



World War II Remembrance Oral History Project

'Reliving the Memories'

Phil O'Sullivan

Interview Transcript

**Interview of Phil O'Sullivan by Frank Heimans
on 3 June 2019 at Queens Park NSW**

Disc No: WWI1:FH3 (1 disc)

Duration of Interview: 61 mins. 44 secs. Restrictions on use: None



Oral history interview with Mr Phil O'Sullivan conducted by Frank Heimans. Today is 3 June 2019. This interview is conducted at Queens Park, New South Wales. This will be the first section.

Phil, could you tell me where and when you were born?

0:29 That is a very simple question. I was born 3 December 1922, and it's only about 200 metres from here. I was born in the front room of 192 Denison Street, and I was given three days to live because I was born with whooping cough and it was raising and everyone was dying. Once Dr Carl said to my mother - I was in the front bedroom with Mum when I was born - he said, "Well, we've got to do something because they are dying like flies. A real epidemic." Mum said, "Oh my God. Go up and get the priest up at Mary Immaculate," up here at Waverley. They went up. He ran. John Donoghue, it was. A friend of the family. He ran up and brought the priest down. So I was baptised and christened on the same day that I was born.

1:42 I'm only 96 now, I think, so not a bad effort considering I had three days to live. So, does that answer your question there, where I was born?

Very well. Yes. You're a Bondi boy, right?

1:56 Yep. Yep. I went to Waverley College. That comes into it later on.

So you grew up in Bondi Junction, basically?

2:09 It was called Waverley in that time.

What was your father's name?

2:14 Eugene O'Sullivan. He was a runner. Do you need a little bit of a quick story on him?

Yes, please.

2:23 He qualified for the Stawell Gift, which is a big race down in Adelaide. He got down there and he got in at the finals, went through the heats, but he finished fourth in the final, and they only paid first, second and third. I think it was 200 guineas, which was big, big money. They gave him five pounds to get back to Sydney. Mum was waiting for him to come back, but he detoured, and he went to Newcastle because there was a big race on up there. She still had the telegram. Won by an eyebrow. He won up there. That was 100 guineas, so they bought a property, or land, down the street here and that's how it all started.

3:22 So then Dad was a machinist. During the First World War, they were married and they went up to Lithgow. He served his time in Palmer Street. The

engineering firm. They had this special lathe. It was coming out from America. Nobody could use it, except Dad, and he was an expert on it. They had one in the small arms factory at Lithgow, so Mum and Dad went up there. They still talk about how cold it was. They used to put the bricks near the fire to warm up and put them in the bed so they'd keep their feet warm.

4:08 After the war, he went back to Hipsley's and they wanted to come down a grade or two, and he bought that lathe which you see outside there. He was about the only one that could use it, except me. I'm a little kid, aren't I? I'm 10. I'm working it as good as him. I'm changing the gears so I could cut a different thread on the lathe. SAE, BSF, Whitworth, whatever; I was it. I could skim drums out, because you could drop the bed out and you could put a big drum in and skim it all. A brake drum, I'm talking about. We got a lot of work from that. That's still there, but it's out of date now because, say, 10 or 15 years ago they started to send out new drums and new brake shoes and stuff. It was just as easy and as cheap as bringing them down here.

5:11 Then we had a smaller lathe where we did a little machining. Small things, like, I'd do the armatures on them, skin them up and [brave] them out, and you got about five shillings for that, I think, or something. When you consider going to the pictures, it was only a shilling, and a thrippence for an ice cream. So it evened itself out that way.

5:39 We started to get a Golden Fleece petrol wagon. Now, my uncle came into it with Dad. You can see a photo around there; there's about eight in a row of these petrol wagons.

5:54 Things went along reasonably well. I went to Waverley College, and there was a chap there, a footballer. I was in sixth class at this stage, and he was in third year. He was leaving. His name was Harry Brady. Harry Brady and Dick Corbett, who is my cousin, they got together just as friends and they came down to visit us, and Harry Brady saw my sister, and he liked my sister, didn't he? So, everything was all right; going on picnics all together and all that.

6:40 I mention Harry Brady, because I've never forgotten; he was like a big brother, really. He was over in Tobruk. He joined the army and he was a sergeant over there. Well, they were held up for about six months. The Germans were all there. They went out on a patrol, didn't go very far, but they came across a dugout or a bombshell hole, and a white flag was held up. There were Germans in there, about six. Harry got his troops and put them all aside and said, "Just stay there. I'll go over and take their surrender." He got from here to you, and they went bang-bang-bang. Shot him to pieces.

