

# Transcription

## Tape 01

01:02:30:00

**We'll start David by just getting you to give us a life summary, a brief summary of when you were born, where you were born to the present day?**

Well all right, well my mother was on her way back from Casino to Sydney and my family, which is Bunzi, come from the Beagle [?] which is a town inland of Grafton and Mum was due to

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have me and consequently she got off the train at Grafton where I was born, at South Grafton Hospital, so that's the home turf anyway. So stayed there for seven days or so until she was well enough to travel again and continued our trip down to Sydney. And Mum being a single parent and so forth and having to work most of my upbringing was by my grandmother, so consequently I went back up to Beagle and then we moved on up to Casino,

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where we were on the Miston's property for a while, which is on the southern side of the river and then the majority of older Aboriginals moved from the main town out to the Victory Army Camp, which is on Kyogle Road, which is where I stayed until I was of school age. And then yeah, we used to come into, I started off at primary school

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which is part of the Casino High School, and then completed the West End Primary School and we were the first students basically to start at West End Primary School. Used to have to let me out sometimes ten or fifteen minutes earlier because the gangs couldn't get me because I was a mouthy little sort of a chappie and didn't step back for anybody if I could help it. So it was a quick get home before they got me, yeah but it was a

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experience I suppose. I wasn't too keen on the Indians always losing the battles and a lot of other things I noticed as a kid but I always knew one day that I would a big gentleman, a big man and maybe I could make a difference.

**So after, was it West Casino Public School, West End Public School?**

West End Public School.

**Where to after that?**

Then we went to, in 1954, I think it was, yeah, 1954, yeah, I went up to live in

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Brisbane, and started school there, we lived in Arthur Street in New Farm and I remember my grandmother taking me to school and by the time, she was still in the headmaster's office signing the papers and I'd already been in a fight and beat her home. So unbeknownst to me at the time the head principal got onto the school and said, 'There'll be no

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racism in his school.' and so forth. That guy I had a fight with became my best mate anyway, Allan and after, because Mum was still working in Sydney she would send, of course we got the endowment but she'd send extra money up to Grandma to raise me and Mum's other's sisters, which is my aunties, they all lived in the house too and worked in Brisbane so life was pretty good. I was the only boy in the sort of, in that circumstances amongst all the ladies and I was probably spoilt rotten but

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I had to perform anyway and do the chores and so forth and yeah it was interesting and they had a major influence on my upbringing and I think it's just because of that TLC [tender loving care] that I managed to weather the storm when things were difficult. And there was a couple of the, who later became uncles, there was a couple of those gentlemen that used to advise me but I always had the backup of family, which is more than most kids get.

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**And so you went to a few different schools in the Brisbane area?**

Yeah, well I did.

**Or did you move back down to Sydney after that?**

No, after New Farm Public Farm, then my auntie and uncle got married and they moved to Dunwich Island near Stradbroke Island, so I went to Dunwich Public School and that's where I got my first horse, which was a brumby and yeah, my uncle got that for me. Yeah,

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and there was a large Aboriginal population that used to work the sand and mineral mines on Dunwich Island and those were good days, just a pair of shorts and a tee shirt or a shirt and no shoes and that was a good life, fishing and all those sort of things that are good for kids and yeah, back to Brisbane and then I went to, Gran and them had moved and that was, we went to Gregory Terrace. That was a Catholic school up near

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Boundary Street, over towards, I can't even remember the name of the suburb but yeah that was, I stayed there for a little while and we managed to buy a house out at Paddington in Brisbane in Central Road and that's where I went to, I was onto high school at that time and yeah, it was pretty, well in Queensland system you go from Grade 1 right through to Grade 8 but I mean the high school was attached as part of the school.

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And then another auntie got married and an uncle moved up that was a rugby league player, and they moved up to Mackay in Queensland and consequently I was a security blanket and I went up to live in Queensland for a while, right up north of Queensland I should say and as a result of that I used to ride a horse ten mile to school and yeah, that was different. Had to cut cane and help auntie with the chores and all the rest of it and

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also he moved to another farm then at Beatrice Creek. There was only fourteen in that school and same deal and seven

mile it was to school.

### **On a horse still?**

Yeah, I had an old, I either took the old draught horse because they had tractors in those days then, but yeah it was good stuff or I could walk or whatever and we had fun and all us kids depended on each other,

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which you learn those skills pretty early. And as a result of that I stayed up there for a while and then came back to Brisbane where I was back at Etherta Creek and I used to train at South's, not South's, Lang Park Police Boys' Club and yeah there was a couple of seminars on up there at the Railway Institute and I just happened to be at one of them. Why I don't know, I think the aunties took me in and someone noticed me gobbing off I suppose in the gallery and

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offered me a scholarship down here in Sydney, back to Sydney, which I did come down to do.

### **An academic scholarship or a?**

Yeah, it was a scholarship to complete my matriculation and then go on to university if I wished but looking at it I was being trained obviously Aboriginal activities and so forth and yeah. I did miss out on one school, I forgot about it. When I was at Bourke Street

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Primary here in Sydney and that's basically when I was eight years old and that's when I realised that I was a black man because we'd just finished playing basketball against Crown Street Primary and Eddie called me a black fellow so I gave him a flogging and then I remembered looking back and thinking, 'Well what did he do??' I went back and said, 'Why did you call me that??' And he said, 'Because you are.' and I had a look at the duco and I said, 'Gee, he's right this lad.' I was probably in the advanced class.

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I was eight years old when I realised that.

### **And so after, you finished school and what happened?**

I finished, I went to Newtown Tech from when I came back down from Queensland and I started at Tranby Aboriginal College and used to go to Newtown Tech and completed my intermediate and then I went onto Obrox Park, that's the new school that opened there to go through to Fifth Year and then onto

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uni, if required but yeah, it wasn't for me. I look back now and I think, 'Well yeah, maybe I should have went that way.' but I mean I was a thirteen year old kid in a college full of adults and wasn't nice. Lots of things were but there were a few incidents there that weren't nice and yeah, so.

### **Well we can go back to the details of those experiences**

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### **but I'll just try and get a quick summary of the jobs you had before you enlisted and then your service?**

Well basically I always had a job, whether it be selling papers, collecting bottles at the footy and getting the deposits, helping people in their yards, like when I was up on the cane properties up north I used to help uncle and get paid for that. And yeah, in Sydney it was, even when I was eight or nine years old, round the back streets collecting the bottles. On Show Day at the

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Easter Show finding the cars for the blokes that couldn't find them in Moore Park, they'd give you tuppence or

threepence or something like that, so I was never out of work but when I was out of school I started as a cost clerk with the Public Works Department and I worked at Callum Park in Gladesville and I'd been to Rydalmere and then I went to Watson and Crane as a charge hand, which is mainly in the building game and I like the building game. So yeah, they were good years, on the old AMP building,

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Australia Square and State Office and a few other buildings in town which are still there, they haven't been pulled down. Yeah, so that was interesting but conscription come along so my, we all trained and played out of Glebe Police Boys' before I was graded up into Balmain in the third grade in 63, so my mates were going so I thought, 'Oh well, I'll probably give it a bash as well.'

**What year was that?**

That was 1964, the year of the Olympics.

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My mate Macca, he was selected in the boxing team but broke his wrist playing rugby league against, I think it was against Leichardt Wanderers or Kodock's, one of the rivals in the Balmain Juniors.

**And you decided to enlist in the navy?**

Yeah.

**Okay. So if you could just take us through your different positions and then we'll go back?**

Well you leave here and basically I went up to

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Queensland and got my auntie to sign the papers for my mother and had an interview and as a result of that, yeah basically that was pretty well much it and the bloke said, 'Okay, take the oath.' and I passed the medicals and a psych [psychological] test and I was on the train back to Cerberus or Flinders navy base in Victoria, which was the middle of winter and

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it was PT [physical training] and all that sort of stuff and basic naval training for three months. And then straight to the destroyer HMAS Vampire and then on her for nearly two years and in that time we went to Vietnam. I'd done diving courses and so forth and yeah, after Vampire back to, I come off and changed category from steam to diesel main propulsion and did a course in, went to different ships that had diesel engines as their main engines.

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And starting from minesweepers and patrol boats to a big maintenance ship called Stalwart to a survey ship called Moresby and also a number of patrol boats and things and which is what happened and eventually submarines. I always wanted to go to submarines and anyway I wanted to do that after Vietnam, come back from Vietnam but Enoch Powell was in government in the UK at the time and they were having a

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few black barbecues and I certainly weren't going to take any crap from the Poms and I thought it might be better to stay here and not disgrace the uniform.

**So you'd already done service in Vietnam before that?**

And Malacca.

**And the Malacca Straits?**

And Borneo, yeah.

**Okay, so you did eventually enlist, work with the submarines, didn't you? When was the change?**

'79 I did, I re-did my submarine suitability and I was interviewed

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at a place called Albany, and a psychiatrist come in and I said to the psychiatrist that I didn't like their branch and as far as I was concerned they had far too much to say what an individual can do and, 'Now would you like a beer??' And that was my interview with the psychiatrist because I had a couple of experiences with perhaps young psychiatrists people and

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I don't like people saying what I can't do or can do. I know what I can do and that's for any individual, as long they task themselves to do that but some outsider coming in and trying to slot me into a category I'm not keen on, never have been and never will be.

**Well they still accepted you though?**

They could either accept me or tell me no, didn't phase me.

**So what happened first when you started work with the submarines?**

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**Can you give us a bit of a run down?**

Well I went over to the UK and you do your basic training and your tank escape and all the rest of it but that was no drama because I was a diver anyway so and then you come back here and in the old days you would have had to spend three years while ours were being built, so that was another reason in the old days, because three years in the UK, away from home, a fair old cop.

**And you were married by that stage?**

I would have just

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about, yeah, I was heading that way, so yeah. But as I say, look in hindsight I know I would have had a ball and I always have a ball. If there's a bad situation you turn into the best you can and the submarine squadron it's family, it really is. And not many people have that opportunity to work in an environment with a bloke next to you can really hate you or dislike you with a passion but however your

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objectives are achieved and that's the end of it but if you needed a hand, even though he dislikes you he would still give you a hand, that's what I find. And that's pretty important, most people don't have that and that goes with my judgement of people today. I mean I mightn't like the individual but if they can do the job they've got it as far as I'm concerned. It's not a personality thing and that's pretty important.

**All right, so just we're going to have plenty of time to sort of**

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**analyse and look in detail about how you felt about different operational services etcetera but if could just give us a summary of the different submarines you may have worked on and then we'll get onto your post war life, so we can go back?**

Probably the first six years in submarines were pretty, I didn't see it but my family and people around me that knew me did, because I was sneaking around the world in other people's backyards I

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sort of lost the plot and when I say 'lost the plot', I honestly believe we were making a hell of a difference but really the bottom line is economics in the long run but yeah, when you're on tasks like that it really starts to forget about your

roots and that's dangerous. I think it's dangerous anyway because everything is a priority. You get the best of everything

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and you forget that you actually came from down there and there's a lot of people still down there that enabled you to be here and that's a danger and that's the way the squadron was set up then.

**Which squadron was it?**

The Australian Submarine Squadron, but it was the way it was set up and they had a couple of specialist boats and I was on them.

**Which boats were you working on? Can you give in chronological order tell us which subs?**

Well they were

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the last two we had, and the Orion and the Attamar and they just did special ops, special operations, and when you're in that environment all the time I mean you start to think, 'Well what's the rest of the world know? Nothing.?'

**This is the Cold War?**

Well it's modern day sort of stuff, sort of thing. All submarine services basically they're all, you don't hear of them or see of them, so that will give you an idea of what they do. You only hear of them when they get caught or something like that,

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the same as the Kursk [Russian Submarine] going down, I know exactly what happened to those poor buggers but the reason the West weren't allowed on board was because of the gear it's got, so those poor buggers had to die. We realise that and it's not a problem. We understand that but it's just a shame the ideal situation is we all get on together but it's not the case and it's a shame because I have some very good submarine colleagues from all services, from all nationalities and

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even with our own squadron and the only time we're not with them is perhaps Anzac Day or something like that because they were German or Japanese or something like that and the bond's there and the environments there and it's a family unit and it's very special.

**You worked your way up to become a chief?**

A chief, yeah.

**Mechanical engineer, yeah, how many years did that take you to get through?**

I was quite happy enjoying life and I could have got there faster but

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I think, goodness, chief, probably about twelve years. I think it's about twelve years, I'm not sure, could have been a bit longer but the highest you could go was warrant officer and that was afforded me or change over to commission rank and that was afforded to me as well but if you're a warrant officer you've got x amount of warrant officers and so many ships,

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so I'm not the type of person that drives a desk. I never have been. I prefer to be on my boat or my ship or whatever the case may be and be at sea, so unfortunately because we're not a large navy, we don't have a lot of warrant officers. Where they'll have ten chiefs on that ship and say six on a submarine, there's a billet for those but there's no billet for the warrant officer, so that's the reason

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I didn't go the next step.

**So that was 1993 when you??**

I left in '93, yeah.

**And can you just give us a brief overview of what you've done in your post war life?**

Well I become a member of the, I was a member of the RSL [Returned and Services League] but I got on this sub branch of the RSL and became a director of the RSL. I'm also President of the RSL Youth Club, get involved with a number of

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local sports teams. Didn't realise that I would be doing a lot of work with the Aboriginal youth and consulting committees and organisations but the most important thing that happened to me is I did a course on welfare and pensions for the Department of Veteran Affairs and I travel the, our wonderful nation, all voluntary and with some

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assistance now and again from the department and inform the Aboriginal people of their entitlements and benefits. So much so that when I took the SBS [Special Broadcasting Service] and legal aid teams up to Kempsey and I went to see two families and ended up interviewing thirty families, going right back to World War II where a lady should have been on a war widow's pension but she didn't get that until 2000, so the

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news in regional areas they'd rather talk to a person in the city than they would their own because the veterans prefer to keep their business to themselves. And they don't have a very good opinion of the RSL and for whatever reason but we've got to realise that the RSL is basically a divisional system and where possible they should utilise the facilities, that's the RSL sub branch, not the

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RSL club per say, which is just the Clubs New South Wales sort of gambling and so forth.

**And there's one important part of your life that we've missed out in this summary and is you got married and had two children, can you tell us when that happened?**

Oh yeah, that was 1969, the year of the tiger, Richmond and Glenelg, Claremont and Perth, East in Brisbane and Balmain in Sydney and North Hobart but anyway that's football, but yes, my wife comes from Tassie and I chased her all over the country and finally

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popped the question and yeah, I think my best mates they both bought HT Holden Monaros, they're from South Australia and they were the wedding cars, which was here in Annandale and yeah, it was good. And my wife's from Tassie, she's white, and I always tell people I went back and captured one of theirs to get even and yeah, that upset some of my family too, because they

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expected me to marry a black girl I suppose and all I could say was, 'There was none in our gang at the time, what do you want me to do Nan or uncle? Travel an extra fifty or hundred mile to find one.' and yeah we've been married ever since.

**And you had a boy and a girl?**

Yeah and no practise required, got it right first go.

**Okay, thanks for that David. We've got a bit of a summary and so now we're going to have time to really go back and talk in detail about your life.**

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**Okay, you said you come from the Bundgelong tribe, can you tell us a little bit about that, your tribe?**

Well that's the land from Grafton right up to the Tweed and that's really rich, fertile country and absolutely beautiful and as a result of that in Aboriginal connections

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I say as you know we adopted white names but there's major clans and in the Williams clans there was three Williams clans at the time but my grandmother was with the Gordon clan. For instance we're related to the Mundines, the Walkers and the Ridgeways and it's all interconnected. Now because I was taken away from that environment early I've lost a lot of the language which the elders used to talk and?

**And it was called the Bundgelong**

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**language was it or did it have a special name?**

Well I just say Bundgelong and I'd have to check with I think a couple of aunties but I know some of the, I remember some of it especially when we had a family reunion some time ago at Beagle and it was good and it all started to flood back and as my daughter says, 'Well why wasn't we taught this Dad??' And I said,

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'Well you're too busy being educated in this system and then you can go back and do the other.' and yeah, that's the price you pay, to get educated or progress is what the white fellas call it costs. Everyone pays, just because some are that far up the ladder and it's like this set up of self determination and so forth, it's all right for people to say this

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but unless some productivity is produced why would you allow that to happen. So whether it be a Liberal or Labor government the system they put in place is not working because there's no accountability and you know yourself you or I can't go and get a dollar unless we produce some collateral and so forth, so it's been allowed

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to fester and in a lot of the Aboriginal circles, like if I'm from your family and I come to stay with you I'm your responsibility until I'm ready to leave, so to get ahead in a white society it's pretty difficult. And as you know there was no leases signed with the locals even though there is some compensation being given back and that's only on crown and undeveloped land anyway. But there's been some, the Bundgelong nation is a pretty strong nation and there's been a lot of positives

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right through up through that country and the reason for myself is my father was with the Dutch East Indies force in the Second World War and so he's obviously of Negroid origin, and the blacks from those units there was eighty thousand allied troops up through there and they weren't welcome at white dances in Australia, so the Aboriginal people put dances on for them. And consequently I get the duco plus the curly hair so I cop it from both sides of the fence.

**So you said your father was Negroid?**

Well he would have, all curly hair

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was out of Africa.

**Africa? Right.**

You see them on the islands and they were thrown off the ships, the slave ships and that or jumped up.

**And where was he bought up, your father?**

He was with the Dutch East Indies force, Dutch.

**And where was he born and raised?**

I'm not sure, I'm not sure, so he's since been killed as a result of that but Mum, his friends came back, when they came back after the war and that and Mum's girlfriends went back to the Dutch East Indies so at least I was reared in Australia,

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so yeah I didn't know my father really so uncles and cousins and that stood in, which is the norm in Aboriginal families. If you're not doing well with that one you just move next door and so forth and they just look after you.

**I just want to get the, is it Munchelong or Bundgelong?**

Bundgelong.

**Bundgelong with a B, yeah. And so can you tell us what kind of a woman your mother was, what kind of person she was from how you remember her?**

My Mum?

**Yeah, as a child.**

Well according to my

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aunties and that Mum was a good looker and so forth and there was sixteen in my grandmother's family and two died and they all had to be educated and as a result of that they worked from secretaries at the university to Mum was an a la carte chef eventually and my grandmother was a chef and we always had jobs. We were the first to own a farm in New South Wales which caused problems from the whites thinking that we were

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going to take over and then.

**Whereabouts was the farm?**

That was in Casino and Miston's old property and a whole host of things but then in Ben and Butter, they were New South Wales engine drivers for the railways.

**They were your uncles?**

Yeah, they were uncles and Margaret she was the first at university, not Charles Perkins and Valerie, a secretary and Elva, she was office administration and so was Gloria

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and Ena ended up matron of the hospital and she was the first to breakthrough in the nursing. I've forgotten who else, Betty was another secretary and they were all successful and as a result of that we used to cop it, ?You've been living with those white fellas too long.? so.

**From your own people?**

Oh yeah, it's still there, it doesn't matter whether they're white or black, you cop that, human nature.

**What do you think it was about your family's spirit**

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**that made them, made so many of them successful?**

I don't think they had a choice with Nanna Williams. I remember hearing a story about my Auntie Valerie who's always been sort of bronchial and tuberculosis side of things, the doctor in Grafton was just going to leave her dying,

just another black kid and Nanna Williams told him off and nursed, walked up and down that hospital balcony for two weeks nursing her back to health. And that's the sort of strong woman she was, and it's

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still the same today, you'll find it's the women who are getting the societies and the organisations back on track and that's what gets it started.

**Did you learn many of your Bundgelong tribe stories when you were growing up or were you much more integrated into the white school?**

When we were at Granny Gordon's place, my great-grandmother,

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we'd be sitting round the camp there, near the Casino River and her place and you'd get told about the Gerrywarra and the hairy man's and a lot of other things and if you didn't have a widdle before the sun went down you never went outside, so they were just the sort of things, just a child-minding service but yeah I remember them and I passed them on.

**What was your favourite story?**

Well it wasn't a favourite story but I just knew that if I was out after dark

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the Gerrywarra was going to get me because he run along on, he had four legs but he only run around on three legs because the other one was to pick little kids up that were out late at night.

**What's the Gerrywarra?**

He's a big animal like a bear, like a bear and he's got a head on him like a fellow and yeah, he's a pretty nasty character that fella.

**So you spent your earlier childhood years growing up in Casino?**

Yeah.

**And what were some of your memories from those years?**

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Apart from taught about the birds and bees, oh it was just country, it was good. You'd go over to swim across the river, well the elder kids did until I fell in and learnt to swim but you'd steal a bit of corn or you'd knock off a watermelon out of the paddock or things like that, go over to the tip and there'd be guava trees and birds, oh it was just a good time. You just learnt to live off the land and what was around you and when I say steal, you just

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took enough for a feed, like all kids in the country do at times and yeah, it was great.

**What was the Casino community like in the Fifties?**

Well we went into town and we'd go in in the sulky and they'd have Saturday matinee and plus the football was on but I was playing kids games so what I used to hate was anyone trying, any individuals tapping me on the head and saying ?What a lovely boy?

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and it used to really get to me that and as they'd try to chat up my mother, so I wasn't too keen on that at all, as small as I was.

**You were very protective of your mother back then?**

Well I don't know if it was protective but I just didn't like it, as if I was subservient, hated it.

**So you had a fairly wilful spirit, even at a young age?**

Oh well I must have had, I wouldn't know.

**So and you went to school in Casino as well?**

Yeah, yeah.

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**Tell us about the school you went to and how you were treated there?**

West End was a, oh I was just a gobby little chappie and some of the other boys didn't like it but I enjoyed it and Miss Grey was the, was our teacher that took us under our wing and yeah, she was excellent. And you learnt your sums and your arithmetic and your English and I didn't have much of a problem.

**Why was Miss Grey a good teacher?**

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Oh she just loved all us kids, why I don't know, I mean we just had our fifty year reunion a couple of years ago and she's still going. I couldn't believe it but yeah, it was an excellent, it was just country and there were things to do.

**And you mentioned that at some point your mother went away to work and you were bought up by your grandmother largely?**

Yeah, Mum would come home for holidays and time off and that but yeah, it was a case of necessity

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and country life is good as a kid, it really is. See we didn't have all these distractions and Play Stations and all the rest of it, most of us had wood fires so there were duties to be done. Like you had a cow or something and it had to be milked and the chooks had to be fed and all of those things happened so your day was full as a kid and my goodness if you didn't do your job you were in all sorts of trouble.

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And you look at refrigeration and my goodness there was the old ice box or the old meat keeper that used to hang out of a tree when I was living in Tottenham, oh I've forgotten about that, living in Tottenham. That was in pedal radio days, that was gee.

**Can you explain what?**

Oh I was out there with Uncle Sammy delivering with him out in the west.

**Out west?**

In New South Wales in Nyngan and Tottenham and yeah, he used to cut railway sleepers in the off season

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and so I used to live with him for a while and his wife and that was Uncle Sammy Towns and yeah, that was rugged, hard country and we lived basically, we shot wild pigs and we'd knock over a sheep every now and again but no refrigeration so you used those meat keepers that used to hang up and all the rest of it.

**And you mentioned a radio pedal, what was that?**

Oh pedal radio, on the station we had pedal radio and you used to do that.

**Is that how you had your school lessons?**

Well it was mainly the

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owner's kids but I was there because we all did it and sort of, yeah.

**What would you be taught?**

Well I was so young but we managed to get it done so it must have been the basics, maths and English and I can't remember all of it, I was just so young but I remember it was good, it was good. And we'd eat kangaroos and all that,

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shoot some galahs and cook them up and yeah, young as I was I still remember all those things and yeah.

**And when you went to Casino did you have, who was in your life? Which family members were in your life? You mentioned your grandmother, did you have brothers and sisters?**

Yeah, I had, Mum remarried to Kenny Watson, that's why we came back down to Sydney and that's where I had me half brother, Allan and I took his name, Watson.

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**Why did you decide to do that?**

I don't know, I suppose it seemed like the thing to do. I was just too young to realise that and it wasn't until basically I joined the navy that I used Williams and it was always Watson and come time to get my birth certificate and so forth and, ?Uh, okay, so it was Williams.?

**So you had one half brother?**

Yeah.

**Yeah, and when you were in Casino was there lots of cousins around and aunties that you?**

Yeah, there was, lots of family and I remember one uncle, well Reggie Olive

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his name was. He served in the military and he used to torment like you wouldn't believe. He used to tickle me to death. My God, he was a nuisance and they would take us to the football, us young kids so yeah, it would be good.

**You mentioned there was quite a few members of your family who'd served in the military at some point or another, can you mention some of them and what they did?**

Oh the list, I've got a list somewhere but yeah, there was

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Reggie Olive, there was Lindsay Gordon, there was a Fred Williams.

**And they were all in the army, World War II?**

Yeah, everyone was army except me and yeah, from the Light Horse right through to present day and yeah, I'll have to get the list and check them all out and there was my cousin, Barry Williams, he was at Duntroon and my niece is a commissioned officer on Western Australia and

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nephew is petty officer on submarines and yeah. Well I suppose it was equal opportunity. My other uncle, Duncan Bullsey, he was in Korea and he suffered really badly when he got back and we couldn't get him into Greenslopes Repat because he was a black fella and they didn't want to know him. And we didn't have a quid so he ended up taking his own life but I see it all know. I didn't realise it then. I just thought

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he was mad but that was the chappie I lived with at Dunwich Island. He just used to wake up in the night screaming, nightmares and God it was terrible but I didn't understand what was causing it. I certainly do now and that's another reason why I justify this welfare and pensions course because I make sure that someone is there for our peacekeeping forces, who have been watching people being slaughtered and the Governments all over the world just sitting back, waiting for the oil price to be

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come right.

**And your mother too, she was in the Land Corps?**

She was in the Women's Land Army, yeah.

**Did she ever talk about that to you?**

Not really, because she wasn't overseas. She could just talk about the, like her and her girlfriends, I've lost the photo or someone's got it in the family of her and her girlfriends there in their uniforms in transport and yeah, it's a shame because it's probably gone forever.

**So as a child you grew up with a little bit of a knowledge of**

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**the army?**

Well yeah, I think so because I suppose apart from the movies you get that. It wasn't drummed into me and the uniform demands respect and you play those games as kids anyway, soldiers and things like that so you it only stands to reason that I was going to progress along those lines.

**Interviewee: David Williams Archive ID 2362 Tape 02**

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**David, how many schools did you end up going to?**

Well I just run past them and I think right, so first off would have been, I'll just go back to the Nyngan and Tottenham and the farmers, the cockies' children, that was pedal radio, so we learnt a bit by the School of the Air and then there was, my first basic school would have been

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at Casino and that started with the primary school which is attached to the high school in Casino. Then they completed West End, which is the public school, little primary school and that was basically my first real school. Left there and went to New Farm in Brisbane, stayed at New Farm for a while and then auntie and uncle got married, then sort of went to Stradbroke Island and went to Dunwich School there,

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on Stradbroke Island. Back to Brisbane, went to Gregory Terrace, after Gregory Terrace went up north. No, must have come back down to Sydney because I went to Bourke Street Primary, went to Bourke Street Primary. Yeah that was when we lived in 256 Bourke Street in Surry

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Hills and then I went back up to Brisbane, then I went up to I think with uncle and auntie, another uncle and auntie to Mackay and went to school at Finch Hatton and Beatrice Creek, which is about forty five mile out of Mackay, then back to Brisbane. Then it was Etherta Creek and at Etherta Creek that's when I won the, we lived at Paddington in Brisbane then and that would have been in the late Fifties, won a bursary

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and come down to Sydney and started school again at Newtown Tech, stayed there until I completed my Intermediate, then Obrox Park, went onto fourth year at Obrox Park and then I left school after fourth year. So how many schools that was I don't know but yeah.

**Which school were you at the longest?**

I'd say Newtown Tech because I did first year through to third year.

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**What effect do you think that had on your character, all that moving around from different school, different places?**

Once you move around you can see where the other bloke is coming from because you can see his turf, so as a result I'd travelled and the others hadn't and I think that would perhaps give me an edge. I didn't realise it at the time but I certainly did when I was in the Scouts or whatever, organised Cubs, because I'd been in the country and didn't have to be taught those basic skills, so it wasn't really a problem. It's like anything,

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until you've travelled you're pretty ignorant of a lot of things.

**Was it hard always turning up in a new school and trying to make friends?**

Well it was hard because you had to establish your bit of turf in the rank structure and a new kid on the block has got to do that. I think a lot of parents call it bullying and so forth but there comes a time when you've got to stand up for yourself and that's what I had to do.

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I think it toughens you up and it's not always an easy road but it has to be done.

**So you didn't shy away from a scrap?**

No, no, I mightn't have won them on the first day but I certainly got even.

**What sort of sports were you involved with as a kid?**

Well it's, myself I could run and any running and any athletics

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and or rugby, rugby league in those days, and they were the main sports so they were the one's I chose. And yeah, I was reasonably good at it so I played New South Wales schoolboys and Sydney metropolitan high schools and so forth.

**What position did you play David?**

I was on the wing, yeah on the wing. I was a pretty fast runner. I was Northern Rivers District champion when I was

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in primary school at Casino and that was barefoot and no training.

**How old were you when you played for the schoolboys team, the New South Wales Schoolboys?**

Well they used to go on weight originally and they picked, they picked five stone seven, or maybe six stone side and that was, I think they, we got a blazer with a New South Wales pocket and

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I think it was 1956, yeah and all you want to do is wear the green and gold so even though you're a young fellow, that's all I wanted to do but in high school we all played, Newtown Tech and we played with Newtown Juniors in the school competition. However weekends I played in the Balmain Juniors with the Glebe Police Boys and I was always associated closely with the Police Boys, whether it be South Sydney when I was down here

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or over in Glebe and Lang Park up in Brisbane, so it was just a natural progression and me uncle he played for Queensland and so forth, represented, Billy Macklin, captained West's in Brisbane, Toowoomba, Ipswich, East's, so yeah, the family was pretty good at sport and so were the ladies with vigoro and hockey, so

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sport was a good equaliser.

**It's sounds like you were in it up to your neck in that sort of thing with your family there. What about the ladies? Did you have any girlfriends when you were younger?**

Well apparently so, I got told that at the school reunion and she said that she loved me and she asked me if I could remember and I said, 'No.' but I could name the boys I used to have a fight with

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but no ladies and I said, 'Well did you ever tell me??' And she said, this is so funny, she said, 'No.' and I said, 'Well how was I supposed to know??' I mean girls weren't on my list as sort of, and it was funny when I think back now and I never sort of, even when I was playing serious football, well I thought it was serious with third grade or President's Cup or Jersey Flag

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S G Ball, I mean I wouldn't go out three days prior to a game and I'd be in bed by nine. I wanted to put that green and gold guernsey on and mmh, they weren't sort of high in my priorities at that stage, the ladies. I've since turned that around a bit.

**The odd sort of bit of fighting that you were involved with at school**

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**were you in trouble at school for that sort of thing often?**

No, not really. I ended up prefect of my schools and that. The trouble was, well a lot of my friends their parents there, especially at Newtown, I mean how we treated new Australians was really shocking, shocking. And I didn't know any better because there were Pommy bastards and wogs and they weren't to step over us Aussies and that's how it was

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and the status quo remained while I was at school. If you looked like going in that classroom before us Aussie kids you were in deep trouble. We'd only let them sit in the five front rows and a whole host of things but as I said I didn't know any better. I'm not proud of that and if you played tennis or wanted to play golf or with a round ball you were considered a bit limp-wristed so there were so many things we did wrong and that's the way I was taught from my so-called peers. I wish I could change a lot of it

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but it happened and mmh.

**So it didn't matter where you came from, a racial national pecking order existed?**

Mmh, and it still does. With the drinking side of things I mean I've seen in different sections of my growing up what alcohol did to the men and the women and I was never going to do it and I used to see things on the movies and I never really drank and I was a 'Milky Bar kid' basically, even when I joined the military.

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Yeah, it wasn't for me.

**As you got towards the end of your school and you were going to Newtown Tech then, what sort of student were you?**

Medium. Ah I'd started to slacken off because I was having problems at the college, the Tranby Aboriginal College, I was having a few problems there and eventually I was drugged one

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night and a bloke tried to rape me so I started to fall by the wayside.

**How old were you when that happened?**

I would have been fourteen, second year, so I waited three and a half weeks for that mongrel to come back from the pub pissed and took him out with a full tin of treacle. I thought I'd actually killed him but I often think, I couldn't go running home to family and say I

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didn't like it. I had to complete what I was sent there to do.

**And that person was a teacher?**

He was twenty five, no he was twenty five.

**He was a student?**

He was a student and he came from Mitchell River.

**And the tin of treacle was in a sock or something like that or just belted him?**

No, no, in my hand. I hid in the old bushes near the front and he staggered along the fence and just smashed him. I often wondered if I was a weaker

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sort of individual where I'd be in the rich road of life now if I had not had that get even attitude. But I couldn't talk about that and I couldn't tell anyone until, it was just part of life. My aunties are ashamed that that happened because if they had have known they would have pulled me straight out but I had to achieve.

**So what, you said you started to go downhill a little bit academically?**

Yeah, because,

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see I needed, really I needed a father image I think. I mean things would happen on the sports field but where do you go after the game? The old Redfern Town Hall dances or it was just, things there weren't what I wanted and so I just sort of tapered off and yeah I think it was mainly missing the family. It was probably if I had of had that it wouldn't have been a problem.

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I would have had my ups and down days but that's all they would have been, days. And then it came time to go and yeah you think, I remember I used to walk up Parramatta Road and sit in the Jaguar cars and, ?One day I'll own one of these.? and mmh, used to dream.

**There's one out in the driveway right now.**

Well it can stay there. No-one talks to me when I'm driving that around.

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**Did you have any sort of relationship with your step-father?**

Yeah, he's a good bloke. Weak sort of individual I know now but yeah, but he was just, not what he could have been and my brother is a lot like him actually, my half-brother but yeah, nice bloke, nice bloke.

**So even though you had quite a few strong women in your family background you think you suffered a little bit from the lack of a father figure?**

Yeah, I definitely did.

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**So what were your ambitions when you left school then?**

Well I think I just looked at the sport side of things and I was going to be, and the movies I used to see, especially a lot of the American movies, slaves from slaves and I wasn't a happy little camper as far as how the blacks were treated and I certainly wasn't going to be treated like that. But I remember what Nan used to say, ?Get educated, know their stuff



and come back

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and teach them yours.? So that's always been at the back of my mind and now I can go anywhere and I certainly know the majority of white man ways but they certainly don't know the Aboriginal way, although it's slowly changing which is good. For instance last night I was guest speaker at a welcome to the country at the local government awards for New

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South Wales and they're getting their protocols correct and sitting next to at our table some very influential people and just explained a few things about how it could be easier and very successful. And here's this in the middle of Auburn which has a multicultural sort of background but they did it well, the local government there and I take my hat off to them. It could have been one of the blue rinse areas but no, here these people are,

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achievers, and in local government if your streets are clean and you get service and the parks and all the rest of it and it's a nice neighbourhood the crime rate is reasonably average, well why not live there? And a lot of good things going down.

**You sound like you're a bit of an angry young man at that point of your life when you left school?**

Not angry but what the hell am I going to do? And I just couldn't

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see myself, well football was there but that was only six months of the year in those days because everyone had a job, so yeah and I was just, I liked the building game, that was excellent, so perhaps I saw an opportunity there but mmh. As I say I needed someone to say, ?Hang on a minute, why don't you travel this road? Travel this way.? but I didn't have that.

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Obviously people had said things like that to me but they weren't in my life long enough so I couldn't see the light at the end of the tunnel.

**So what did you do?**

Well I had a number of good jobs and I just did the normal things that everyone did and we went, my mates and I we pulled our resources and go shooting and things on weekends and camping

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and all of those sort of things. Yeah, it wasn't really, oh a couple of the guys had permanent girlfriends but as I said I didn't drink so it wasn't really an issue and then came along this Melbourne crim one time and I wouldn't say he had to get out of Melbourne but he was a nice bloke but obviously not to the victims down there

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but yeah, he was. He taught me a few things about basic mechanical engineering stuff and so forth and I took an interest in that and I thought, ?Oh well I might be in the technical side of things.? so fitting and machining looked like a good possibility or a television technician with Channel Two but something on the technical side of things. So I was having a look at that then and I was thinking, ?Well I'm still young enough, I can do an apprenticeship.?

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**Prior to that you'd been doing a bit of construction work?**

Yeah, yeah.

### **On what sort of projects?**

Well it was mainly waterproofing of roofing and so forth and sealing of concrete joints and that but the thing was you can look back and say, 'Well you worked on that building and this building.' As I said the old AMP [Australian Mutual Provident] building at Circular Quay, the State Office block, Australia Square, I worked on all those buildings and that's probably where the navy, I used to look down

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on the fleet and think, 'Wonder what those blokes are doing?'

### **How did you learn that job?**

I started of labouring and then you just get taught by the normal progression of the people above you and I remember when I was fifteen I did a bricky's labourer's job for a weekend and I knew that wasn't the job for me. I had to keep two brick layers up doing a flat wall with no

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mixer and my hands were red raw by the end of that weekend but the money was good. I knew I couldn't do that one but yeah but as I said I like to think you build it all and you go back and you can say, 'I did that and it's still there.' so that's what's happening on a few of our committees around the traps with walkways and paths and the stories on the people who lived here before and

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what it means to this particular bend in the creek and the hill over there.

### **Were you working at heights on those construction projects?**

Oh yeah, the State Office block, can't remember now, about forty floors, walk along the steel girders there, no harnesses, nothing, never worried me. Now I wouldn't go up with a parachute and a cargo net and everything, never get me doing that.

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I mean you just did it. I remember I picked up a piece of plywood one day to move it out of the road while we did this ceiling and the wind came up and I think it must have been on the thirtieth floor and nearly took me straight over the side. My God, when I think back, yeah, it was different.