7:42 The write-up was in the paper. There were no prisoners taken. They just went mad. Our blokes went mad. They raced through and - Harry Brady copped about six bullets. Dead. I don't like that story.

8:07 I know I've gone off your story, but that is something that affected me all my life. He did have a brother, who became a priest actually, but he died some years ago.

You are one of how many children in your family?

8:26 Just my sister and myself. She died about five years ago. She was a pianist, actually. She got her ALCM and LLCM from - what do they call it? Not an auditorium. Musical [unclear 8:51] things, you know? She played in a lot of concerts.

This garage where we're sitting now, how long has it been established?

9:04 This was stables. Horse stables. Harry Lynch owned the horse and cart and he used to go around for the council cleaning up the streets and all that. Another smaller garage opened around the back, so he moved out of there and Dad had bought No. 182 down there and he had a little garage at the back, so he decided to hire this one up here. He was able to get a few more cars in, instead of the other garage. So that was in 1926.

9:46 Dad and his brother, Ritchie, they got a contract for Golden Fleece Petrol. I can tell you a little story about this one. They did very well, actually. They got about six trucks. Golden Fleece trucks. There's photos in the office about those. During the war - this was the Second World War now I'm talking about - I was 16, that's right, and the army came out. This real smartarse, he was. "I do this..." you know. Dad said, "What do you want? Just tell us what you want." He had the army car there. One of our drivers, Russell Southam, pulled in in a big Golden Fleece wagon.

10:54 Oh, what happened just prior to that, Darwin was bombed. They killed 241, and 400-odd were injured. So, we were hit. We were in the war now. Before that, it was overseas and England. When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour on 7 December, the war was in our area, so we brought our troops back, and the British said, "Yeah, we'll come and help you when we finish here." We had nothing. We had bugger all. I had to tell you about that, because we had nothing except these trucks, and I can show you a photo of them. All Golden Fleece. This sergeant said, "I'll be back. They've got to be camouflaged."

11:58 They took them out to the depot, which was out at Botany, and they had to get one done at a time because he couldn't take them off the road. They were all done in camouflage, and he came back to examine them. This is about a

month after. We had them out in the front there, and he said, "Righto. They've got to be filled up with fuel, because they're expecting the Japanese to come down here." They did, afterwards. They shelled us and that. They came down.

12:35 Anyhow, he come out and he said, "How many have you got?" and they were all lined up. They had six. I know their names, but it's not of interest to you, except one bloke, Russell Southam, he was the head man. Russell Southam and Johnny Boyd. Anyhow, he said, "All right, you've got six trucks there and you've got five drivers. What are you going to do about that?" Russell Southam said, "Why? Where they gotta go to? Just out of Sheas Creek?" He said, "They gotta go to Sheas Creek, and then you go down to Jervis Bay." That's a bloody long way down. I'm standing there, and Russell Southam said, "You've got to get another driver." They said, "This fella can drive." He said, "He's only a bloody kid." He said, "He's not a bloody kid. He's been driving these trucks in and out. He can pull them over the bloody pit. We can't, but he jumps in one go over the pit. He can do it." He said, "He hasn't got a licence." Pulls his book out. Army book. "What's your name, son?" "Phil O'Sullivan." "How old are you?" "Ah, 18." "There's your licence. Get in the queue."

14:09 So we're all in there, and Russell Southam - we all had to get behind him and keep an eye on him. We went out to Sheas Creek. We all had a load up. We loaded up out at Sheas Creek. It's not there now. It's part of the aerodrome now. That was all taken over. Off we set, all the way down the coast. Bloody hours. About four hours. Pulled up here and there and had something to drink. But I got down there, and they turned around and came back. I stayed the night. I was tired. I stayed there, and I come back on my own the next day.

14:50 These are the things that happened, you know? Then I'd get on the lathe then, and I'd make parts for the machine guns, the turret and stuff like that, and then our big project was a boom net across the Harbour. We knew that something was going to happen in the Harbour. I spent 12 hours a day on the lathe. We'd go from 6:00 until 6:00. Half hour for lunch. That was all. 6:00, we'd jump in the old Rugby and drive into Ultimo. I was doing two lots of education: I was a fitter and turner, and a motor mechanic. I wanted to get my certificates. I was 16. The lathe - I knew more about it than the bloody teacher. He said, "Son, you need only do a couple of nights. Come in a couple of nights a month." He said, "You know what to do." He said, "I can't teach you." So, that was all right. I still did motor construction, and I got both certificates for that.

16:12 By this time, I'm a little bit older now. They had a foundry up here in Bondi Junction. W.H. Plumb. He did the forging of all the shackles; a shackle fin, and the fin goes through it like that. Well, that made the boom net across the

Harbour. There was myself down here in the garage and there was Redhouse down there. There was about five of us in this area that had to control this. We had to get it done as soon as we possibly could. Big heavy shackles. There's a photo in there.

16:57 They started building the boom net across the Harbour, from Green Point across to Taylors Bay. It had an opening door. There's a little photo there which explains it better. We just worked on that and that and that. You couldn't do anything else. Just keep doing them and doing them. Made thousands of them, and made a net. So, you can imagine, a U bolt like that with a pin through it and then another one hooked onto that and another one hooked onto that. It took a hell of a lot of bloody shackles to make a net. Anyhow, it was made, and unfortunately, the Japanese came down...

17:45 Oh, at that same time, I was working Friday afternoon - if you got down to Rose Bay, O'Sullivan Road goes up there, there's a golf course there and I had joined up the gunnery and I was a layer [forbearing?]. 0.37 gun. Big things like that. Three Japanese submarines came down. They call them miniatures, but they were bloody big, but they were on the back of a bigger one that brought them down here. Long distance, they couldn't do it. What happened was, they got into the Harbour. They followed a ship in. The Manly Ferry was still running, so it had to come around through there. When the boom net was open, they snuck in there.

18:31 One in Taylors Bay got caught in the net - we all claimed we sank a Jap sub, when it come out later on - in Taylors Bay, and it couldn't get out. By this time, they knew they were in the Harbour and they came looking for the American *Chicago*, which was a big battleship, or cruiser; it wasn't a real big one. Anyhow, one of them lined up his sights on the *Chicago*, and what was happening, it was steaming up, getting his steam to come out, and they thought it was moving so he fired this torpedo. He thought it was coming out like, but it wasn't, it was still there. So he fired that and missed the *Chicago* and it hit the *Kuttatul* alongside of it. Blew it up. The *Kuttatul* was an old Manly ferry. If you were in town - it didn't matter who you were; in the navy or the army or whatever - you could sleep in it overnight. When it hit, it just missed the ship itself, but it hit alongside, and it exploded. It blew it up and blew the bottom out of the ship and it started to sink. Well, it did go down. There's a photo there of it. It was submerged, and some of them were asleep in that, and I think it was 18 Australian sailors and two British sailors were on it. They were dead. There's a photo of there of the rest of them.

20:43 So, they traced that one, and one submarine has already gone. They depth-charged another one, and this other one we're talking about, the third one - Ban his name was - I tell you that because later on after the war was over, Ban went down with his sub; they blasted it out with depth chargers, and then I think it was in the '60s or something, after the war, they brought his mother out from Japan. There's a photo of her there too. They presented her with his sword. She's all broken up and she's saying how good the Australians were. Well, the Japanese were bastards. No doubt about it. Oh, what they did is unbelievable.

21:39 Anyhow, that was that. I used to go in Friday. If I could get away early Friday, I could sleep there. This is another bit of a story too. A true story. I got medals for it, and I don't know why. A Lieutenant was in charge. I'm in camp now of a Friday until Sunday night and I come back to work Monday morning and do all that again. If I was lucky, I could get out Sunday at lunchtime and see my girlfriend, who became my wife. Anyhow, we were down there and we got a call to come down. I'm just trying to put it together. No, I was going to go down. The shells came over. I'm just trying to think whether it was before or after.

22:46 That's right. The alarm went off. The siren. We had a few little places around. They were only garages. Brick garages. That's where you had to run into. Not stay in your own home. Anyhow, I got down to Rose Bay. The shells came over. There was a big submarine out yonder.

23:20 What had happened, the mother submarine that brought those three submarines down - there were three bigger submarines and they hitchhiked on the back - the bigger one that was left had waited out there for them to come out, but they didn't come out of the Harbour. They decided, with the shells they had, they were just going to shell Sydney. This is one big submarine. They shelled, and one just burst up the top of the street up here. Of course, I'm off then. I'm in the old car, and I went up, and Joan, my wife - well, not then - she lived in Grafton Street. I heard the whistle. Boom! I drove up there. I said, "I'm going to camp. Get down to the air raid shelter." She tried to get somebody to go with her. Her grandfather. He said, "Oh, bugger that! I'm an old man. I'm staying in bed!" So, he stayed in bed.