### **How was the money?**

The money was good but I didn't drink so I didn't need that much and if I was really doing it tough I could go and catch pigeons and sell

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them at the markets for two shillings, yeah, so no, it was good. Just rugby and Milky Bar and run around as I said, pool our resources. Someone always had an old Holden or a Chevy. I remember I bought an old Mark 7 Jag and it used to take about eight of us to get from Glebe to Parramatta in the stupid thing, but anyway it was fun days but it was my Jag.

### **So while you were**

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### **running around up on steel girders you could see Garden Island down there and got a little bit interested?**

Well yeah, I saw a movie with Jimmy Cagney in it and he was the chief tiffy [artificer] on a destroyer which had been torpedoed and the stern glands were leaking. Now I must have been about twelve or thirteen and anyway the whole of the ship's company is depending on him sealing that bloody stern gland and I just said one day I wouldn't mind being like that.

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That's what I want to do and I can still see that and I can't even remember the name of the movie but I've seen it a few times since and it was a mongrel of a job what he had to do and I've done it heaps of times because they leak and yeah, but yeah, I did it.

**So at what point did you start to get a little bit more serious about joining?**

Well conscription, yeah the mates were going and being Aboriginal the government, you didn't have to fight for the country because we weren't citizens

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but it wouldn't have looked too good on the old resume but yeah if they were going well I thought, 'I'll join the senior service. Rather than do two years, I'll do nine.' which happened.

**Signing up for nine years is a big call when you're only that young anyway?**

Well I was in the school cadets, I was in the Cubs and Scouts and what was the difference and someone, I mean travel the world

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I suppose, that was one thing but sure you could get shot at but you've got to understand you're not on your own. Like in civvy street when you get into strife or not in the best of health, nine times out of ten you are on your own, this thing you've got a big family around you and that's what they advertised.

**It's interesting that you didn't have to do National Service because the country didn't consider you a citizen but yet you were prepared to commit nine**

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**years to the country that didn't regard you as one of it's own?**

Well that's true, I have to live with myself and I don't care what the Federal Government says. Those are my mates over there and I certainly don't want them fighting my battles. I believe they are our battles and whatever little Johnny Howard or the rest of his cronies say they can get nicked. I grew up with these fellows, not with them and I know none of them would bloody stick

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their head in a noose and go but they'd certainly send us and I'd rather go with my friends.

**So what was the procedure for you to join up? Did you have to go to an office somewhere?**

Oh yeah, I went to recruiting in Brisbane. I think it was down in Elizabeth Street and Nobby Clark was the petty officer. I know his name was Nobby because it's Clark and I didn't understand it was Petty Officer Clark as per the name tag and if you're name is Clark you get called Nobby. He asked me a few basic questions and I said yes and he said could I fight? And I said, 'Yes,

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those I can't beat I can outrun.' and he said, 'Right, sign here son.' So that was it, do a medical, psych test, take the oath and I was on my way. And I can remember coming home in uniform, my mother was living in Australia Street, Newtown then and I knocked on the door and I could see the worries drain out of her face, that her son was in the military. But yeah I met some

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wonderful, wonderful people in the services there for all of us.

**So your Mum was pretty chuffed that you'd joined up?**

Oh the whole family was, the whole family was. Yeah, it was, I think as I said if I had a father there that was perhaps in mining or some industry I might have travelled that road but like my uncles were engine drivers with the railways, now I

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always wanted to be an engine driver. Little did I know the engine was going to be a steam engine but it was going to have a propeller hanging off the back of it instead of some wheels on a steel track, so I achieved my goal in that aspect. My favourite engines are the steam engines, the heat engines and yeah, just the smell of them. I remember when I went on a cruise and I'm thinking 'this will be boring.' I think it was the Oriana or one of them, the Orcadia or something. I spent most of

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my time down talking to the crew instead of up there hobnobbing with the bloody guests but yeah, it's just what I like. It just grabs you. I suppose it's like people going to the drags or their favourite, the adrenaline gets to them and they want to do it, that's what those engines do for me, being at sea.

**Where did you go for your recruit training then?**

Down to Flinders Navy Base,

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and I remember walking into there on the weekend and hearing, 'You'll be sorry.' from all these young fellows. They've got about two thousand sailors and one black fellow so they all knew my name but I didn't know none of them so I saluted everything that moved in those days. Got my needles, woke up the next day in hospital, collapsed after getting my needles.

**What do you mean by needles?**

Oh you're inoculations and all that sort of stuff.

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We used to go on the cross country run of a morning, six in the morning, across swamps and Christ knows what, so if you couldn't swim you had to do backwards swimming and it was a heated pool, so I couldn't swim until they timed me one time and I got sprung, so I was back on the cross country runs. Yeah, that was a good couple of weeks that I got away with that.

**I think it's a good exchange, swapping a run in the swamp for a**

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**heated pool.**

Well I didn't have to clean my sandshoes and do all that because all I had to do was say I couldn't swim, you never saw any black fellows in the Olympics except Eric the Eel, well there you go.

**When you first hit navy life there what did you reckon of it, at Flinders I mean?**

Well doors opened up for me because on my resume it said I was a footballer so I went straight into the rugby cup, the Colts, the Navy Colts

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and like I was told, 'You'll be doing this, you'll be doing that.' and so it was good, sport.

**Did you have to swap to union though?**

Yeah, but I played union anyway.

**I thought you played rugby league, sorry?**

I used to sneak over to North Sydney. I forgot about that and play over there with North Sydney on Saturdays and then play rugby league on Sundays in the juniors and think no-one would recognise me but anyway that was, sport was

everything to me.

**So you've actually played both codes?**

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Oh yeah.

**Sorry, I didn't realise that. So you were a bit of a favourite then if you could walk straight into the?**

Well that's right, that's right.

**What about all the little bits of discipline and learning to put your hammock this way and your sheet that way and that sort of business, what did you think about that in training?**

Well mine was put that way and this way but it was never spot on but I persevered and we never won cabin of the week like those other snivelling little snakes but anyway it doesn't matter and I never was a blue card

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holder. My best mates were.

**What does that mean?**

Well they just got extra privileges. I was always in strife, I was a bit late for something, whatever, but it was just me, just me. I had a ball, absolute ball. I was ashore and the first weekend where you don't normally get leave for six weeks because we played rugby and I had four glasses of Victoria Bitter and of course the chief said, 'Have a beer.' and I was sick for three days, couldn't

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march, couldn't do anything, so yeah, but anyway.

**So the fact, it seems like you had a good time because you had sport but you also had a bit of direction going on as well?**

Yeah, I'm just, I just tried to be good at it, whatever it was. Like they said, 'Jump in the air.' you're doing survival at sea or it was just easy, it really was. As far as the uniform

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being, some guys would spit polish, I just did enough to get me through and I wasn't really into the other stuff and that hasn't changed that much I don't suppose.

**What sort of level of discipline was there at Flinders in that post?**

Well everyone was yelling at you for whatever reason so they used to the old Sinbosun dances on a Sunday night where they used to have the WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Naval Service] over there segregated and I just

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remember my old instructor used to say, 'Never ever go out with them or tie up alongside them because why would you want to go out with someone that can fight a fire, shoot a rifle and make out a watch bell as good as you?' So that's always stuck in my mind so I used to, yeah, I just remember one night at old Anford, one going to the movies, Jesus but anyway that's another story.

**And as you sort of went through your training**

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**what sort of ambitions did you have about what sort of branch you wanted to go into?**

Well it was always going to be more or less call it a stoker, so started off general entry stoker. Yeah, and that was it in the mechanical engineering and I enjoyed it because I felt like, 'Not everyone can do this job, they can't handle being down the engine room.' And I just, and because it was a strong branch you

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felt better than anyone else because you could do that and they'd be sooking because it's too hot or it's too dirty or it's, anyway I prided myself in that and apart from the satisfaction of getting the platform from point A to point B, so I realised it takes all of us. And it wasn't until really the latter of my career that I finally

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realised that it takes all of us to get the thing from point A to point B and at least I learnt that. It might have taken a while but I learnt it.

**How did you feel about stokers having that kind of underdog status in the navy that a lot of people looked down on them?**

Well a lot of people looked down on them because they were on the upper deck and a lot of people looked down on them because we're made of the right stuff as far as I'm concerned. We can do things that the average

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bloke can't and that's as much as and it didn't phase us and consequently half the songs are made up about stokers or the ditties or how it runs ashore and the wild things we do and I am certainly sure we can outperform most of the other branches.

**What sort of technical stuff were you learning at Flinders in that branch then?**

Just the basics of recruit training

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and then you come back after your two years at sea and then you do your branch training and you learn about pumps and refrigeration and air-conditioning, steam turbines, gas turbines, internal combustion engines, boilers, pneumatics, hydraulics, you learn the basics. Then you go away, do more sea time and come back and do a promotional course and then you learn more about that and so on and then you get an Associate Diploma of Marine Engineering Systems, so.

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**So your first sea posting was Vampire?**

Yep.

**What did you reckon of sea life when you first go aboard her?**

I went down the spacers and I went, 'Oh my God, what is this?? Just couldn't see it and then sort of it all started to fall into place like we were taught, different colours of the lines, what the bulkheads, watertight integrity, escape routes, yeah, it all

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come together.

**And I guess you would have been working with some pretty salty old dogs?**

Yeah, well in the middle watches as a young, ordinary seaman you used to blow soot when the ship turned sideways and then you put steam into the upper economiser and like it decakes all the soot and that and the big valves around the side of that particular boiler and as a young bloke jump up there you had one of those limp-wristed chappies adjusting your valves,

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as he said and that was all part of the rich way of life.

**What do you mean by 'blowing soot'?**

Well you do a clean out of your air uptakes for your boilers with gas and that otherwise it will fill up, it's like a

chimney in a normal fire cleans up once a year. You do it once every twenty four hours on a steaming boiler at sea, well more if you want to but yeah.

**And it's not a pleasant job?**

Oh it's pretty easy, it's just that the seamen don't like it because all the black soot goes onto their clean upper deck

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so they've got to scrub down again, so you can imagine that on the old wooden decks. They weren't happy little campers but it give them something to do, that's if they didn't turn sideways to the wind.

**And the more senior men that you were working with, senior in experience and rank, how did they treat you when you first came aboard Vampire?**

Well as I said you knew you were coming aboard. They knew because your information preceded you and they knew what sport you were

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playing and the first would be a senior, probably the rugby coach or something and, ?You'll be doing this and your duties are that.? and providing you kept your nose clean like the perks come. And the other job I had on there was after mess café, which meant I kept the after mess for the senior sailors. That was a specific job on one of the four, three

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months and then you go to a part of the ship which was the fo'c'sle, the front part or the tops and you do seamanship and then you go to mess decks, which are internal so you learn a bit about everyone else's job and then you come back and do your category or put in a request to change branch. Yeah, it was good because we were on deployment so everyone has to blend into together but even though we were the youngest them old fellows looked after us and they were always there to kick your backside

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if you made a fool of yourself ashore or something like that, which is where the father thing come in, which doesn't happen a lot today because the Defence Department don't have the guys living on board any more. They outsource all that so they're not together, which I think is a bit of a shame.

**So it sounds like you really sort of found your place there and enjoyed that time. Was there any aspect of navy life at that point that**

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**you didn't like?**

Yeah, getting up and keeping watches but, no you only remember all the good times. I don't remember all the defects and arduous hard duties and cleaning boilers and tanks and all those things but it's got to be done and as you go up in rank, I mean your physical effort lessens off and you become

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in charge of the compartment or whatever it is. And then it's your responsibility to keep it ship-shape and operational, so it's sort of, the onus changes a bit and because you'd hate to think it's your section that kept the boat alongside and you strive for that and then you're competing against the other ships of the same class as well, so that was all relevant. You've got to be the best gunnery ship, the best engineering, the best sport and there's a whole host of things so while that's

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ever there you're pretty flat out and you used to have a few blues amongst your colleagues as a result of that, arguing

over, 'That's our corner of the Rocker's Hotel, or Vampire's.' or, 'That's Vendetta's.' or, 'This one over here is??' and that's what happened. And when we'd sail our girlfriends that we had the other ship would be coming in and we'd be going around the corner and vice versa, so everything was all in house.

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**What were your living conditions like aboard Vampire?**

Oh pretty crowded, a lot better than other ships like Sydney and so forth. The mess decks were air conditioned and unfortunately asbestos was everywhere but yeah, and especially when you're eating your meal and if they were going to do a shoot or something like that all the dust would be in there and I've been a lagger as well in a brickies, so I mean that was the downside of it all.

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I mean in hindsight a lot more guys would be alive if we took more care preventative action and they would have informed us better.

**So you're saying that at particularly times of a shoot the lagging would break up and drift around?**

Yeah, well the shock transmitted through the ship's superstructure and hull and it would shake and those pipes are all slung on brackets and the dust and that would fall out of them, it's not flash, seeing as I lost

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quite a few mates through asbestosis over the years. It would have been nice but they didn't, see that's our job but what I get angry about is how they drag out the compensation. Families need the money straight away, not go to court and prove this and prove

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that. None of the servicemen really mind but as long as your family is compensated a.s.a.p. Like in a building site, you fall off a ladder, it happens the next day, doesn't like that in Commonwealth terms, in the military.

**Any issues with sea sickness, David?**

The only time I've been sea sick is in the twenty four hour period the day of sailing and

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that's usually from basically a vitamin B [Victoria Bitter] or a Mr Toohey's or the appropriate sea sick tablets which come in a liquid form the night before. No, no, I have been sea sick a couple of times. I think once was on Stalwart and I forget, might have been coming down with the flu or something. It's hard on submarines but on a service ship you can go up and get in the fresh air and you catch up with the horizon

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and you see a wave coming so you know the ship's going to go up and so your mind sort of floats into synch so that's all most of the sickness is but no, I don't normally get sea sick.

**What about in those early times, I don't know it might be different later in subs but in Vampire any claustrophobia issues with working in the compartments?**

No, never, never. No, look I just never entered

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into the equation really. I know it affects a lot of people, only since especially working in civvy street and having a little maintenance business and asking people to go up a ladder or across that there and do this and no, they just can't work at heights and that opens your eyes up a little bit, especially with claustrophobia. Hopefully that's where I fall back on psychiatrists and psychologists for



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this and is hopefully they can weed that out in the individuals before they get that far and are in that situation.

**What sort of ship was Vampire as far as the crew and the spirit and the personality of it?**

Well we were, this stems back to when I was saying about the first few years in the submarines and Vampire was Captain D10, in other words she was the senior ship of the destroyer squadron, the 10th Destroyer Squadron, and as a result of that our captain was senior to the other captains

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on those ships and we got priority and the crew acted accordingly. So when we were coming alongside we'd come alongside the wharf and the other ship would berth outside of us, that was all relevant and that carried on with everything we did, 'We're the boss and you pay attention.' and that's how it is and that's where that friendly rivalry comes in, whether it be a boat race at the bar or whatever and I think it's healthy and it was important

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we win the rugby game against whichever and I dare say there was a lot of sly bets going on but that's how it was.

**Interviewee: David Williams Archive ID 2362 Tape 03**

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**David, just going back to your childhood you were talking about being in the Bundgelong tribe and some of the nights you used to spend there hearing some of the dream time stories I guess they were, how did that experience and that sort of Aboriginal side of you, how did you take that into your early life in the service, in the navy? What kind of lessons had you taken with you**

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**from your Aboriginal teachings?**

Well I don't know whether I could sort of assimilate, see these stories were more or less on the spiritual side of things and the Defence Department and the navy are more or less on the man thing, so you really sort apart from the basic traits of all men, do the right thing by the other bloke and vice versa

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like the only thing I can perhaps assimilate is on Sundays we had church parade. Well I mean that never really grabbed me because I'm not from the Middle East, around that area where JC [Jesus Christ] was running around telling his mob what to do and how they should do it so it never really, I never really looked at it like that. However I just knew

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there was a right and a wrong and it's pretty universal and how the stories are told is I suppose is no different from my family saying to the kids, 'You'd better not go out after dark because the boogie man will get you.' But perhaps in our stories the story was told a little bit more in detail because you weren't supposed to be outside so stay inside and depending on the type of story there was different types of individuals out there

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to pick up children running around in the middle of the night. I think, as I say the two that stick in my mind are the Hairy Man and the Gerrywarra and they were two bad characters, consequently I was never out late at night so didn't have that problem.

**What about the human lessons that you may have been taught from the very strong influences of the women in your life, like your grandmother and your aunties?**

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**What kind of lessons of the kind of person that you ended up being did they kind of give you?**

Well they were always very competitive and clean, neat and tidy and that was always a priority. Wherever we stayed always had to be neat and tidy and the grass had to be mowed and things had a spot in the place and we were always clean.

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The washing was done and whether it was me going out and getting the wood and putting it under the old copper and old Nanna would silver starch and boil the things and we always had to be clean and I think that was pretty important, pretty important.

**So that stood you in good stead for navy life?**

I think so.

**That cleanliness?**

Yeah, because there was always, being from a large family and a lot of aunties and uncles and stand-in-dads I suppose there is

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always someone following you so leave the place how you found it, which was pretty easy, pretty easy. I think we all used to argue and fight over who was going to wipe up and wash up and all the rest of it but that's pretty standard in any organisation.

**You mentioned during your training that you had four beers and it knocked you out for a few days?**

Well that was in my recruit school days and it was a week after I

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joined the navy. I had four seven ounces glasses of Victorian Bitter and I was sick for three days, three to four days after that and it was forty five mile back to the base from the middle of Melbourne and I was crook and basically that was an introduction to alcohol. As I said I never drank and I've seen what it does to different people and never, ever and I couldn't understand people who smoked. If John Wayne went out on the balcony and lit up a durr

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all the Apaches had to do was fire the arrow where he lit the cigarette, they've got to hit him, so I mean I never saw any sense in smoking either.

**So you've carried that through? You still don't smoke and?**

Never, no. I drink, I drink but I've never smoked, except passively, like on the submarines ninety five per cent of the crew smoke so I'm breathing that crap in.

**So you did drink a little bit during your service years?**

Oh after Vietnam I

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did but in the initial days two or three large bottles of beer and that was me done so but yeah, I've progressed a little bit better than that now I suppose. I'm up to about four or five but no, I drink far too much for my liking but that's probably because I've been in a welfare club environment as a director of the club and there's a lot of functions you're at and socials and Anzac Days and all these sort of social occasions where

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you're having a few beers and a laugh and a giggle with your friends and yeah, probably a few too many most times but

it happens.

**Okay, how did you find the transfer from civilian life into the navy life?**

Well I think because I was always in a team sport I didn't see much difference except you stayed where you worked I suppose,

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I was always in the Scouts or the Cubs or the large football team. I didn't do individual things. I did it with a team and it's like the Defence Department is I suppose, a team and yeah, and an organised one so I didn't have a problem, I really didn't. And there was heaps of things to keep me entertained as far as

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interesting, there was so much going down, it was just an incredible time.

**What kind of things kept you entertained?**

Well if I wanted to I could have choice, either engineering or administrative things or actually recreational things. I had choice, large choice and that was good. If I wanted to go the snow and go skiing I could, didn't have that choice I don't think in civvy street, one because

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not because I didn't have them but I didn't have it all like a travel agent there ready to organise it for me, so yeah, and meeting these guys from all over, they've had experiences where I haven't and vice versa and it was great so when leave came up we'd go home to someone's place and that was good.

**Did you maintain many friends that you'd made in civilian life once you'd joined the navy?**

No.

**Why was that?**

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Cause I'd changed, I'd changed and travelled and they hadn't.

**Was that an immediate transition or did that take a few years for you to lose those friends that you had in civvy life?**

Well they were there but I don't think, it's hard to say, I don't think, the one's that I had in civvy life that did service time are still there. The normal

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civilian side type of ones, no, I just drifted apart, just like that. Wasn't any long process, just became different.

**Where did you spend most of your time growing up when you were actually in Sydney?**

In Surry Hills and then going from there to Glebe.

**So that would have been the Fifties,**

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**early Sixties, that you were?**

Fifties. And in the Sixties, early Sixties.

**So what were those communities like for you growing up there? How did you find them?**

Well I was in the Police Boys' so we knew everyone, whether it be climbing over the back fence to get into Redfern Football Oval or crawling up the drains to get inside the showgrounds at Centennial Park or being in Glebe and the police knew us and we knew them because

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we were all a community and I'm not talking black people. I'm talking white friends as well. The majority of my friends are white anyway, so yeah, so that was the bulk of the football team or the scout group or whatever.

**How did your Aboriginal friends treat you having like white kids as friends? Did they care or did it matter?**

It mattered to some obviously.

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I didn't realise it at the time but obviously it did but they weren't where I was so I can sort of remember still going out to La Perouse and jumping off the wharf there for some pennies and halfpennies and stuff and talking to some of those old fellows there that used to make boomerangs and things like that but that was about it. Some cousins lived over in Alexandria and around Redfern but I never

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sort of went much further than that. Maybe have a chat at a footy game or something but that's about it.

**Did you feel more comfortable with your white friends than your Aboriginal friends or you didn't think about it?**

Didn't think about it, did not think about it. I just think we always had a house and things like that so that may have been the difference, I'm not sure. We weren't in Housing Commission so maybe that was the difference.

**Does that mean also that you had a bit more stability?**

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Probably, probably.

**What sort of coping mechanisms did you develop as a child that you were able to take into the navy, in those early days in the navy?**

Well it wasn't hard for me to cope because I was in the job I wanted to do, so I mean it would be different and there was a port of call that

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we were going to and I'd never been there so it was just a matter of, 'How long before we get there?' It wasn't sort of how to and I was being given a hard time or we weren't and every day was a bonus as far as I know. You'd get up and I was in my own part of the ship, which was engineering and I happened to be on the machines that made fresh water well you compete

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to make sure that you made more water when you were on watch than the bloke preceding you or the funnel gases weren't correct and you were making too much black smoke so you just tried to achieve and do it just a bit better so your days were full. Otherwise you'd be watching the old movies on the old sixteen millimetre film or late at night on the upper deck or whatever, yeah. Yeah, every day was a bonus.

**It sounds like you took to navy life like a**

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**duck to water?**

I think it was because we were a big team and if you were on an exercise you knew that your mates were on that ship over there and you're going to do the job better than them so I don't know it was yeah. There was some hard times but I mean I don't really remember the hard times. They would have been to do with defects or some job or breaking down or something like that.

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**You mentioned before that by joining the football team when you joined the navy you perhaps avoided bullying and some of the harder times that some of the other blokes may have encountered?**

I don't know if I really avoided bullying. It was a fact that the rugby team went to training at such and such a time and you're in the rugby team and you'd be there, while there was other jobs and duties for the people that didn't play

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sport, whichever those duties and jobs may have been. I didn't have time to worry about it and the rugby team or the sports team got this done where the other mob didn't, just little perks like that, so it was advantageous to yourself to stay in the side so to speak.

**Okay, well getting back to your time with HMAS Vampire, can you talk about the first campaign that you went on with HMAS Vampire,**

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**which I think was the Malacca Straits?**

The Malacca Straits. Yeah, there was confrontation between Indonesian and Malaya and so forth and also a fair bit of smuggling going on between the Philippines and Indonesia and so forth. So our job was to patrol in the Malacca Straits and also to stay offshore of Borneo as well.

**What year was this?**

That was 66 and 67 and as a result of that we picked

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up some smugglers and perhaps some other desperates trying to get to the mainland and cause, yes and while the minesweepers and that were patrolling up the rivers in Borneo we'd be offshore in case they needed bombardment or protection from whatever sources. And yeah it was, I didn't understand all the politics but we had interpreters on board

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and things like that so I knew it was, I was taught it was necessary to the country and to the defence alliance we had between south east Asia and Australia, so you did your duty.

**And was your duty, what were you doing at that time?**

Well at that time I was on boarding party if necessary and also landing party if they had to send a fighting force ashore, armed, well I was part of that as well.

**So can you give us some detail about exactly what that would involve for you?**

Well we would have

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probably be about ten of us and we would have taken off in a rubber ducky if we were landing party and gone to whatever the problem was or if we were boarding party we would have been armed and boarded whatever vessel it was and expected to search it for contraband or people or whatever the situation was, which we did. No, there was no incidences which

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required us at that stage to use our weapons on those activities although I did see some of the interrogation of some of the smugglers and so forth which were pretty rugged but that was part of the?

**Well what would that interrogation involve?**

Well that involved our interpreters doing the interrogating and the translating and we just had to be

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in the appropriate positions, armed, while they were interrogating whoever that was we had on board.

**What sort of interrogation methods did they use then with those smugglers?**

Oh whatever it took to get a response. It wasn't the everyday thing you see in the street.

**Violence or is it mental intimidation or?**

Probably a bit of everything.

**How did that effect you seeing that?**

Well they were the baddies, they

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were going to get Australia, so I was doing my job but you know in hindsight, probably pirates smuggling whatever, but that's in hindsight. You don't know on the day because there was people being killed and explosions and I remember in that era marching around on the, while we were alongside in Singapore with an ammunition belt and a weapon because they could have been boarded

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by saboteurs and so forth, so there was politics. So as I said we had a treaty with those countries and if that's what it took to do the job, well so be it.

**So did you feel proud to be part of the navy in your first campaign? What kind of feeling did that campaign?**

I didn't see it as that. I mean it's not until you, it would be like saying about Cyclone Tracy, until you're actually there

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you haven't got a clue. You just think you know what the damage is going to be but it's not until you actually get there that you realise that and that was the same with our patrol duties and so forth and it's not until you're actually there that you understand.

**So can you explain what you understood when you actually got there, what was it you understood that you didn't before?**

Well unrest in that country and the country, for whatever political reasons and we were there as a stabilising force obviously and

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if that took on civil unrest, well so be it.

**And what about for your personally, how did you find your first campaign?**

Well I was eighteen, nineteen and I was bullet proof and it wasn't an issue and I know that around me there is another three hundred guys ready to step in if I fall, so it was never sort an issue. It was my job while I was there to make sure that they could sleep

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so that's how I looked at it.

**Now you mentioned before that one of the reasons you joined the navy was for the sense of adventure, were you getting that sense of adventure on your first campaign?**

Well yes I was and the adventure would have been visiting these other people in their countries and understanding that they mightn't have as much as what we consider important, however they were people just like the

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rest of us.

**These were some of the people in the Malacca Straits, the local people that you met?**

Yeah, all through, yeah, all through, didn't matter which country it was. You realise that so I was never, I never sort of stood out with money hanging out of my pockets and just stood there as a big, ignorant Aussie. I just said, 'Please.' and, 'Thank you.' to them, the same as I would to anyone else.

**That was a lesson that you learnt early on?**

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Well certainly is because I know how lucky we are.

**And after the Malacca Straits, after that campaign, you then did a diving course?**

No, I did it before I went up there.

**Before Malacca Straits?**

Because that was part of my duties, to search the ship. Before anyone attacked from underwater saboteurs and so forth.

**Okay, can you tell us about the diving course, what exactly you learnt in that course?**

Well in a diving course you're at a limited depth and it's down to a couple of atmospheres, which is about sixty six foot, sixty

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six to a hundred foot, and if necessary you do bottom searches or like basic repair maintenance if needed and also like when we were in Vietnam you do a dive every four hours checking the ship's bottom and hull and anchor cables, forward and aft, for bombs or limpet mines and things like that and you may have to do other ships that are in because they haven't got a diving team.

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Yeah, yeah and on one particular occasion, it was about half past eleven at night and the current went up over three knots and.

**This is in Vietnam?**

Yeah, and I was the surface swimmer, which meant that I didn't have tanks on so I had to duck dive and feel up the intakes and so forth and also feel above the waterline, just above the waterline and I got tangled up in the other guys who had tanks on and it was a bit of a mess

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and we got swept out to sea and they picked us up about an hour, an hour and a half later, floating out in the South China Sea in the middle of the night. Don't even know how they found us, to tell you the truth but they did and picked me and a mate up because I'd just resigned myself to, 'Oh well, keep swimming until you drown, that's it.'

**What had you been taught in your diving course that maybe kind of helped you when you were in that kind of desperate position?**

Well nothing because you couldn't swim against three knots, it's just

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impossible. See I had, when you're doing the surface swim you've got to be able to duck dive so you have limited buoyancy on and I wasn't in a wet suit and I was in cloth sort of overalls, which is like cheesecloth sort of thing and I had a set of fins.

**Is that what happened, you always dived like that?**

No, not necessarily, other times you might be in a wetsuit or a dry sea but anyway that's

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all it required because the water temperature is about eighty something degrees so it's not necessary to get in this other stuff but if you can appreciate it it's pitch black and all you can see in the distance is flashes and every now and again

from gunfire and things like that. But it's pitch black, so you're disorientated where the land was and we were anchored in the middle of the delta so you go with the current, it was a case of

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have to and yeah, they got us, that's the main thing and got us back on board and said, 'Get this into you son.' which is a cigarette and two large cans of Resch's Pilsener and gee that was how you cured the patient and boy was I sick but there you go.

**From the beer or the cigarettes?**

Well both probably as I never smoked or drank. I was eighteen.

**So there wasn't a doctor come and look at you?**

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Well there was a doctor on board but this was calm the patient, that was it, a beer and a durry.

**It sounds like, you must have for a few moments there when you were getting swept away you might have thought you may never have come back?**

Well I had to try and get me mate's, what they call the demand valve, out of his mouth and breathe it in because I was underwater and it's night time and if you can imagine the chaos and he probably thought I was a shark and being

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attacked and I just couldn't unclip this little line that we had between us, I couldn't get it out and so I'm struggling and so I get his mouth out and get one breath of fresh air and he's being pulled down because he's fully weighted with tanks and everything. And I was thinking, 'God, I'm not getting out of it.' and it seemed like ages but it was probably only a couple of minutes but yeah, a bit worrying for a while because I thought I'd lost him. I yelled out, 'Anyone there??'

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and I heard his voice and I was thinking, 'Christ, that's Debby.' So yeah, he was, a pretty horrific experience but you put it back out of your mind but I sleep with a c-pat machine and I wake up now thinking I'm drowning because of a few diving accidents that I've had, so I've got to rip this mask off that I breathe through.

**What about when you're in the Malacca Straits and that first campaign, did you**

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**have any close calls?**

Only with sea snakes and things like that and one time with a small reef shark but that's about it. Yeah, I think that was mainly patrolling by night.

**In Vietnam?**

In Malacca Straits, in Malacca Straits we'd be sort of blacked out, we'd stay out of sight during the day and yeah, we'd come in close because they'd be trying to sneak between islands and that during the night.

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**And you mentioned that you preferred to be in the engine room, that's where you felt at home, but you obviously made the decision at some stage that you were going to be a diver or was that decision made for you?**

No, no, it was okay because there's a full-time diver, which is called a clearance diver and they're the SAS [Special Air Service] of the services and I had the opportunity to go that way but I had a few mishaps on just basic

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tasks and if you fail those tasks, I realised, 'Well perhaps this is not the way to go for me.' because I would have been a danger to myself and to my colleagues so it was time to bite the bullet and say, 'No, I just haven't got what it takes



that sort of individual.? so I just remained a ship's diver, which is limited, like a, it's like instead of being a V8 super car you're a little mini.

**So you just come on when they need extra help basically?**

And

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do the smaller jobs, do the smaller jobs rather than the demolition and the sneaky, so it's like a back up system and every ship has ship's divers and they usually have one or two clearance divers, so they're you're specialist category.

**And would you be doing, have any role when you were doing those, the job as a diver?**

Only as I said, landing party and boarding party and

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my action station in those days was in one of the big gun turrets, up front. I used to load the cordite when we went into action stations, which is the charge that shoots the shell out, so that was to the left in A turret.

**Can you describe in detail how you do that, talk us through it?**

Well the ammunition comes up on a hydraulic hoist from down in the gun bay and then the breech is opened and the ram is back and then I grab it from out of the rack

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and I put it into the breech area and the bloke next to me, he puts the shell in and then they ram it up to the gun barrels and fire, that's when I'm actually at action stations in the gun turret. Other sections if I was landing party well that's a different action required so that's when I've got small arms and I've got a Tommy gun or a rifle and I'm about to go ashore and so we get into, either the rubber ducky

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or the ship's boat and we go ashore to do what job it is and the same with boarding party, that's small arms and so forth. So you usually get a knife and a clip of ammunition and whatever the appropriate weapon to do that job. Yeah so it wasn't sort of, oh there was a couple of incidents where there was

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you'd see the remnants of sabotage on different ships and that that had been in the delta up there and another scary incident would have been when we'd come off patrol and we were headed to Bangkok and we were on recreational leave.

**This was your Vietnam campaign?**

Yeah, and we were on recreational leave and that's how easy it is. I mean we did all those jobs and then you come into harbour and we're about to leave and this merchant dredge came down and collided

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with us so I mean who would have thought you could have been in danger in friendly waters.

**What happened? Did the ship sink?**

Oh we had to go back to Singapore and get new bow, the old one cut off and new ones welded on but I was on the fo'c'sle then, which is the front of the ship and I just didn't realise that steel could just fold up, cutting it like a piece of paper. Then

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we had to do some emergency movements and make sure we didn't go backwards into a submarine and one of the British ships that was there at the time and cause more damage and it was just so easy. And when you're looking at the

amount of personnel, three hundred and twenty on ours and seventy on the submarine and on the English ship probably would have been about four hundred, so could have been all sorts of bother.

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**What was morale like on your ship in the Vietnam campaign, HMAS Vampire?**

Well we were on defence watches so there was the thirty ships companies crewed up and because of that watch keeping situation morale was pretty good, because everyone's got a job, so as the result of that you know that you're at a reasonably good state of readiness so nine times out of ten you can never be surprised. It's only a case of

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full action stations when all of us are awake, so any given situation you're in is patrol quiet, which is a, oh that's submarine talk, you're in a full watch system, so it was only a quarter or less of the ship's company actually doing something, if you know what I mean. The rest are just doing maintenance so yeah, it was good because as I said we were Captain D10 and good

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skipper and very senior crew.

**What would you do in your downtime in that Vietnam campaign?**

I always had a little thing to fiddle with, a model of some description. I was a hands-on person and I'd be doing something like that and I spent a lot of hours on the upper deck, putting whatever it

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was together and that's how I spent most of my time.

**Did you disembark very often into Vietnam to Vung Tau? You were at Vung Tau?**

No, no, I didn't.

**Never?**

Colleagues did and no it wasn't an option I don't think. No, yeah, some of the crew did but that would be the signals people and intelligence sort of gatherers so they would and the boss of course but the rest of us, no, we were there ready to go. We were,

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you can understand that everything's flashed up except the main engines weren't turning so we'd be turning them every so often so that creates a current under the ship as well, so that the divers can't, the saboteurs can't because the screws are turning and pushing the water past the hole, so that's another thing you use in defence watches or operational awkward as they call it. So you turn the main engines so that if anyone is coming to try and attack you,

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they get swept away. So that takes personnel to do that so we were still on board.

**Did you have anything to do with the Americans?**

Only when some of them would transfer to our ship and, or, on leave, leave and that was a case of having to pick sides when you were either with the black Americans or the white Americans and it was just a different

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kettle of fish.

**Why?**

Well everything is just politically incorrect. It's not right, it's not real people.

**Can you explain for us what you mean by that?**

They still hate each other.

**The black Americans and the white Americans?**

Yeah, a lot of them are trying to get on and I'd like to live over there longer to see that but it's still a black white thing with the majority of them.

**During those Vietnam days?**

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No, today, today even.

**I mean can you remember specific incidences back then in the Vietnam campaign that really made you think that there was a big standoff between the two?**

Well the fact that some of my colleagues had to go and identify different mates and the amount of black bodies that were in the morgues compared to whites and a whole host of things, and the supply lines and other stories that we heard and not good, not good. Instead of being as a unit and all together, they weren't.

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**You mean the blacks often, might have been sacrificed instead of the white?**

And vice versa, I dare say they got their own back, from what I hear.

**How did that make you feel as a?**

I just felt sorry for them all because I've got what they'd love to have.

**What do you mean by that?**

Well I can still walk down most streets of my town and have a decent debate without being locked or shot, locked up or shot and even call the Prime Minister a few bad names and

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they can't do that in most places in the world because you've got to be politically correct and so forth and mmh, so I haven't got that hatred and I refuse to pass it onto my children. I've always taught them, 'The person is an idiot, move on. Understand that it's her or his particular way and just move on.'

**There was a lot of protests in Australia at the time about the Vietnam**

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**War, what were your personal opinions about that given that you went to that campaign?**

Well when we got back no-one cared and a lot of us were abused and spat on and I didn't take too kindly to that. Consequently I got into a few little bits of a ruckus with civilian personnel and let them know in no uncertain terms my thoughts on the matter.

**So you were personally denigrated because you'd been there, by people?**

(Nods)

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**By mates or by?**

No, not by mates, not by mates and by this stage all my mates were in the service now anyway. But no, we were doing our job and that's our job and it was not for me to know the economics that are running the show. Your country says, 'Do your job.' that's it.

**When you were actually over in Vietnam were you worried about the public opinion about Vietnam in Australia? Did you know about it then?**

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Yeah, we knew about it. You'd see it on newsreels and so forth but they have the guard and the band on the dock and that's about it and you're sitting there and you're thinking, 'Well what did we just do in the last twelve months? What's

going on?? And you go to the club and the old fellows down there say, 'Well it wasn't a big one boys.'

**How did that make you feel?**

Well I didn't know you had to have a big one. I just thought bullets shot you and didn't care

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what time it was but anyway, that didn't sit too well with a lot of us and I'm not saying, it's just like saying that you've got to have a big war to be recognised, it's just ridiculous. Just have a look at what you do on the day and assess it that way and the point is our country said, 'Go and do it.' and we did and pretty well.

**How did you feel when Australia when, when Aboriginal people in Australia were finally the vote? Did it make any**

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**difference to you or?**

Well I always voted but legally they could have rejected that.