24:39 Anyhow, I got down there and the sergeant was there, and the commander was there. He said, "We're being attacked." He said, "Get your guns down at ground level." Well, ground level - we're looking at houses opposite. "What are we going to do?" If they land, they can break through. You can still fire." We were there, and the shells came over all right. One hit up there in Grafton Street outside. There's a little shop there where it landed. Another one

hit down in Bondi, into a home down there. I think only three out of 10 worked. That was all right.

25:39 We were waiting there all night. The sergeant, who had come back from overseas, he come through. We're all there. I'm sitting there, frozen. There was a lot of older fellas from World War 1 who was in our group. They were all right. This other fella had come back from Tobruk. He was a sergeant. He only looked about 22 or something. Not much older than us. I said, "Hey, Sarge. Look, this gun is not going to be much good." "It'll be all right, son." I said, "We've got our .303," we all had a .303. I said, "We've got one clip in the gun and one clip my pouch." I said, "What do we do if we run out of bullets?" The saying was, "You've got a bayonet, son." We all went to [unclear 26:47] no bloody bayonet!

26:51 Eventually, that passed over that night. A bit of damage done. Not a lot. But then, we called on the Yanks to come here. The story was, of course, three things: over-dressed, over-sexed, and over-paid. But without them, we were gone. We absolutely would've been gone. They went up to New Guinea. I went up there later, just after the war, because one of my friends that come back, he was up there and the war was over and up at Kirundu (??) they came across some Japs who had come across Kokoda. They got to the top and they were buggered. They had no food, nothing. They surrendered.

27:55 I went up there and had a look around and all of that sort of stuff. The chaps I knew took some photos of the Japanese. Adachi. He was the third-highest general in the Japanese army. He surrendered at a place called Kiarivu. It was about 15 kilometres in from the coast. This fellow that I knew, Davis, he got them all lined up and their general, they carried him across on a bloody big stretcher, like this. "Get him down! Get him down here, now!" They marched them all to the coast and there was another group waiting there to take them across to Manus Island. This fellow gave me the photos that he had done. They were little ones, like that. The fellow had even taken them like that, because you'd get kicked out of the army and excommunicated. I said, "Bugger that." I spoke to General Cosgrove. I've got a letter there, just to show you, but it's not for publicity. Oh, this is publicity, isn't it?

29:35 Anyhow, we turned around and had them developed and they're now in the museum down at Canberra. So, that was good.

Can I take you back a bit earlier for you to answer some questions I prepared?

What can you tell me about the O'Sullivan family? What's the background?

30:04 Background? They all lived pretty long. Well, they came out from Ireland. Dad's mother and father came out from Ireland. County Cork, or some

bloody place. I don't know. They went to school out here. Or Dad did; he went to St Charles'. I don't know about Joan's side - Proctor. They came out too. So, it was an Irish background, but Dad was born out here. They went to school here and did their education here and, as I said, Dad became an apprentice to Hipsley's down in Palmer Street. Very good, but I was better than him when I was 12, so that wasn't a bad effort.

Was it a very large family, your family?

31:07 My family?

Yes. A lot of extended family?

31:12 I had a son. He was in the office there a little while ago. He got married. My foreman is one of his sons. Number one son, Phillip. His name is Phillip too. He married and got two kids. Chris and Patricia - that's my son - they had four boys. The second boy was an apprentice to Mercedes and he is now the manager out there. Floor manager, doing repairs on Mercs and all that. The other one is a plumber. So, I mean, they've all got a history.

Can I take you right back to 1939 when war broke out? What do you remember about that?

32:18 Twenty-nine?

1939.

32:19 Thirty-nine. That's better. I thought you said '29. Well, in '39, the war was a long way away. It was over yonder, you know? We sent our troops over. I told you about Tobruk. Held up for six months there, I think. Eventually they got through. But, after that, of course, was the bombing of England. That was unbelievable, how they survived that. I mean, every night - bang, bang. The Germans thought they had it done. They come through, they had the Italians there and each night they'd come over, but, the good thing about that - well, not the good thing, but hopefully - not hopefully - they did have the better plane. The Spitfire. The Germans came over every night, bombing, but they were losing half their planes. The Spitfires were just too good. Bang - you know? It blew them out of the water. But then, on the land, they got pushed back. Pushed back to Dunkirk, as you've probably heard about.

Yes. But let's talk about Australia now. You were in Sydney. War broke out. What do you remember about that? Did you join up, the army, or what?

34:03 Yes. Yes. I was too young, but I joined up what they call the VDC. Volunteer Defence Corps. I've got certificates; I've got everything. Every week, I'd be down practising, and we got a couple of shots away. They didn't hit

anything; they were out in the bloody water somewhere. But, when the Americans came here, the first thing they did - I had a photo; I don't know whether it's in there or not - at Bondi Beach, with two piers going right out - the first thing they did was blow them up. They said, "The Japs are going to land there and just unload and walk straight in." That was blown up. When they blew them up, they blew the shopfronts out. They used that much stuff. Just blew all that up.

On Bondi Beach?

35:06 Bondi Beach. And then we had wiring all the way along there. Bronte Beach - I have a plaque down there on the walkway. My mates were good. They'd take their dogs down to have a piddle on it, they said. "It washes the sand off it." All this rot, you know?

So what were things like during the war in Australia?

35:39 You've got the siren going quite often. You didn't know if it was a false alarm or were they testing them. There were a couple of frightening nights there where we thought we were being invaded, but each time I was down there. All my mates said, "They named a bloody street after you." O'Sullivan Road has been there for 100 years, you know, but that was just a, "Oh, named a bloody big street after you..."

36:19 What happened down there - I still don't know and I don't want to know. See, we had no petrol. You've got two gallons of wheat. That was all. All the food and everything was rationed. You'd lined up for your queue to try and get food. You had butter coupons and all that. Black market stuff was raging again. But this particular time, my sergeant said to me - well, I had a 1927 Rugby. Well, it was a garaged car. "Will that get you up the mountains?" I said, "I've been up the mountains in it a dozen times. Of course the bloody thing will get me up the mountains." He said, "Righto." This was Friday, late afternoon. "Come back when it's dark. I want you to do something but fill your car with petrol." I said, "There's no petrol." But what I had on my old car, I had two vacuum tanks. One was a normal one, and I'd put another one in there. The other one there held about three-quarters of a gallon - a gallon in those days - and I could switch it over. So, what I could do, you could get power kerosene. I had the tank full of power kerosene at the back, I'd start it up on the petrol, get it nice and warmed up, then I could turn it to the power kerosene. I could drive it everywhere. I said, "Yeah, I can go up there." "All right. You can get it up and back?" I said, "Yeah. Yeah. Yeah." "Come back at 7 o'clock." I said, "I'm on duty at 6 o'clock tomorrow morning. You want me to..." "This is urgent."

38:25 As I was driving away, I saw these two very tall men in dark suits. They looked like Chamberlain. You know old Chamberlain? They were dressed like that. I thought, 'Oh, gees.' Anyhow, I came home to Mum down the street. She gave me some things. "Why have you got to go back? You don't have to go back 'til the morning, 6 o'clock Saturday morning." "I've got to go back. I've got to go back."

38:53 I go back. He had these two blokes, and he said, "Can you get them up the top? Up the mountains? Just up the top." "Yeah, of course I can bloody get them up there, but what for?" "Just get them up there." Anyhow, we got back, and they sat in the back, the two of them. Hardly said anything. I'm driving away there. It took me two hours to get where I had to get. Lapstone Hill. You get up, and that's the top. I let them out there. It took me about two and a half hours or something. I got back. I left them there. On the way, we pulled up at Penrith and had a cup of coffee and kept going.

39:59 I got back, and instead of going down to camp, I just come back and dropped into bed. What had happened, they were out here from England and they were up there, observers. Everyone was going to leave all the coast. This is what I'm told later, which was probably right. They were up there looking down on the plain below, and that was going to be made into an aerodrome very quickly because they couldn't land our planes on the coast - if this happened. They'd be in a good position to stop the invaders.

40:47 The war was over, and I had all my medals, the normal ones. I get two medals.

Were you in the regular army as well?

41:03 Yes, but, I had to be on the lathe. I had to work on that. That was more important than anything. If they didn't have a bloody bullet to fire...

What were you manufacturing on the lathe?