**You voted since the age of twenty one?**

Yeah, yeah, no eighteen, because we used to get postal votes but see the Defence Department saw us all as Australians, not as Aboriginal Australians and that and on paperwork I was an Australian and it was only if they were cross checking could they say

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that if it was my vote that decided who was going to be Prime Minister then they'd probably pull rank and do an American thing but yeah, it was pretty important. I was always taught you can't whinge unless you actually voted the captain or whoever the situation, if you hadn't had any input, well don't whinge because you haven't got that right. You have a right to an opinion but keep it to yourself because you just didn't take the time out to try and make a difference, so that's relevant.

**Did you, if you started voting at eighteen you would have been**

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**voting before you joined the service?**

No, I joined at eighteen.

**You joined right on eighteen, okay. Did you try and influence any of your Aboriginal friends to vote because you were?**

Well they all did.

**They did?**

Yeah. You talking service guys?

**Yeah.**

Well that was it, everyone on board were Australians. There wasn't black Australians or white Australians.

**What about your civvy Aboriginal friends?**

Well you lose track of them and

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you don't really come ashore and talk about voting and I might say, 'Where have you been?' or, 'What have you been doing?' And that might last for ten or fifteen minutes but then you, because they're still here and South Sydney is still playing nothing has really gone down in their life, through your eyes, so you tend to drift away.

**And your family? Did they vote?**

Yeah, that's where I got it from, the vote but as I say

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was it thrown in the bin or what? You don't know but we were always taught you should vote but as I say 1967 it did mean a lot but I didn't know there would still be a lot of doors left shut and it's still the case today.

**What do you mean ?You didn't know there'd be a lot of doors left shut??**

Well until reconciliation takes place there's still a lot of doors left shut, still two doors there, one for blacks and one for whites.

**You mentioned that because you were in the service you voted and do you feel like you were insulated**

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**from a lot of maybe the racism or the hard times that some of the civilians were going through because you were in the Defence Force at that time in the Sixties when you joined?**

Yeah, yeah, I remember as a young kid I'd been to Cherbourg and I'd seen the, what alcohol did to the blacks and I've been in situations where you couldn't sit in the movie theatre because that's where the blacks would go in after lights and all the whites would sit and I've experienced all that and been told not to swim in that pool, so

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it's not that I was ignorant of it, I was just going to make a difference and no-one was going to tell me where to swim, so yeah and because I knew the white bloke's ways, what could he really say? I mean I could say I've travelled here and there and, ?What have you done son?? Or whoever I was talking to, ?I've fired a shot in anger. Have you??

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And maybe that's just me, I don't know but as I said I used to see those movies and the Indians always lost and it used to get to me because I don't believe the Indians are that dumb and I can't understand how a bloody indigenous force can ever lose a battle when you've got Snowflake running through beating on a drum, playing on a trumpet and lighting fires and putting up a flagpole, to me it's dumb military logic. So as I say a bloke goes out in the middle of the night and lights

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a durry up, you've got to get him and that's how I used to think as a little kid and perhaps that why I'm like I am, I don't know, I don't know but I certainly understand and the proof of the pudding is I knew my job and as a result of that, doors were opened and I didn't go after anyone else's specific job, I just did my own.

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And I wasn't the only one on the boat. There was another five black fellows on the boat and another two that didn't identify, for their own reasons.

**On the HMAS Vampire?**

Yep.

**Interviewee: David Williams Archive ID 2362 Tape 04**

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**So you said too, David, that the navy considered you all Aussies and it didn't matter what your background, so you found that there was no racial issue for you in the navy through your career?**

Well there was people there that didn't like blacks but there was more people that didn't like slopes, so I suppose you can add that up between slopes, wogs, Arabs, blacks and whatever, so I fared pretty well. Yeah, but their rules and regulations are set up in such a way that

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you really have to be pushing the point to push the racism issue into a place where it's going to really affect the

individual as much as it would in civvy street where you can be isolated and they can grind you into the dirt but in the Defence Department it's a pretty cut and dried system.

**So whilst you might have encountered individuals there that had prejudice you're saying that it was institutionalised in**

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**any way?**

No, no, not through my eyes because yeah, I mean usually what happens is, 'You're a black fella, you should get out the front, you're scout.' I mean that's just a standard thing and that's because they perceive us as, because we're black, we're born in the bush, so we should know more and so, 'Get out the front and get shot first.' That wasn't a racism thing, that's how it worked and yeah, and I think if you see most of those movies and that,

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that still happens. The Indian is still out the front, or whoever.

**You talked a little bit about the US Navy or the US forces and how there was a very hostile acrimonious attitude?**

I'll give you an example. While we were in Hong Kong on recreational and sitting in a certain bar and having a few beers and a big marine comes up and offers me, the white fellow offers me a bourbon and I said, 'Mate I drink, I'm Australian, I drink beer.'

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And I say, 'Who's that from?' And he says, 'See those girls over there, they want to meet you.' and I said, 'Well tell them to come over here.' And they're two Negresses and no, so here's the go for this bloke, and he's back and forth. And I said, 'Look mate, these are my mates, if you're going to be interpreter, these are my mates, we're all here together.' And these two ladies couldn't understand that of all the ships, the Australian ships that was in, I was the only black fella there, the real outstanding black fella. There were a few other colleagues that aren't as black as me but they just couldn't comprehend it and there was no way

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they wanted to talk to my white mates and consequently I said, 'Well see you later.' and I mean that's terrible. I mean here we are in the middle of recreation leave and there's two ladies with a passion against whites. I don't know what happened to them in their childhood but I certainly hope they never carried that onto their children when they had them eventually.

**So even though there were other Aboriginal crewmen aboard the Vampire you never developed that**

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**us versus them attitude?**

No, as a matter of fact because I was a bit of a stirrer I remember we came back late one night, we were on leave in Singapore and Billy Simpson and I we joined up the same time and I got an extra day's stoppage of leave because the Captain reckoned I was leading him astray. So we also had on board the senior Aboriginal, identified Aboriginal in the navy at the time, which his name was Lefty Leon and he was a

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AB [Able Seaman] gunnery rate and another big chappie, Al Moon, who's now retired in Queensland and a few others that didn't identify but yeah, yeah, we had a good ship's company.

**What was Vampire's role when you on her up in Vietnam?**

Well she was, it was called Far East Strategic Reserve and you go up there on deployment and obviously you had patrols to do between the mainland

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and Malaya and Indonesia and also down south off the Philippines and also in Borneo. Borneo was in conflict at the time, which was obviously government boundaries was the thing of the day and that was our deployment and we were in company with another ship called the Derwent and then Derwent would relieve us on patrol and then we'd go back to Singapore to restore and do some maintenance and go back on patrol.

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So the patrols usually lasted a month, maybe and you'd restore at sea, one of the other supply ships comes out and restores you, out of harm's way and you go back into your patrol grids.

**Were you doing any escort work?**

Yeah, we escorted the Sydney up to Vietnam from Manus Island and yeah,

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and then we'd anchor and I think we stayed a couple of nights there that time, the first time, ashore and then we'd escort her back.

**And it was at this point when you were anchoring that you were doing the counter sabotage?**

Yeah, operational awkward and that wasn't just there, that was also in Singapore when hostilities were.

**Can you describe to me the routine**

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**or the methods of things like doing a necklace search and so on, on a ship's hull?**

Well you have, the diving team quota is made up of a number of us and out of that is two specialists, two to three specialists. When you're on patrol there'd be two to three minimum, which would either be a petty officer or a leading seaman and an able seaman of either CD [?] category and then the rest would be made up of the ship's divers and that would be maybe any branch. It could be an electrical guy, myself, who was engineering

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and a seamanship guy and a tasray or torpedo or submarines or a communications rate and we'd make up the rest of the team. Now I think it takes about five of us to do one side of the ship, that's your surface swimmer plus another four guys at double arm length to be clipped in and you'd go from the front of the ship down to just before the propellers and you'd feel, you'd feel up in the intakes and that,

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the one's with tanks on and down to the hull, the keel of the ship. Then you come up, you swim around the other side and then you go the same thing, do the other side with the other guys, you've got two single guys and a team that are doing the cable, that's separate and also around the propellers and the rudders and so forth. But you can understand if you've got five clipped in you're going to get tangled so that's why they have their separate free area forward and free area aft they call that.

**So the divers**

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**are going parallel courses along the hull at different depths?**

Yeah, yeah, and the surface swimmer doesn't have tanks, he just has fins and a weight belt because he's got to duck dive and feel up above the waterline where they put mines and so forth.

**What sort of methods were you warned that enemy swimmers might use against you in the delta there?**

Well normally it would be floating debris and they'd be under that and also that

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would come floating down with the current and go past the hull and they'd stick on a limpet and just float past and away they'd go, so as a result of that, operation awkward and your engines are still say idling but your shafts aren't turning so you turn your shafts every so often and that creates a current under the ship and it's two strong for divers to swim against, so that's what happens. And then we throw scare

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charges in, which are like mini hand grenades and that gives you acoustic problems for unsuspecting divers and also you actually physically do the dives, which I've just told every four hours so if you get bombed after all that's going on well you've definitely had a bad day.

**Were there any attempts to sort of search any of the debris coming down the river?**

No, anything suspect you would

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call the officer of the deck and he'd either put some rounds into it or observe it. I mean you're not going to see that in the night and this was all before thermal imaging and all that. Even though that technology was all there we didn't have it issued, not like today's modern day soldier.

**So if a clump of rubbish coming down the river looked sus you might just put a few shots into it?**

Yes, yeah or we'd throw a scare charge into it.

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**How long roughly, you made two trips to escort Sydney?**

Yes.

**How long roughly would you have been anchored?**

Two or three days at a time. Yeah, I'd have to check, I mean it seemed to go so fast. I mean you just drop an anchor and you think, 'God, a few days off.' but it wasn't the case. It just

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went so fast and yeah.

**How strong was the current there?**

As I said it was up over three knots and you just couldn't swim against it. I mean it's not until you're actually in those situations that you realise that. I mean that was the first experience of, I mean we've all been caught in a rip well it was exactly the same thing. You think, 'Oh God, I've got to go this way.' and the trouble is I was restricted

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because I was clipped on a safety line to the next bloke underneath and when they got tangled I was caught up and tangled and I couldn't get my clip out of his arms and legs and Christ knows what to get to the surface. And I thought I was, yeah, I thought it was ages but it was probably only a few seconds or minutes or whatever but anyway they found us eventually.

**What about the water conditions as far as clarity and?**

No, forget it,

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forget it, no. Fair weather divers that go off the reef and all that, no, this is a job, it's yuk, yuk, visibility is minus nothing, that's why you feel. You're taught that anyway.

**Any health issues with diving in water like that?**



Well in Hong Kong yeah, I remember a couple of mates and I mean we were just doing maintenance and in Hong Kong they got ear infections and so forth and Singapore in the basin, oh

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dirty, dirty, dirty place. Yeah, you just had to be mindful of it but when you're on deployment like that you do take away a doctor with you, which is great but yeah, filthy harbours and dead dogs and the occasional dead body depending on where you were. You just had to be mindful of that.

**What did you think**

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**about the Vietnam War when you were up there and how just it might have been?**

Well honestly because I was in the service and I was trained to do that job I thought it was the right thing to do and because we were told that mob from up north were coming down and this mob down south don't want them on their turf and they need a hand,

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well which is the Australian way, ?Give us a hand mate.? But knowing the politics of the whole situation I mean none of it was worth one Australian life, none of it, that's in my eyes today and it goes with peace keeping forces in East Timor and every other ruckus we're involved in, it's not worth an Australian life. However, these situations are created through whatever reason and those countries do ask

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us for assistance and I would expect our defence personnel to get in and do the job. And I just do not believe why we held off so long with East Timor because a lot of Australians would not have been born if it had not of been for those islanders in the Second World War because they helped us and yet we stand back and watch their mob get slaughtered, the same as letting New Guinea, west New Guinea go, I just don't understand this.

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If you going to bloody occupy and do the right thing, pass the knowledge on and get them on their feet, so but as I said that's not my decision and I support the Defence Forces of all nations of course but especially ours and it's their job to do what the Government tells them and do it right.

**So at the time you were just doing your job, you didn't really think?**

I didn't think of the politics of it.

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**Fair enough. Did you think, you didn't have attitude towards Communism or anything?**

Well I was told it was bad and I was thinking, well you do a little bit at high school and I was thinking, ?Well if everyone is working for the country.? and you just look at it. ?But then again I don't want to drive that particular model car, I want my car.? and I looked at it like that. Well if someone is going to say ?Well you can't, you have to have this one? well I think, ?Well why not work a bit harder

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in the capitalist way and get the car I like.? and so I assumed that was the case with doctors and a lot of choice was taken away from you and I know how important choice is and I was thinking, ?Well them blokes haven't got choice, I'll go this way.? which was what I thought was more important, that was to me. It mightn't be to other people but it was certainly to me.

**When you came back to Australia after a couple of years on the Vampire**

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**where was your career about to go then?**

Well I came back and then there was to do a course and another ship and more adventure I was thinking and we were just picking up the new aircraft from the United States and submarines, and I always loved submarines and I know the family seemed better on the submarines. I was in transit through Penguin and I was coming, in transit means I was just passing through

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and I was there over the weekend and I saw these guys in the mess having a good time and I was thinking, 'What's going on here? Must have some birds on board.' They were just singing and having a good time, old rugby songs and they were on one of the English boats and they operated out of Penguin and they said, 'Oh good day Oz.' so I got singing and having a few beers with them and they took me out. And I said, 'I like this job?' and I decided I'd do my sub suit when I got back

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from Vietnam in '67, which I passed but then Enoch Powell was having political unrest in Birmingham and Brixton and places like that and having black barbecues and I was thinking, 'Well, certainly not going over there to cop this from the Poms.' So I decided I'd stick it out and stay this way for a while, which I'm glad I did in one aspect but then that aspect is because I would have had tunnel vision being a submariner and

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I nearly got that way anyway being in the first few years because I was on those specialist boats. Yeah, I didn't see the big picture.

**So you had, this submarine crew that you encountered at Penguin was a British crew of a Royal Navy boat?**

Yeah, of Trumpet, yeah. Yeah, it wouldn't have mattered whether it was Brazilian or Russian, the atmosphere is the same.

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**And at this stage I take it Australian potential submariners had to be trained in Britain?**

That's correct, yeah.

**And you didn't fancy rivers of blood?**

Only because of the unrest. I know I would have, the thing with me is you never disgrace the uniform. That always stuck in my mind, while you're in uniform you don't disgrace it and you're on duty twenty four hours a day and sort of that would have meant I was over there, probably would have been wearing my rig out, got into a debate with some of the locals over black white issues or whatever

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and the next minute I'm being hauled into military prison and that didn't sit right with me as I was very proud of my uniform and me being in it, rather than bring disrespect to the navy.

**So you obviously had a real fear that you would end up in an altercation over there?**

Oh I would have, yeah, because I'm a mouthy little Aussie and I like winning, especially at football. I think

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the only thing the Brits could have won at those days was soccer. They're not too bad in the rugby these days but we'll get them next year.

**I think that was their peak David. I don't think they'll be up there again.**

No, they won't. There certainly won't be another Johnny Wilkinson but I think if you've got to do it they did it well.

**Okay, you mentioned on the last tape that you copped a little bit of stick from civilians about your**

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**Vietnam service?**

Yeah.

**Whereabouts was that sort of happening?**

In the city, in the city on leave and of course around Newtown and places like that where the students are from uni and so forth and yeah, and you can pick it. You're more observant as a black person about who's watching and the mannerisms and so forth and the body language so yeah, I'd be there and I'd say, 'Have you got a problem??' Then perhaps I looked for a bit too much trouble in those days but I certainly wasn't going to cop

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any from them fellows and it wasn't their fault. They were just doing what they believed in but the way I saw it was probably just trying to get out of the National Service as well and I believe one in, all in and I don't believe they should have selected just a few, should have been all of us or none of us and that's another sore point with me. I think that it should have been everyone or none of us and I think it was unfair for a number of us to go and be disadvantaged, job wise and so forth

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while the others picked up the cream and that always has annoyed me and that's what happened in most cases.

**How do you think things were different from you coming back as a ship's crew compared to the National Servicemen in the army who came back and were then out of the forces straight away?**

Well they copped their own prejudice by the regulars and understanding of course that national service was voluntary to go to Vietnam and like I'm compassionate about it

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and I believe that a bloke that puts on the uniform should have the same entitlements as me. The country gives you a little medal to wear, that's fine, but that's as far as it should go. Everything else should be equal and that's not the case, even with my present day club there's still members down there that because they're returned men they just hold that over the young blokes that haven't been away and it's unfair. And then the peacekeepers standing there

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watching people being slaughtered everyday and how the hell he is going to adjust or he or she is going to adjust is beyond me but we have to be there for them and recognise them for their full potential that they done a good job, if not better than we did and that's how I see it and I'll always act that way and I take my hat off to them.

**Do you think the RSL was not as helpful as it could have been to Vietnam veterans returning from your period?**

The RSL was discriminatory towards Vietnam

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vets and that was because our predecessors were set in their ways and perhaps they needed to be reminded that bullets aren't dated or colour coded, they just shoot you dead no matter what the time or the year is and there were a lot of our Diggers in the trenches up there that desperately needed help and they definitely needed a cuddle when they got home, not to be ostracised by people on club doors saying,

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'Mate it wasn't a big one, it wasn't a real one son, you're not a fully returned man, you're not joining this club.' and

the things that happened to them. So one, they didn't fit in with their civilian friends because we'd lost sight of them and as much as we'd changed and two, they were not being welcomed by their so called divisional system, which was the RSL with open arms and that happened in most cases. And I know it's affected a lot of Vietnam vets, big time and consequently the RSL only reaches about thirty per cent of the

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Diggers, the rest are hiding in the scrub and don't want anything to do with them.

**So having rejected the submarine course in Britain?**

Yeah, just deferred it, just deferred it.

**Oh you deferred it, you didn't say no for ever?**

Oh no, no, just deferred it.

**Okay, so you obviously had to do some testing to be accepted onto that course did you?**

Yeah, yeah, went to see the psych and some basic tests.

**What sort of things did they ask you at**

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**psych or test you for?**

Well that one I did the colours and the medical and it was just basic stuff and association and silly stuff really. A trained ape could do it but anyway he said, "Right, tick in the box." and I really can't remember. One of the questions is usually, "Why do you want to do this?" And the reason why is to the average individual

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it's like, "Why do you want to fly the jet fighter?" Because you want to be up there and that's where they put that particular job, the same as the boat because, "I've done all this and I need to be there." It's no big deal, I can do it or I can't, so yeah and yeah it was good and I was accepted but as I said I changed it because of the newsreels coming back from Britain

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and yeah as I said probably lucky that I did but where I would have been based today I wouldn't have been involved with that but however I dare say I would have copped a bit from, when I say copped a bit jokingly from the Pommies or whoever I was on course with, the Canadians.

**So you went down to Flinders again then I suppose for?**

Yeah, did me marine technical,

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yeah it's like a leading seaman's course. It just covers, you've learnt the basics, you've gone and done the practical and now just upgrade that to next promotional level and so forth and yeah, it's all the same gear just that you're doing it in a bit more detail.