41:27 Well, the boom net across the Harbour. That was number one. That had to be done and finished, and it proved to be something. Got three subs out of it.

41:40 Oh, that sub, when they were all done, the mother sub still had some shots left, some shells left. It went up the coast after waiting for three or four days, and fired 30 shots over Newcastle. Some exploded. Some didn't. Then it made its way back to Japan.

42:09 I had bayonet practice. We had to go up to Liverpool. We did that. I came second in my shooting. It was a .303. The bloke that beat me was one of

the regular men up there that trained. He said, "That wasn't bad, son." I said, "Well, I hope I haven't got to use the bloody thing."

What rank did you get in your army position, finally? What was your rank when you were finished?

42:41 My rank was nothing. I was a soldier. I could've got one hook, as they call it, or two hooks. I could've been a corporal, but I would've had to do more time and I couldn't do the time. They wanted me here, they wanted me there, they wanted me driving.

So you said you were in the EVD, or whatever it was called?

43:00 VDC. Volunteer Defence Corps. That's what it's called.

What did you do while you were in there?

43:13 What did I do?

Were you being trained for warfare?

43:22 We trained on everything, yeah. Our 3.7 guns, they were big. They were bloody big. They're an anti-aircraft gun. One particular night, a plane was coming down the coast and if it had've come between the big sink pipe and the Harbour Bridge. On the point of Bondi Beach, there's a big pipe there, a sanitary pipe, and this one is coming down there. All the bells rang and everything else. "Get ready. There's enemy coming down." The girls were inside in - not much bigger than this - chasing us down. They say, "Fire!" I was on number two gun and number three gun. "Fire!" Well, radio silence was broken by the bloke up in the air. He was an Aussie coming out. The girl came running out of the [predictor hub], and said, "Ceasefire! Ceasefire! It's an Aussie." That was a real practice shot, but they did land online, but a bit lower.

44:58 We went and we had army practice. We had bayonet drills and shooting with a .303. Mum made me a pad for my shoulder because I was a bit scrawny around there and every time I'd fire...

45:18 I had 3 years and 11 months. I got a certificate, the same as an Army man, honourably discharged. I did a lot of different things, you know? Did a lot of things, but master of none. I wasn't a master of anything probably, but...

Did you ever see a Japanese soldier?

45:54 Yes, I did.

Where?

He was captive up in New Guinea. As I said, I went up there, but this bloke had been living with a tribe. This was after the war. About six months after. He was

getting on all right with them. They finished up, they dragged him away, of course.

What was Sydney like with the American army here?

46:25 Well, I told you; you they had a girl on each arm. Overdressed. Their uniform was like tailormade. My one was a daggy old 1914. You could smell the camphor in it. Mum tried to do something with it. Yes, they had beautiful uniform. A girl on each arm. Overdressed, oversexed, over here. That's what it was. But, without them, we were gone.

The Kuttabul, you said was an old ferry that was sunk?

47:20 The what?

The Kuttabul. The ship.

47:28 Yes, the *Kuttabul*. It was an old Manly ferry. There's a photo of it there.

It was torpedoed by the Japanese, wasn't it?

47:38 The *Kuttabul* was moored. It wasn't doing anything except you could go and sleep in it of a night. It was equipped for that. The submarine was out there, and it fired at the Chicago, which was getting steam up. So it's like that-this going like that. But it didn't. It stayed there. It was just getting steam up, so it missed it, and it hit right alongside the *Kuttabul* into the rocks, but it blew the *Kuttabul* up in the air when it come down. That's where 18 Aussies and two British were killed, in that one.

The net that you'd been building in your workshop, the net across the Harbour, was it finished by that time?

48:30 Oh, yeah. They got in when one of the ships was coming out. Just the Manly Ferry going around or something. There's a little photo of it there. They snuck in that way, but one of them went too far and got caught in our net. See, that net opened. Big gap. As it come out, it went in, and they all got in. But one of them got caught. It went wide and got caught in the net and they had to blow themselves up.

Yeah?

49:11 Yeah.

What was your biggest challenge in building that net?

49:17 It was a challenge. In fact, W.H Plumb, the fellow that organised it all up there, he made up all the bits. We just had to do the machining on it. Cut a hole, thread it, get a pin, thread the pin, screw it in. Just like a block and tackle. They were all hooked together, so you can imagine the time that it took to do.

49:51 The army came out and picked up myself, Ray Redhouse, some other bloke - about five of us - in an army truck the night after this happened. He said, "You're part of this adventure. I want you to see the destruction that has gone on." If that had've hit the *Chicago*, it would've blown up. Thousands of lives would've been lost. They sent us out a citation for it, and all that sort of thing. They said, "That is one of the biggest things that's ever happened." Something important. I've got letters; I've got all sorts of crap now.

Just as well that it missed the Chicago then, that shot that was fired by the submarine.

50:54 The *Chicago*. That's what they were aiming at.

Yes. They missed it, which was lucky.

51:02 But because it wasn't moving - you can imagine, it's there; this is the submarine seeing the smoke come out. He thinks it's going, so, you know, boom. Instead of that, it didn't move. The torpedo went and hit the *Kuttabul*.

You never had to go into the water to place the net? Who placed the net into the water?

51:27 They were working on it all the time. The navy.

Divers, or what?

51:37 Oh, yeah.

There's a story about the Queen Mary...

51:42 Yes. The *Queen Mary*. What happened, a lot of us, before all that, we thought, 'What are we making a bloody net for? We could be making bullets.' That's what they wanted. Mr Plumb again, he picked us all up and we went down in an army truck, because there was about 20 or so. Took us down, went around, and around the other side of Taylor Bay there's the *Queen Mary*. This would be the old *Queen Mary*; the original one. On the way out here, it ran into - not a net - depth charges. They were placed everywhere, and it had hit it. But it had a net around it. They called it Queen Mary's Girdle. It was right around the hull and it sort of dented it, but it didn't break anything. But the net was damaged. He said, "I brought you down here. You go back, you drop everything, and you make two dozen, and you make..." He needed about another hundred U-bolts made up. "Drop everything and do it." And we did it. We all did our share, whatever it was. All picked up. Go down. They had the diver ready. He put them all on, and the *Queen Mary* went out the next morning with 3,000 troops on it. He said, "We got letters." They were nice letters, but what do you do with a bloody letter? 'We congratulate you on great support in getting the work done in record time.' They

said by the time somebody saw that *Queen Mary* - and they were, they were all over the place waiting for it to come out - it was done and gone. They said 24 hours later, they were all swarming around. They were notified the *Queen Mary* was in the Harbour. But it was gone by then.

54:05 It was a nice letter, I know...

There was a boom net around the Queen Mary. Is that what you're talking about?

54:11 A girdle. From the hull, it was about four-foot out. Even though wherever it struck, that problem, it had blown up and it had blown a hole in it, but only a dent in the hull of the ship. No leak or anything.

54:42 This is the place up at Bondi Junction...

Which place?

54:52 It just blew a hole in it.

One of the shells hit the building. So that was a real danger, wasn't it? Were people scared? How did people react to this...

55:04 They weren't scared. Oh, some people a bit. No, I didn't notice anyone scared. No, I might rephrase that. Like an excitement. I think everyone was excited about what was happening and how it could happen.

You spent most of your life after the war working here in the garage?

55:47 Yes. After that, life went on. Things were very hard, trying to get stuff and people didn't have any money. It was a tough time. But when you said were you scared, well, I must've been a bit scared because I said to that bloke, "What do we do when we run out of bullets?" You've got a bayonet, son." Everyone is looking at me. "Which way will we run?" We made a joke of it, but internally, yeah, sure. If you think, you're sitting there with a gun and they're landing on Bondi Beach. They could've landed anywhere. But they were so far away from home, the Japs, see? Their line of communication was being cut. But when they got to New Guinea, and had they been able to get more troops there - but they couldn't. The Kokoda track, that bugged them, and they were out of everything.

57:21 I don't know. When you look back, I mean, I was only young. We got married when we were 24. I was only 18 then, before that.

Like a big adventure for you, was it, the war?

57:45 Yes.

They named the grandstand at Waverley Oval after you, apparently?

57:51 Yes.

Were you happy about that?

57:55 I was very happy. I brought something to show you. I don't know where it is now.

So your life has been very much involved with the eastern suburbs. Tell me what else...

58:11 Yes. East's cricket. I was captain. I was president for 10 years. Took a cricket team to China with all the good cricketers. Took another team to New Zealand.

You've been awarded some honour recently?

58:37 Oh, yes. Got a few honours here and there.

Centenary Medal. Why did you get that one?

58:48 Which one?

The Centenary Medal.