**So what sort of engines were you specializing in?**

Well I changed from, they just introduced a new category called diesel

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and I changed from steam category to diesel?

**Why?**

I really don't know. I've got no, because it was new but they had diesel generators on all these ships anyway so anyway I did and yeah. Probably because of small ships, I'm not sure. I just thought it was some sort of a challenge. I mean a steam engine, a boiler is a boiler, a steam turbine is a steam turbine so

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it's probably because it was diesel that it got me. Anyway I got to work on our biggest ship, Stalwart; and the diesel engines were over three stories high, burns a ton and a half of fuel an hour at a hundred and thirty five revs flat out downhill with a tailwind, pushes a twenty thousand ton ship through the water at twenty three knots, direct drive, air start, turbo charged, pistons that are

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two and a half foot across and it's an A frame and the flywheel weighs nine ton and I can tell you all about it.

**So what sort of engine, what sort of ship would that be on?**

That was the maintenance ship, the Stalwart, yeah, I was on her for about seven or eight years, on or off.

**Before that you were at Waterhen?**

Yeah on patrol boats and minesweepers and in that time I went up to Cairns and I was running out of Cairns on Barricade and that was mainly on

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fishery patrols and so forth and that was a good job, and got to keep the Indonesians out of our northern waters and illegal fishing and so forth.

**Did you ever sort of knock heads with the Indonesians while you were up there?**

No, they saw us coming, and they knew we were coming so they took off but mainly that side of things more rescue work, people getting into trouble on the reef, because the patrol area on Cairns base is from Gladstone

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right round to Weipa and then it was the Darwin base coming that way. Oh the Van Gogh was plying around up around up there for a while but she had enough gear on it to pick us up and rev up and take off and we were looking at about twenty four knots, twenty five knots with those patrol boats of ours. No, that was worthwhile.

**How did you find it working on a much smaller vessel?**

Oh good,

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because the crews are a tighter family. A couple of officers and the rest is a couple of senior mates and the rest of the crew and we were just a tight family. It was excellent and it was the same routine. There was three boats operating out of Cairns and we had to be the best boat, whether it was sport, engineering or efficiency, that's how it worked. We all had our favourite watering holes and played our favourite sports but it was the whole crew and if you were playing rugby

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league this week you were playing Aussie Rules the next and soccer the next and cricket against the locals and whatever small town, might have been Bowen, might have been TI [Thursday Island] you pulled into or Weipa or something and played against the locals and we went to a lot of nice little spots along the Queensland coast and Northern Territory and so forth.

**Okay so we've just got to get the chronology straight, the patrol boats was '71, '72?**

Yeah.

**And before that you were on Stalwart, '68,**

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**is that right?**

'68, yeah.

**Okay, so sorry it was my mistake, I jumped ahead.**

Yeah, '68 I went to Stalwart and what happened they were short of diesel stokers, that's the reason and a couple of blokes got sick so they needed and because I'd already done what they called the patrol boat courses they just transferred me up there to Cairns. Oh well I actually went over to Waterhen and then I went to Cairns.

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**So what did you do on Stalwart?**

Stalwart, I started off, gee, I think I was in the engine room and then I was in the boiler room and then I was in the generator room and then I was promoted and you get 2IC [Second in Command] of those three spaces and oh there's the double bottoms party, which is all your services,

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your fluids, your hydraulics, air, fire and fresh water and all that and I was in that for a while too. You call it double bottoms and yeah.

**How often did you and where did you go with Stalwart?**

Oh she never went that far but I think the furthest trip we did was in 1970 and that's when we went overseas to Rabaul and Moresby and Singapore and I don't know whether we went to Hong Kong, might have.

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Yeah, Nu Chan Pen Dang and Indonesia and Jakarta and what else? Yeah, that's about it I think.

**So you saw a lot of those Asian ports between Vampire and Stalwart?**

Oh yeah, oh yeah.

**Did you have a favourite one?**

No, I have a favourite port and that's New Zealand actually only because those mongrel Kiwis are so much like us

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and I just like beating them on their home turf. I managed to be captain of the Stalwart's rugby side and I beat the army team in Wellington and I didn't let them forget it.

**So Stalwart didn't get out much, is that right?**

No, it's a maintenance ship and the other ships came alongside and we'd service their engines and although I was ship's company the other part of the crew were what we called fleet maintenance unit and they boarded on the

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ship and they did all the work on the other ships but I was part of the ship's company that actually steamed our ship to and from wherever.

**Did it bother you that you didn't get out much?**

No, because I knew the importance of the job that we were doing and me mates on the other ships, ?Oh, go and see Daggy and see if you can get that for us and this for us.? and you scratch each other's back. I don't know whether you've seen some of those

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programs like Sergeant Bilko and McHale's Navy and you have a way through the stores system so you can look after whoever or whatever, try and get around this and that and swap this for that and it was good, it was good.

**So you learnt how to work that system?**

Very much so.

**What sort of stuff would you be trying to get or receive?**

Well if he was a mate and he was in charge of the NBCD, which is

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the Nuclear, Biological, Chemical Defence he might want some new fire extinguishers and some nice clean ones because the admiral's inspections were coming up so we'd swap them. He might need some new three inch fire hoses or some cartridges for some of his gear or RAD meters for reading radiation and a whole host of things, that was it, that was the part. Or if it was he was down the engineers ready use store he might need some X amount of tools to top up this drawer

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and that drawer so that the books are all square and this mob's continual but because we weren't sailing I could take his broken and bent ones, rusty ones and put them in our drawer and return them through stores and little things like that and yeah it was scratch their back and or just the ship's company laundry. We had big laundry tubs that could do the washing for them so it worked out, it really did and we'd say, 'If you're going on deployment through those ports bring us back some duty free this or some duty free that.' and that's how we did it.

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**So in return you were getting?**

Oh favours, scratch your back and yeah, and you might want some sporting equipment and so forth and instead of paying top dollar here at Mick Simmons in Australia and because there's no duty on that we'd say to them 'Pick up some scuba tanks and stuff like that.' yeah so they would and it was good.

**Does it give you, in that network it must give you a little bit of a position of power**

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**if you are in that stores area where other people, where you can supply people?**

Well you think that and well as I said I liked what I did and I give you an example. I was captain of the big ship's rugby side but I had an engineer who either hated me because I was black or hated the sport and rather than take him to task I'd come back and I'd work two hours in the dog watches when I

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should have been ashore or on the grog with the boys or whatever and I'd work two hours to complement the time that I'd take off the play rugby and that was just because this bloke just didn't like me with a passion. So rather than just push the envelope I could always turn around and say, and the guy's knew and I'd go back and do the job. And that would pacify the ones that didn't get the time off to play sport and that's the way I've always been.

**If we're discussing sport at this period we'd better talk about**

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**how you met your wife to be and what sort of scrapes you got into because of her?**

Well sport, yeah. Well I met, I'd just come back on board to Waterhen and that would have been in 196-, end of '67 and there were six girls that were supposed to be staying in a unit at Annandale and my mate said, 'Oh come to this party.' And I said, 'Oh no, I've had it, I'm staying on board.'

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Anyway we haven't got enough bread and that and he said, 'Oh don't worry, we've got a couple of dollars.' so he convinced me to go to this party and I was waiting and 'Where's this so good looking bird you were talking about?' And they said, 'Well that's her there.' and I told my mate, 'Listen, you'd better have another beer.' I said, 'You've got to be joking.' and it was a bean pole and anyway did nothing for me and I used to go out with her girlfriend and yeah, just after a while it was a turn around

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and decided that was the one for me and I'd never ever missed training or sport, never, but that's what happened and the ship had been completed and we were due to commission it and it was going on a capital city tour to show the taxpayers what they were getting and I was supposed to be playing navy rugby against the army and the air force and also New Zealand sides and then I got selected in the Australian services side and I would have been playing against Sydney City, New South

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Wales and all the rest of them but I didn't want to play and once you're in the rugby team you do play.

**So you were spending your free time with your?**

Yeah, and that didn't go over too well. I was soon reminded of where I was supposed to be because my wife, my wife now was on a working holiday and was in Perth, so I jumped on a, I rang up a mate at RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] Richmond and jumped on a

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Hercules to go over to Perth, just for the night and it was diverted on the way back so I got into all sorts of trouble.

**How late were you coming back?**

Oh well I was supposed to be playing rugby at nine o'clock in the morning or training at HMAS Penguin and because I wasn't there I was charged with being absent from a place of duty and I was charged with a chargeable warrant and sent back to Sydney to play rugby. I'll never forget that but

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as a result of that I mean I was very fortunate. I knew my wife for a couple of years before we got married so it's just lucky that I picked one that could go the distance because it's difficult on the ladies when you're away and barring health reasons I've seen a lot of good men get out of the navy and still end up divorced, which is a shame because sometimes they may get that 'Dear John' [letter informing that relationship is over] and we've got six or seven months to go before we get home.

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Look I've been on board and a mate gets a 'Dear John' and like you get into port and there's about a hundred letters there and you see them and we've got about six months to run and his missus is gone and probably shackled up with an ex-mate of his and Christ knows what and you've got to keep those guys, you're on deployment. If you go home and you get special compassionate leave, you're a welfare case and a whole

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host of things but it's up to the people around him to keep him together and to say, 'We'll be there for you.' and that and that's what I find is pretty important. Well that doesn't happen in civvy street, nine times out of ten you're having problems with your family and you're on your own and you've got nowhere to go to so I'm always mindful of that and I just received a phone call and it's exactly about this. And yeah it's always been a big family to

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me and I'm still pretty heavily involved with the navy, so much so that I go to their rugby games and some of their functions and always talk to the young people and encourage them, 'We're out there for you when you leave.' and it's a good feeling.

**When you bludged that free ride to Perth on the Hercules?**

It cost me a carton of duty free durries, that would have cost me six dollars.



**You obviously**

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**had mates in the air force as well?**

Of course.

**Was the navy annoyed with the fact that you'd gone, that you'd gone absent or the fact that you'd gone absent and missed the rugby game?**

Well I've never really been absent. If the Hercules hadn't of been diverted I wouldn't have been absent but it was the fact that it was rugby and it was the old school tie and it's hallowed ground. That's the game

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we play in heaven and no little upstart leading seaman is going to interrupt that by any means. It wasn't that I was a black man or anything else, it was the fact that I was in the navy rugby side and that's a no, no and I would be made an example of and I was and yeah, certainly was.

**So the fact that you'd interrupted the rugby game in a way was more of a crime than being late for duty?**

Yeah, yeah, it was because

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Bobby Fulton was in the army side and Tommy Ridonikis was in the air force side and yeah, yeah, we certainly had some opposition there and when we played navy we played police and Chicka Moore was captain of the police side and he was first grade for Newtown and I think Johnny Greaves was playing on the wing and Christ know what. I mean it wasn't that, it was pretty

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big stuff and I certainly learnt the lesson, rugby.

**It was a romantic thing to do though, to put all that at risk?**

Yeah, wasn't it? Yeah, well that's what happens, you're not thinking right. You're probably thinking, probably with the wrong end of the body but anyway it was, it happened and I think all of us that have tied the knot have done some silly things that we look back on and

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think, ?Oh well, can't change it and it was fun.? Yeah I'm pretty fortunate and I knew that woman was the one for me. Might get a second opinion these days but anyway that was then.

**Interviewee: David Williams Archive ID 2362 Tape 05**

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**David I'm just going to go back to a very, very basic question just to begin with. Why did you choose the navy over the army because you mentioned that a lot of your family people were in the army so what was it that made you decide to go to the navy?**

I think I liked the uniform better and also I don't know I just saw more opportunity. I'd been

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in the army cadets and I knew I could do all those sort of jobs and I still had that in the back of my mind that movie I saw as a young thirteen year old, where that chief engineer on that destroyer that had been torpedoed was the hero of the day and the ship still sank eventually but he give them time to perhaps get everyone off the boat, off the ship and

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I said, 'Gee I wouldn't mind being in that position one day myself.' not that I wanted to be torpedoed but be in the job that that man was tasked. So yeah it still rings a bell.

**So it was that film that was stuck in your head?**

Yeah, it did because I saw, I don't know, I just thought, 'Here's everyone from the captain down depending on his expertise and

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his job.' and yeah that was pretty important to me.

**When you were in the Malacca Straits you visited Borneo? Is that right?**

Yeah.

**Can you tell us about your experience in Borneo and what you did and any experiences with the locals?**

Well we come alongside one upon a time in Towoa and one of the local plantation owners invited us to play rugby against his team

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and I remember being in the old sort of army type Blitz wagon and thinking, 'We could be ambushed here, there's a bit of hostility going on and so forth.' but we had a wonderful time but I didn't understand the significance of what we were doing there and the insurgency, what was happening in the country. I was too young and hadn't read up on it but I was always under the

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apprehension of it must be necessary otherwise we wouldn't be here and not realising that some of the minesweepers were up inland rivers or whatever and they would need support if necessary and I was just mindful that there was unrest there but as I look back now it was to do with borders and who owned what, as usual.

**And you were showing us some of your photographs and it seemed like**

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**you had some really good mates in the navy and you must have developed some really, really strong friendships and can you talk about some of the good times you had on the campaigns, maybe in Vietnam in particular?**

Well not so much in Vietnam. There was no good times for me because we didn't have shore leave however in Malacca Straits, Borneo we'd sail out of the area to some of these uninhabited islands and that was where half the ship's company would go ashore

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and get some recreational activity, whether it be swimming and a barbecue and so forth before we had to return back to the ship in the afternoon and then patrol by night and we did that sometimes on alternate days. However it did give you an idea of some sensibility. You weren't on task twenty four hours a day, which is pretty important because when you're not seeing the actual enemy you can become frustrating. I remember

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we were away for that Christmas and we received some parcels with a plum pudding in it and just some nice Christmas lollies and stuff and that was pretty important, gifts from home so that made you feel a bit more worth.

**When you got married to Donna, when you went away did it change going away for you?**

No,

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no, not really. I was a young sailor when I met Donna and she knew what the job was and knew sort of something and

I'd been going out with her on and off two years so she knew what was involved and her father was in the army and her brother had joined the navy and that made things easier. And because she came from a large family she

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could handle those responsibilities which you take on when one of the partners isn't home so that was good. I was really lucky in that area.

**What about the other sailors' wives, did she become friendly with them? Was there a support network there for her in that way?**

Well they do have a good Navy Wives Association but some of the wives don't fit in for whatever reason. It's usually because some of the younger wives

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complain about silly things and there becomes a bit of a rank structure and a power struggle and lots of things I'm aware of but don't get involved with but where we lived up at Greystanes in those days, oh this is after I moved from Eastlakes and we moved into navy accommodation, housing at Greystanes,

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yeah there was pretty good on the patch and that. There was always support there for the wives.

**What was the accommodation at Greystanes like?**

Oh three bedroom houses, brand new houses which had been built by the Department of Housing but the navy owned them and consequently had a lock up little tool garage and a carport and brick and gas and electricity and a reasonable size block.

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Yeah, it was good stuff, brand new.

**You mentioned that sometimes the wives, some of the younger wives in the club, the navy wives, were a bit perhaps not as nice as they could be to some of the other women, did Donna ever experience that?**

Oh yes she did and she said she made a choice that she wouldn't be attending a lot of the navy wives meeting for whatever reasons but each chapter is different, whether it be a new

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chair or a couple of new faces come into the neighbourhood that makes all the difference but as I said she comes from a big family so she pretty well had her act together. Anyway it's a support place for the younger ones that weren't, that feel isolated.

**How did you get on with Donna's father?**

Well I got on quite on quite well with him, the old Donny Molross and yeah he took a liking to me from all the son in laws and

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of course there's four sisters involved here and took a liking to me and every time a ship would pull into Hobart he'd be the first down there bragging about his son-in-law, meaning me, being in the navy and he'd take the young boys home and feed them and show them a good time. Quite proud I think old Donny and as I said my brother-in-law, his son was in the navy as well, the old boy was pretty good. I thought he'd be a bit of an

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evil sort of a man but that was one side of the story I'm getting from the eldest daughter, which I was going to marry and I remember when I did ask permission to marry her he had me working in his garden as he's giving me a father and

son talk then he took me all over Hobart and introduced me to his friends and things and I've never looked back from there.

**So he never had, it didn't matter to him that you were Aboriginal and he was white and in**

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**that time at all it wasn't an issue for him?**

No, no, well it certainly never showed and knowing the man as I do, it was never an issue. I think that he was more hurt that his eldest daughter had left home rather than who she was going to marry become an issue.

**And didn't marry you? So you could have married either of the girls?**

Well I could have, Donna was the eldest daughter and I mean the eldest

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in any family always gets the whipping post, paths the way for the brothers and sisters and the old man was pretty hard on my wife, so anyway, it all came right in the long run.

**All right, you mentioned before that you didn't have tunnel vision but you could have if you'd chosen a certain path to go into submarines earlier on?**

Yeah, if I had of been in submarines all my naval career

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I definitely would have had tunnel vision because of the nature of the operation of submarines and what we do. And having that it makes it awfully harder to get on I believe and readjust to a civilian environment because one minute you're running around the world sight unseen, sticking your nose in everyone else's business and all of a sudden you've come back

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when you're time is up to a civilian environment and try to assimilate with people who wouldn't have a clue what you're doing and you know it would be difficult to try and adjust. And the fact that if you look at how, if you know a little bit about submarine operations, yeah it's pretty hairy, scary and final. Once we fire, that's it, you're gone

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and they don't miss, so you can imagine how, you've seen a lot of the movies where we've got big bombers and they're full of cruise missiles and one of those boats could wipe out Australia, just one and in the Cold War they had hundreds of thousands but there you go. It only takes one.

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**From your experience would you say that submarine work is more stressful than, on your mental health than any other job?**

It's definitely more stressful because you've got to keep water out and you're operating in a hostile environment and sometimes you're blind and you can't tell where you're at and yeah, it's awfully busy down there. There's things running around everywhere and sometimes

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they're not always friendly.

**You mean other submarines running around?**

Probably have to put traffic lights down there one day, yeah, so that's what they do.

**This would probably be a good time to start talking about your training in the UK, your submarine training.**

**Can you walk us through that, when you left Australia to go and do it?**

You go over there and you do your basic training and they teach you all about the boat and hands on stuff and what the systems are and how they're

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made up and who's duty it is to do what, and where all the valves are and the blowing panels and the different door stages and the machinery layout. And so once you've learnt all that you go to a boat and do your part three and now that's where you actually operate, drive the boat, operate pumps, operate the blower,

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which is like a big fan which blows air into the ballast tanks, pump the sewerage over the side because there is a number of valves that you've got to operate, and yeah, put a snort on when you recharge the batteries and also discharge the signal ejectors, which is the flares and so forth and you do all that. And you consolidate that and then you've got to walk through the boat and name every valve, right from the front to the

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back and that's called part three.

**So what made you decide to do the submarine training? Can you talk about the events leading up to that?**

Well I always wanted to do it anyway but in the latter part it was the only thing I hadn't been on, was submarines. I'd been on carriers and minesweepers and patrol boats and destroyers and everything else so it was time to finally do what I needed to do and that was go to the boats

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which was pretty hard yakka for me. I was pretty old then.

**How old were you then when you started to do your sub training?**

I was in my thirties, probably, yeah and early thirties and it's a young man's world and back in the old days it was the eldest on the boat was usually thirty four so I was already at the edge just about.

**And there wasn't**

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**any race problems over there that like you were stopped from going because of race problems?**

I wasn't stopped. I chose not to because of that. There were race problems over there but it had nothing to do with me.

**I think you wouldn't have made it if it was going to be an issue for you that time around?**

No, no, no.

**And the world had changed a little too at that time?**

It had, it had. There wasn't a lot going down

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as far as we were concerned. The Cold War was probably just coming to an end and yeah, it was different.

**So can you talk about a typical day training when you were over in the UK, getting up and what you'd have to do next?**

Well our instructor was a chief mechanism called, ERA [Engine Room Artificer], called Mac McKinney and you'd get up and you'd go to course after you'd showered, washed and had breakfast and you'd go to the classroom there and you

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perhaps might be doing the trim pumps system, which is the pump in the middle of the boat which pumps water forward and aft, so that you sit evenly and you can reach neutral buoyancy and you'd be doing your lines and drawings. And you'd go down after X amount of instruction and you'd go and physically see it on one of the training boats, which

they have alongside,

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and consolidate what you did in the classroom. Or you might be driving the LMC which is the one-man control, which is like a simulator and you drive the actual submarine and do all the emergency manoeuvres to steer and air and all the rest of it.

**Did you find the training difficult to do because you were a little bit older than the rest of them?**

I did, I did. I found it a little difficult because

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I was pretty well set in my ways on how the general service operated and as a result of that, 'Well we don't say this word any more, we say that word.' that's all. When you say the wrong word you used to get fined but that's part of making you learn quicker.

**How would you fine you? What would happen if you got fined?**

Oh if you said the word 'closed' instead of 'shut', well you'd be fined say it might be a beer, it might be something else.

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**Who would fine you?**

Well depending on where you were in the boat. If you were in the mess deck and you said 'closed' instead of 'shut' they'd say, 'Right, put a beer on his tab.' so you remembered next time because you hate giving a dollar away to some other bugger, so you remember to say the right word. The word was 'shut' and 'clip' and in general service you would say, 'Is that hatch closed?' Well that's wrong.

**It's like learning a new language?**

Well you just had to

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change it a bit around so that it fitted so that everyone was on the same wavelength on the boat because you can't go running from the front to the back and you have to translate the message from the front to the back so if the words are all the same it's precise. If I say 'closed' or 'hey' or 'pardon', it's not part of the transmission so it can create confusion.

**Did you get the sense while you were doing the training that you'd made the right decision?**

Well I always knew

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I'd made the right decision but the training was just part of it, that's all. I was on course with Canadians and so forth so we had fun, a lot of fun.

**What kind of fun did you have, can you tell us?**

Used to go around terrorising the local countryside of a weekend, because we'd go up to London and go over to the Australian Embassy and get the wine casks and then over to the Canadian Embassy to get the rum and then come back down to the navy base at Gosport, swap those rations with

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real steaks and ten man ration packs from the yachties and all the rest of it.

**The yachties?**

Yeah, being the sport section of the yacht club, of the navy. We have one too, it's called RANSA, Royal Australian Naval Sailing Association, well the English have the equivalent and every year in the Sydney Hobart you'll see one of our service yachts in the Hobart Sydney Race so it's the same overseas. So

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we'd go and get their ten man ration packs off them, swap them say a bottle of rum or something like that and then we'd get the mini bus and tour all over the UK on the weekends and have a ball. It was good.

**Did you miss home during that training period?**

Always, always missed home because you can't, everything is owned, can't get lost over there. You've only got to yell and someone else is around but

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yeah, I used to get homesick but I was only there for a short term so I knew I was coming home so you can grin and bear it.

**How long were you there altogether?**

Five months, five months.

**That's how long it takes to complete that training?**

Well on our side, yeah. It depends, sometimes there is interruptions to the course and like the only reason the other guys were there longer was their base was

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was still being built. See I was to go over there, do the course, and then come back and join one of ours here so that could be down to three months if everything fell into place but sometimes the tank was down, the escape training tank was down for training so that could add another couple of weeks onto your deployment.

**And how did the other nationalities cope with you being an indigenous Australian? Did they find it different, like those Negress girls that you talked about earlier?**

Well no

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because the English navy trained the Ethiopians and Christ knows who around the world, the Kenyans and all that and anyone who had submarines and the Argentineans were being trained there, so it wasn't a problem. Actually it was good because you learnt some of their skills so that was good. I didn't, everything was there

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for us, whenever we needed it.

**When you say ?You learnt some of their skills? can you give us an example of that?**

Well I knew that with the Canadians that the French and English are still fighting the civil war and there's not much love lost there at all but when they're on the boat a different issue, but ashore, my goodness, it's World War Three. And some of the Ethiopians that were

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and the Africans, the black Africans and that were at, they weren't necessarily doing submarine training but we run into them doing their engineering training over at Saltwoods, the engineering base and I used to sit down and talk to them and see how their boats and patrol boats are going and what type of ships they had and exchange information, yeah, that sort of stuff. And they were operating on a shoestring in most cases and they were getting the job done.

**How did the other, say Ethiopians, respond to you as an indigenous Australian or the West Indians or?**

Oh well

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I never really asked them. They were either on board or they weren't, so to speak.

**You mentioned before that you might have had more problems with the West Indians?**

Oh that was in civvy street. Yeah because they just, some of them honestly were so ignorant in the tourist service industry and I remember one night old granny was going to catch a train and

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she was carrying this big bag and a suitcase and she didn't know what eighteen hundred meant and this lady behind the counter in ticket sales was so rude and I was thinking, 'That could have been my grandmother.' and I gave her a serve and the next minute all security is jumping all over me and so forth. But she was just a bad example of a person that should feel so lucky that the country that she's chose has accepted her in as an immigrant rather than just, maybe it was a bad night, I don't know but she wasn't

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very polite. And a couple of occasions that's happened and I used to tell them if they didn't like it they could always go back to where they came from, so that didn't impress them well, one, because I wasn't staying in the UK and I knew that I was going back to where I came from so I was always happy about that.

**So you came back to Australia after that training and what did you do?**

Joined Orion

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and I was on her for about six months I think, maybe less and then I joined Attamar and they're two special fit boats, so basically just ran in and out of Sydney.

**All right, let's go back to joining Orion?**

That's where I consolidated my UK training.

**Right, so what did that consolidation entail? What did you have to do?**

Know every part of the boat, engineering wise,

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except the wireless office and a few other things, know all the systems on it. That's what you consolidate when you get back and that's called your part three, so they'd go through there and they'd say, 'What's that??' And I should be able to tell them.

**And you could?**

Yep. Forgot now and again but I anyway I knew what it was for.

**At what point did you start specialising or did you?**

The boats are special fit, the crew is optional. The boat is a special fit.

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**And what about you yourself, did you have to choose?**

No, no, not me. Everything is the same, an engine is an engine and an air compressor is an air compressor, it's just knowing where those pipes and everything go to so that's never going to change. I know how to fix all that and maintain it and operate it so that's fine but the boat was a special fit. Now what the boat was specially fitted out was other matters and other areas

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of the world, so the crew is constant. The only time the crew changes is when we go on patrol and that's when you bring on extra people and they're the ones that do all the other work.

**So the Orion was fitted out to do intelligence work?**

(Nods).

**And so after the Orion you were on which?**



Attamar.

**The Attamar.**

And that was fitted out to do the same.

**And how long did you serve on her?**

Oh I think

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about three or four years and yeah I became sort of so engrossed in what we were doing it sort of, the rest of the world was passing us by.

**Can you explain that?**

Well we were just too busy doing defence intelligence gathering and it was just hard work and you tend to lose all your

05:26:00:00

friends and that except the one's on the boat.

**You become quite isolated?**

Yes, we do.

**Can you just give us a sense of what a day and a night was like on the Attamar for you?**

Well one day our sonar chamber wasn't working so we had to get it fixed and then the drain blocked, which is an air vent type of thing and that's outside the hull so you just can't surface and fix these things,

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you've got to, so it took us X amount of days to get away, get out of the area, get up, go down again, put two guys in, fix the problem and nearly suffocated the two guys because the valve wasn't working properly and then surfaced, get them back in and try to revive them and Jesus, nothing might happen. We might just be going up and down for

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a day, a week, a month.

**Where would you go?**

Well wherever they wanted us to be.

**Around the Pacific mainly or would you go further afield?**

Well the boat's got enough to go wherever until we run out of food and we can go anywhere we want but it's no good sitting off Sydney Harbour Heads, is it? We know what's happening there so you're always in someone

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else's backyard so that's the difference between special fit boats and that's what they do. So there will be one of their mob sitting outside the Heads now, listening to everything that Richmond might say or the radio station or whatever radar is going on top of a building in town.

**When you say 'their mob', who do you??**

Well whoever's out there.

**What like Japan or China or?**

Anyone who had got boats, that's what they do, they

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just sit there and listen to everything you say so every time you make a phone call just remember that and every time you turn on a light, transmit on CB [Citizens' Band], do any of that, they know exactly what you're doing and if we don't use that we can always listen from up there but that's only Uncle Sam and Boris and the French that have got them satellites and so forth though. You've got to be mindful of that side of it as well.

**What about your day to day routine? Can you walk us through a day, your tasks?**

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Well on a conventional boat you normally charge once a day and do a short charge for now, that's if you can. If not, you sit and wait because it's running on electrics. It's like a white pointer shark, they just move nice and slow until they're actually on attack mode and they don't swim fast or anything, just one or two knots, that's all the boat does, just goes along like that.

**What were your living quarters in Attamar like? Can you describe them?**

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Well when I got out of bed, rolled up my sleeping bag, my mate unrolled his and jumped into my bed.

**That's how close you were?**

Seven on, seven off, four six or eight weeks, dived, maybe longer on the later patrols.

**Did you get on each others nerves?**

Oh you read or I was always a fiddler so I always had

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something to do but yeah you do. Nothing happens until you actually surface and you're in a friendly port and that's when it happens and then you settle your differences and then you get on with it.

**So there's an unwritten rule that you never ever actually have a fight when you're under?**

I've seen a chef chase one of the other members through the accommodation space with a meat cleaver and going to kill him but that was just an isolated and a few other things but I mean they're minor things. I don't know even what

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started that one, probably got a fresh spud, which would have been rare, instead of powdered crap.

**What would you eat? What would be a typical meal for dinner?**

Well it tended to drop down to a cheese platter in the long run because you can't exercise, so you don't eat big meals, so powdered eggs and powdered milk and powdered this and any other space food that they can

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drum up prior to, we might be the guinea pigs, just add water and you've got an instant feed. Waterlogged baby carrots and oh tin this and tin that, yeah but we survived. Fresh food runs out pretty quick and get into it while you can. I had no complaints about the food, it's just part and

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parcel for the course. You couldn't wash on the older boats because the machinery makes too much noise, so just had a bird bath and because I was engine room I was entitled to have a shower but you just wouldn't waste the water because the water's for the engine and the cooking and you only carried a limited amount.

**What was the longest you went without a shower for?**

Without a real shower, oh about three and a half weeks, or maybe longer.

**So a typical day on the Attamar**

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I mean you could use salt water but why would you bother?

**And it would be stored somewhere or?**

What, the salt water?

**Yeah?**

No, you flood that in from outside and then you're skin is all dry and so it's, used to have a bird bath, fill up the sink,

eyebrows, ears and brush your teeth and that's it.

**Did you, you said it was pretty busy under the sea, did you ever come very close to enemy**

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**subs, like very, very close?**

Yeah, earshot.

**What would the crew do when that happened?**

Well what would we do, we couldn't do much except I was thinking of my wife being deprived of her entitlements.

**Why would that happen?**

Because there would be no pay out, no bodies, no crew, no nothing.

**Because you were not supposed to be doing this?**

Well we shouldn't have been where we shouldn't have been and as I said

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you stick your nose in other people's business and sometimes you get it bitten off and that's what happens and you saw that with the Kursk and you know the full story now, there was twenty five guys still alive in the after compartments, well there was but because no-one was allowed on board those poor buggers perished and that's the sort.

**But you had permission from our government to be in those places**

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**because that's what the sub was doing, was gathering intelligence?**

From our government?

**Yeah.**

We had permission to be in that submarine, yeah.

**So I don't understand why your wife wouldn't get, it doesn't follow that your wife wouldn't get her entitlements?**

I don't think we had, I don't think our government would ever say we had permission to do our job where we were doing our job, that's what I mean by sticking your nose in other people's backyards.

**So that would carry on even if you disappeared?**

Our government certainly wouldn't admit where we were.

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Not unless it was a major diplomatic incident.

**How did that affect you mentally knowing that, having that pressure that that may happen, that you may disappear?**

Well I'm only a basic engineer, they're a dime a dozen, so we're expendable. The other blokes they got the information they want to get, not me, but as I say you see what happens with just a basic

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incident of the Voyager, compensation. None of us care about dying, well we do but it's like East Timor, no-one was sanctioned until the contract was signed so none of them people prior to that are entitled to any compensation until the actual contract is signed and that's how it works. And it's the same as

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SAS forces, they're always there but they're there before there's an official signature, so really what do you put that under? There's no facility in the compensation for that so it's difficult.

**What about your actual job on the say the Attamar as a mechanical engineer, can you tell us what you might do in a day to make sure that everything's going well?**

Yeah, well when you're on

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patrol there's only so much you can do because everything has to be ready to go so you can't go pulling down a system if you're going to need it in a hurry, so you just do your, but you're in two watches so it might take you fifteen minutes to do a specific task. Now you might do that which might be changing an injector because this

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one was temperature readings had been going up, so you need to pull that one out, put the new one in and clean it, do maintenance on that one, remembering of course that spanners are steel and you're working on steel and they make a noise so that noise is transmitted through the hull and if people are listening I mean we're going to get found so this is all relevant. Like playing Monopoly and throwing the dice,

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you can hear that, so that's out so there's a whole, you've got to be so quiet because someone is listening in. You know yourself with your own gear so imagine that magnified, which it is in water so you really can't be. Those neon lights in patrol, you've got to turn the fluorescent lights off because they produce frequencies, which is picked up and that's how critical it is. The days are long

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and boring however if you're doing a charge in that charge you start your main engines and hopefully the seas are not rough up top because if they are the waves can be fifty, a hundred foot high and flood back down the exhaust pipe and cause the engines to flood and also the hot gases can escape and be picked up on an infra red heat sensing systems from the other mob and there's a whole host of things and you've got to be mindful of all that.

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And it's just there as a big, if you can visualise it, as a big ear floating around, underwater, listening for everything, that's what the job is and also recording, recording information on other ships.

**Did you have weapons on your?**

Oh yeah, we were loaded, fully loaded.

**Just in case?**

Well we don't go to sea empty, we're always fully loaded. Like if my boat was sitting in the harbour now and we punched in the coordinates for this place and pressed the button we could flatten this area with a harpoon

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missile and that was one of my jobs as a weapons tiff and as a weapons tiffy it was my job to make sure that weapons were discharged from the hull as next to the running speed as possible, which is a set of circumstances so yeah, but we never see the other side of it, like the damage we do.

**Did you have to do that much while you were on patrol?**

No, we never fired on patrol because if we did they'd know exactly

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where we were and be gone. That's what happens in the modern era, as soon as you fire they've got you pinged.

**So you never actually had to do that in real life?**

No, but we came close but they were the older type weapons where you had to shoot a pattern or two, two or three like the ones they used on that cruiser in the Falklands and see that didn't have any anti-submarine gear so that was a slaughter really, all those poor buggers dying but that's war. But yeah,

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we had two floods ready to fire if necessary.

**Was part of the reason that you became sort of insular from the rest of the world while you were working on the subs because you were privy to intelligence and etcetera that you really couldn't tell anyone so you preferred?**

That's right, we were privy to exactly where we were and what we were doing and you just don't talk to anyone except yourself. There was always someone listening.

**What effect did that have on a gregarious bloke like you?**

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Well I've been to the other side and I know what they believe in and I can put myself in the other fellow's shoes all the time and I used to tell my subordinates whenever we need assistance them buggers are going to be up there trying to help us so don't be too hard on them.

**Which buggers?**

The service fleet or the air force or whatever so I can relate to how they think as well. They might think we're the animals and Christ

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knows what but I've been in that mob fifteen years so I understand.

**How did you get on with the other crew in the submarines? Was it an easier time for you as far as mateship goes?**

Well I had more interest in the little things that I used to do, the fiddling things I do with a piece of wood or something like that. When we were on patrol because I was always fiddling and making something, hand carving because you couldn't hit or bang or anything like that

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and we had a good time really. We had our cliques but we all looked after each other and it still shows today like you may have thought that, I was talking to a wonderful gentleman the other day, which is true. On Anzac Day I was caught in Canberra with four submarine ex-captains talking about nuclear energy and I mean it wasn't

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idea of a good Anzac Day and why we should go nuclear and I'm saying, 'No, we should not.' But anyway, that was my Anzac Day and who needs to talking about that at twelve o'clock on the night. It was not flash. I can't see it and these guys were keen, ready to go and I said, 'We don't need it, we do a good enough job killing ourselves with defensive weapons, rather than going nuclear.'

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And I just said, 'Stay in bed with the Americans and let them worry about that crap.'

**Interviewee: David Williams Archive ID 2362 Tape 06**

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**Now when you were going out on the spook boat did you know where you were going?**

Yeah.

**The crew were briefed?**

No, the people that needed to be were and there were curtains drawn around the chart table, short curtains.

**How did you know then where you were going? Just gossip?**

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Oh no, you could just have a look when you looked past the chart, just have a look or just check on the, even though, the curtains they weren't fully drawn all the time, so we pretty well knew. Just put two and two together and you knew you were about here, the world's only so big so it was not a problem.

**I guess it would be fair to say that most of your time was spent going northwards?**

Yeah, well you're not wrong.

06:01:30:00

It wasn't in these lovely waters of ours.

**Ever get up around Cam Ranh Bay?**

Well we could have been. I mean I'm not saying where we were, it's just that you appreciate we weren't in our own backyard and that could be a lot of places but there was only a few places of significance really so I mean it's not difficult to work them out.

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**You had some contacts or passive contacts with other submarines, did you know them to be friendly or enemy?**

They were enemy, they were enemy. You can tell on their signatures so yeah, and you know you're too close when you can hear them yourself through the hull, so thank goodness pretty well went grey overnight on that one because I could see myself not getting home.

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We didn't have enough water underneath us to go anywhere.

**Because you were in very close to the coast?**

Well we just weren't in a deep part of the ocean, which is a worry.

**So when you get a contact like that or in that situation do you run or do you play doggo?**

Oh no, we do what we were there to do and any extra that come out of it, so be it but that was,

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we didn't expect to encounter that particular one. We were looking for something else but these things happen.