58:53 I don't know. I got a medal for every bloody thing. I can't say what it was. There was a lot of work I did with the Little Sisters of the Poor, Red Cross, all those. I ran gambling nights for them. I raised a lot of money. Probably about \$100,000. Bit more, maybe.

You're a friend of Peter Cosgrove? I saw those photos. Amazing photographs of the General Adachi.

59:32 Adachi and Kiarivu. They said a lot of things I did, just couldn't have been done. I said, "It can be done if you make up your bloody mind and do it. You can do it." "Oh, pig's bum, Phil. You can't do that." Oh, God. "All right. Let's try. You can only get beaten."

How would you most like to be remembered, Phil?

60:10 How would I like to be remembered? I'm not dead yet. I might look dead. I might feel dead, but I'm not.

No, but how would you like people to remember you?

60:22 Oh. I really don't. I mean, I've done what I want to do and what I could do. People come along and cry for a week and forget about it. I like the way they remember me, like, my mates, you know? "I took the dog down again on Sunday, Phil. He liked going down there having a piddle on it." It's true; it does wash the sand off it too.

Is there something in particular that you want to talk about more, to emphasise?

61:18 All I want to talk about is get back out to my...

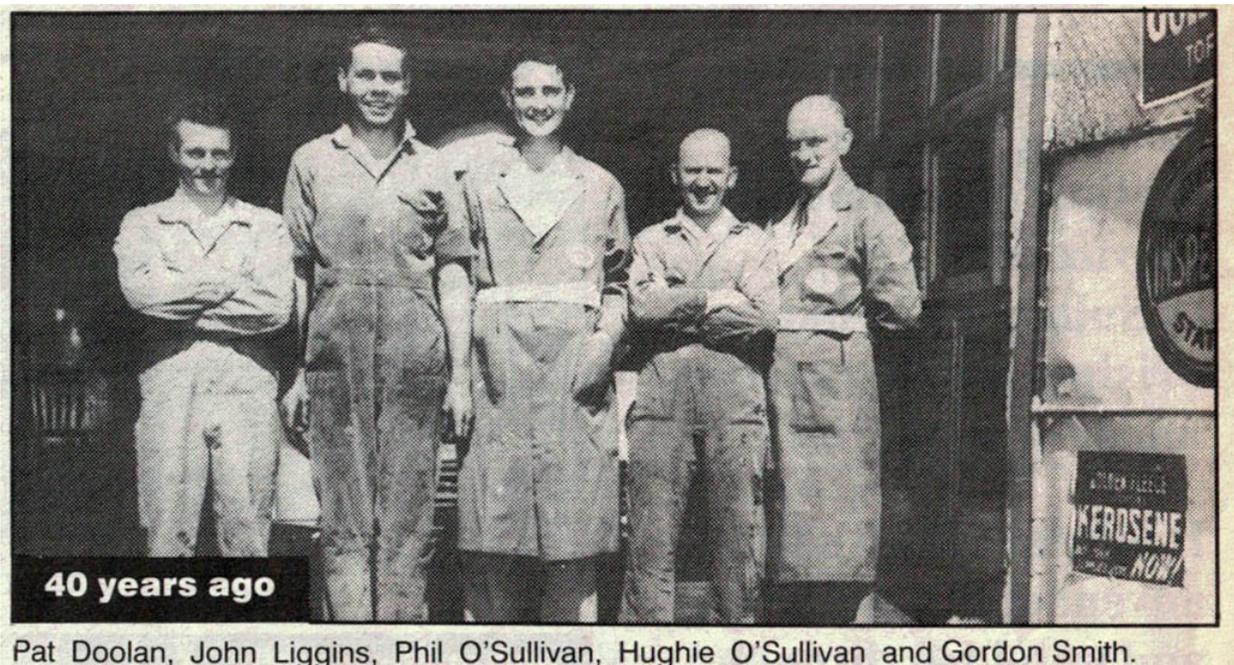
I just want to thank you very much for giving this interview.

61:29 It's bad today, too. I was nearly going to ring you up and say don't come. I thought, oh no, get it over with.

Anyway, we've done it, and thank you very much. The Council wants to thank you, so on behalf of the Council I'd like to thank you as well. Thank you, Phil.



O'Sullivan's motor garage and workshop, 1910s



Pat Doolan, John Liggins, Phil O'Sullivan, Hughie O'Sullivan and Gordon Smith.



Bondi Beach, 1943 with piers.