**In the case when you were encountering something unexpected what sort of attempts to gather intelligence was there?**

Well there was no need because we knew what it was, so that had already been done. There was nothing new on it that we didn't know about but that's not what we were waiting for so.

**I believe**

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**these boats were also fitted with cameras that could take underwater pictures?**

Oh yeah, they are now and we've still got periscope cameras, the old pretty basic primitive stuff. We did it on a shoestring budget, not like the Yanks but it was successful.

**What about taking photographs of ships hulls and that sort of thing?**

Yeah, we were fitted for that and that was possible.

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**When you went out on patrol you were taking an increased complement of crew?**

Yeah we took on more specialist categories, had nothing to do with the actual operation of the machinery of the boat, this was extra gear that those blokes needed to operate.

**We're talking electronic gathering?**

Yeah, yeah, electronics.

**And that meant, you kind of alluded to it before that you were having to go through a sort of hot bunking**

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**system?**

Yeah, you've got to because the boat was designed for seventy and you've got all of a sudden eighty five on it or thereabouts or more or less and every time there is something new comes up that goes in and the crew gets squashed more, so that's how it works.

**How did you try to kind of personalise what minimal personal space you had?**

Well I, as I said I was always

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a hands on person and prior to leaving Australia I went and got a piece of cedar wood and modified my bunk with it and some plastic piping and all this other sort of stuff that dates back to when I used to make models and so forth. And every time I had a bit of down time off watch I'd do something different to the wood and or plastic piping which I had coming out of what air conditioning we had to cover my toes or ankles or knees and

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just created a bit of interest there, ?What's that mongrel doing to his bunk now?? So I didn't know it was causing all this but it was something new going on which had never been done before obviously but it should have been the standard Formica bunk, two straps, get in and boring but I needed to make mine different.

**What was the function of the wood that you bought on?**

It was a good piece of cedar which I'd lacquered and varnished before

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deployment because of the fumes internally in the boat and all the rest of it but it was just wider than the normal piece and when I polished all the fittings that went on it, it looked neat and put individual markings on it and yeah, it was a bit of a showpiece actually, just whittling away, just doing little bits to it. And then I had about six different areas of small, plastic tubing which I made a nozzle which fitted over the air conditioning louvre, which

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I could turn on a little cock and have air to that section or that section or that section of my bed or my bunk, which was of no significance whatsoever, but it was something to do because the only reading I ever did was anything factual so that meant there was no mail and nothing new coming on board except the incoming signal of the news of Australia but yeah. And most of the books were

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fiction and all that. I read a few space, science fiction books on space and that but that was about it. I preferred to do whittling or do something like that and that's why I had the wood and I had little bits of wood stashed here and there throughout the boat and it was good.

**It's a pretty ancient seagoing tradition to be carving a bit of wood in your downtime?**

Well it kept me mentally stable to the best of my knowledge but other people might think differently.

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**Was it a pretty blokey atmosphere aboard the boat?**

Oh our boat was. We had a senior crew on it and there was about, just on the normal boat crew, ten of us over thirty five so pretty old crew, considering we were all oldies so yeah, that made a big difference

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and yeah we still had a few gay guys but they were still in the closet, so to speak, although we knew and it was never an issue but that's how it was.

**But there was no sort of sexuality expressed aboard?**

No, not really, not really, because those boats the crews are handpicked prior to deployment so usually it's the same old faces so if you did a job you wouldn't get to go on the next one.

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**Why do you think you were handpicked then David?**

Something different I suppose, new kid on the block, no other reasons, not because of my knowledge of the boat, that's for sure. It's may be because of my tolerance, along tolerance views. I did in those days, I haven't now but probably that's the reason and also we

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still liked to play sport although ten minutes in the fresh air with a submarine crew you were usually gagging but yeah, perhaps that's another reason because in the squadron, out of the six boats we won the sports shield. I don't think we won a game. I think we drew one, even the women's team in Auckland, in Napier, beat us in basketball, so that says it all but we tried.

**So what did that sort of service do to you physically considering**

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**you were such a sport loving guy before?**

Well it mentally drained us I think. We didn't see it at the time and it's not until you come back and the crew split up and you go different ways and you get ready to leave the system and you realise that it did take a toll on our health, especially the mental side of it. You don't understand it at the time but it certainly did

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and we drank probably more than we anticipated and because the boat was your family, your mistress, your girlfriend, your boyfriend, whatever, boat came first, no matter what. That's what that type of boat required.

**And your grey hair?**

Yeah, well I didn't have one until I went to the squadron so that say's it all too, the grey hair but as I said it

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wasn't from any of the other things, it was probably just being in those other backyards.

**If you were going up north at what point would the tension start to ratchet up a bit?**

Oh it didn't, it didn't because we were more concerned with completing the job, that was a priority. Never say you can't do it, that was always, it doesn't really matter in submarine practice. Action stations

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or war time the threat is the same. The only difference is you have your bow caps open and fire a weapon, every other danger and level of alert is the same so yeah. That's always there.

**When you've done your training you've mentioned quite a few times going through the escape tanks and that sort of thing, in reality what chance did you have of**

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**getting out?**

On our boats?

**Yeah.**



None, straight in the water and if you're off the coast here on the continental shelf, you're gone so you don't really worry about it. You just realise there's another seventy guys on board going with you and anyway being a senior crew on board it's usually a senior sailor first out and then the old man or myself or a senior sailor last out and

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depending what type of escape it is, if it's a rush escape unless there a recompression chamber on a large ship up there to take the crew you're dead anyway so if it's a controlled escape well that's something different. You get time to get dressed into your suits and they're doing that from over a thousand feet now so that's fine but a thousand feet's nothing in the ocean really.

**So all those factors**

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**about being close to the enemy, being in a sort of unsurvivable position, that was the sort of thing that you reckon began to take it's toll on you submariners?**

Well if you look at a submarine crew and look at the same on a service ship crew and the ages are probably similar, you'll see the wrinkles on the submarine crew and I never noticed it until later and I know that

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it's a hard life style but yeah, I can't put a finger on it but you feel your worth and as I said everything you do directly affects someone else so you make sure you do it right. One of the biggest crimes would be not change the toilet roll, could start world war three on the boat if that happened but these were the things that do need a lecture after weeks and weeks of being dived, so you've got to be

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mindful of that.

**So there were a few little courtesy things like that that became very, very important in that environment?**

Well when you're in two watches and I was seventy seven bulkhead which is near the engine room, that's where the ship's company bathrooms were and some of the guys would come down and leave the wash basin in a filthy state and

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when I was a young man trying to earn more money to get a deposit on a house in the general service, I used to clean toilets and things like that and I was always mindful of the fact that someone used to have to use that next so I'd always make sure, even though I didn't have to do it, that they were clean, both sides. I used to polish the mirrors so that if anyone decided to squeeze a zit or something that the bloody foreign didn't have to look at that. Just little things like that can make a difference, keep the taps shiny and

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that basic little fact might have made it easier for whoever was coming to put the plug in and pump a bit of water, fill up the sink and have a little bird bath so yeah. And I also used to, we'd get the news and we'd run the book for the football results on Radio Australia and all I would do if I took a dollar bet off this bloke on that one, I'd put a

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dollar bet on with this one with the other mob on the other one, so all I was doing was changing money over. I wasn't making money, I was just and of course that created an interest, little things like that and I have done a few patrols, but I've got a mate who's done a lot more and he was certainly used up by the system.

**In the closeness**

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**of that environment where you're even hot bunking and things, what sort of personal habits or personal hygiene things become unacceptable and how do you deal with them amongst other crew members?**

Well you just, nothing is a secret and everyone knows your, and we all stink the same so if anyone was becoming what we considered really bad well he'd be reminded in no uncertain

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terms. You think you're nice and clean but I can remember going into a number of hotels where we would sleep ashore because of the accommodation on the boat, when we went into port you'd stay in a hotel but we always got, you'd go into the foyer and you'd see the normal people, the regulars just split up because we stunk of diesel and even though we thought we were smelling

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pretty with whatever underarmers we put on and showered and shampooed. The diesel was in everything, absolutely reeked of it and it takes a while to get it out of your system but yeah, it happens. So you're mindful of your personal habits. You can't wash regularly. See we wore sandals so that was a help and a t shirt and a pair of stubby shorts or something like that but now they wear full uniform and now the gear that they use to

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make fresh water runs so silently it can't be picked up, well they've got a slight chance of it being picked up, so they can shower and wash regularly so consequently back into uniform.

**What about farting?**

One in, all in.

**No restrictions?**

No, no, what goes around comes around.

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Goes from that section of the AMS [Air Management System] all the way up forward, and back down to the accommodation space, torpedo space, accommodation space, control room, back into the engine room, if the engines are running, or back down to the AMS and then recircled [recirculated] again until it dissipates so if you fart forward I'm smelling it down at seventy seven.

**And if everybody's eating a lot of powdered egg?**

Well no choice,

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either that or starve and that's in between sleeping with those little mini cockroaches that used to camp with you because they'd come in with the vegetables and that and then they would, they wouldn't get really big but they'd get behind the Formica where they couldn't be destroyed and they'd be on the patrol with you. That was handy and so you've always got some company.

**You mentioned that the food, the fresh food would**

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**run out pretty quickly on a patrol. By the time you got back to Sydney at the end of a patrol what sort of privations were you living under as far as the monotony of the diet?**

Oh because it had been done before by other nations they've pretty well got the diet down to a tee, calories and all that. Prior to deployment you go for normal meals in a normal working environment and they scale them down so when you

enter the patrols

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by a few weeks you're on basically survival rations but with all the calories and so forth required to do a decent days work and then you work your way back. After you come out of the area you pig out but we're back into a full time maintenance routine so the coolers have got to be changed, valves have got to stripped and cleaned and checked and reducers done so you're flat out and you're working accordingly and you're back to full course meals, so yeah they had that down to pat.

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But every now and again they'd, the food industry would come up with some other technology they wanted to experiment on and they'd probably supply the boat with some space food and what a perfect test.

**You're guinea pigs?**

Exactly.

**But I imagine though if the boat was diverted or extended, even by a few days it could really run down what was in the food locker?**

Oh yeah, yeah but there was always,

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it's like the actual boat, there is a seventy per cent safety factor built into it and with the food I daresay that would be taken into consideration too, so if we had to do an extra couple of weeks somewhere we would have been wherever it was safe to do an air drop or whatever. Actual running out of food, you run out of your normal and then you go to your powder stuff and your instant stuff and you

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survive.

**You mentioned a bit before about the noise discipline aspect, when you were working on an engineering task how would you minimise that noise, by method or equipment?**

Well for a start you wouldn't be using a hammer and you'd pick such a time

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that because of the gear you did have operating you knew there was nothing in x amount of miles, fifty miles, a hundred miles or something, whatever and you'd be in a patrol quiet state, other words be mindful you're on patrol but a quiet state which you can walk to and from up the front, down the back and just make minimal noise on the Formica and so forth but yeah. Any other states from then on it's yeah, and when you're on ultra quiet you turn off lights and

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don't do anything.

**And what about the noise of metal on metal if you were using a socket or a ratchet or something like that, how do you stop that sounding too loud?**

Well you're mindful of it and some of the tools we had we used to put tape on them to keep them quiet but normally you're not in an environment where you're going to have to be using that. It would only a defect which would cause that

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and that's a problem but nine times out of ten we'd get through a patrol without too much hassle. The ones I was on there were a few problems but we managed to do it but there has been others when they've come up short.

**How did you get on with the other POs [Petty Officers]?**

Oh good, good. So much so that the Submarine Association is alive and kicking and we've just come out of Hobart and there

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were about eight or nine hundred of us down there, it was just in Canberra, linked up and marched with the guys from Canberra, always got a bed somewhere, always a submariner lying around Australia somewhere, so yeah it was good. **Given the operational pressure that you guys experienced time and time again, what's your opinion on the fact that certain service medals are denied to those submariners**

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**of that period?**

Well you can appreciate it if you are getting a medal for being in such and such a place at such and such a time and then that means our government would have to say, 'Well what were your submarines doing there??' And the government would have to explain that and it's unfortunate but they give

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us what I think they call a Special Service, Special Operations Medal now and that recognises that you've done a few patrols but that doesn't compensate all the guys that were up under the ice and Christ know where else and as a result of that by not being called operational service they are denied the Department of Veteran Affairs benefits, which is a nuisance factor, big nuisance factor in my eyes and that's a government thing. It's nothing to do with the lads and that's the hurtful

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part. They were there.

**Also because of the deniability of those missions you were saying the benefits aren't available for those submariners?**

Yeah, that's right and for some of the guys in the early part of our service, re-arming the submarines, have done a hell of a lot of time with Royal Navy and unfortunately that's not recognised

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except for the basic injuries like a broken arm or something, all the other things, and it's not operational service so that puts them under military compensation rather than the Veterans' Entitlement Act, which is a major difference. Where one you get a lump sum for an injury and that's it and the other you get a fortnightly pension and like most things that condition can worsen but because you're getting a lump sum, that's the end of that.

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So you get certain treatments to cover that but because they've got this injury other injuries will develop so it's always better for the veteran to be under the Veterans' Entitlement Act but to get information out of the English is most likely like ringing up Russia and trying to get information out of them, it's just never going to happen.

**Physical injuries are one thing but you obviously**

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**feel there were some mental affects that occurred with the crews?**

Yeah, big time, big time, yeah.

**And how is that taken care of for those people now?**

Well the Submarine Association, the national body, we're putting together a men's health program and asking all the guys to write in with their problems and you'll find most of the submariners worldwide anyway but some of ours are on

their third and fourth marriages and things like this so not travelling real well. And because of the carcinogenic

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conditions we had and the products we used and it's all breathed in and ninety five per cent of the crew smoked so passive smoking, a whole host of things. I remember trying to get, I liked the guys but I can assure you my chest and eyes used to bleed and I used to wheeze and sting but I just liked the guys on that job, that's the reason I stayed. And when I say 'I liked the job', it was camaraderie in the job,

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not necessarily the job. The job is hard yakka but yeah, it was camaraderie and that's why I stayed in that environment and it's still relevant, even though I'm in civvy street it was still a close-knit family.

**How did you cope being absent from Donna?**

Well funnily enough I knew

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she'd always be there for me, that made a difference. So I'm not happy with the way I treated her but yeah, but hopefully with this trip around Australia that we're supposed to be doing, would have been to make up for a certain amount of that time but we've had to put the brakes on because of the grandson arriving on the scene, which puts us in a whole new ball game, which is great anyway

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as no good having grandma separated from grandchildren. It's just never going to work.

**Were there times when you sailed out of Sydney and you thought you might never see her again?**

Well that time, one specific time that I was thinking when I heard it and I'm the chief and my young lads are excited saying, 'This is great.' and I'm thinking of all the things that could go wrong and all these kids are thinking, 'Well we could be in a fight here.' And I'm afraid

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that comes with old age but oh no, I think there was a time when I dragged one of our officers out of the wardroom and was going to counsel him severely and I rang her up and said, 'I've done it this time. I'm in for a court martial.' but because of the type of job we were in and the captain made us be best friends and here we were, we went ashore together.

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I remember it was in Singapore or Hong Kong and we were holding hands and I'm saying, 'Look sir, here we are, best of friends.' But yeah.

**What was the nature of that dispute you had with the officer?**

Oh he picked on one of my lads and I was the duty senior sailor, the duty chief and he should have went through me and I reminded of what he should have done and he reminded me that he was a naval officer, so I dragged him out of the wardroom and was going to stitch him up once and for all. It

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was just one of those things. I was having a bad day with my engines.

**Was that a junior or a senior officer?**

He was a junior officer then but he later became captain of his own submarine and asked me did I want to ship with him and I said, 'Had enough of you on the other boat. Why would I want to go there again?' And yeah, no it was just a bit of counselling that some of those officers needed, so much

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so that I think that as you get older you get more worried and you think of the things that could go wrong and it's like anything, it's perhaps time to get out of the job because you lose it. You can only drive a fast car for so long and then you've got to move over and drive something slower, and that's what happens in the boats.

**Now you did the two spook boats but then you moved off those didn't you to regular ones?**

Yeah, yeah, yeah, to Onslow

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and also vibration analysis was my job as well as chief of the workshop and I got to go to all of the boats but I was on mainly the three boats were Orion, Attamar and Onslow and yeah Onslow was a work boat and used to work up the fleet and things like that

**What does that mean exactly, David?**

Well she'd play with the fleet and the aircrafts and hone their skills and the air force and also the anti-submarine equipment on surface

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ships plus do visits and go to New Zealand and play against the Yanks and so forth, so yeah that sort of opened my eyes up to ?This is not too bad, this is all right.? if you get my drift and rather than a specific task for a specific operation.

**So how was it different working on that boat for you?**

Oh I think it was just the fact that if

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we did get a defect the whole world wasn't depending on us, well the world that I knew and that was important, that was important, whereas the other ones you just hoped you didn't get a defect because the amount of, well we couldn't afford down time with what we were doing with the others so it was as simple as that.

**Stepping back from Attamar and Orion and then**

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**working on Onslow, once you stepped outside of that circle of the spook boats how did it then seem to you in perspective?**

Well sometimes you couldn't get the stores that you wanted because we weren't a priority boat. Everything was important but you weren't a Level One priority so as a result of that you can follow that all the way down to the

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budgie in the after mess, it's just you can do it and the requirement wasn't there in as much as, ?If we don't get this thing by that, what are we going to do?? Because it worries you because they'll certain other priorities and you can back off a bit. It's not critical that you've got to be best of them all. Well you still

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try to be best but you do it in different ways.

**How did you rate the performance of the Australian boats at that period compared to other nationalities?**

Oh we got our fair share of the best that the others have got because if we hadn't have been as good I wouldn't be here for a start and we wouldn't have photographs taken of the most powerful country in the west

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some of their best machinery and the photograph takes the place of the torpedo we could have fired into them.

**So you've got photographs of American boats?**

(Nods)

**At what distance would they have to be taken?**

Oh didn't matter, it was close but they didn't know we were there but once we fired they would have known. They would have produced countermeasures and probably sunk us but we'd sent one of their biggest, best and about

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six or seven thousand men to the bottom and contaminated wherever it was with nuclear energy for however long, because we'd blown them up and we've lost a crew of seventy.

**So you're saying you got close enough to a carrier to?**

Carriers, bombers and their attack boats, frigates, cruisers, yeah. Even our noisy

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Collins Class were doing that. Prior to what you get fed in the press they've done a excellent job and they certainly got in and stuck it up the Americans again and the reason that the Yanks were out here, the Secretary of Defence, and gave us another five hundred million for project as the Australian submarine project was up for grabs and they didn't want the Germans to have it, the technology. So yeah, they're the real things.

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**I mean infiltrating a US carrier group is a difficult task, why do you think Australian men and equipment are able to do that and have done so on a number of occasions?**

Because we're not sort of short term, we're all long term and we haven't got all the toys in the closet so we can throw just throw that one away and get another one. We just push the envelope a little further and that's the way we operate and we make do and I think that's come out in all facets

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of Australian defence history. We're not bigger and better. We're better but certainly not bigger and we just do, we just do an excellent job with what we've got. If you've seen some of the gears and the setup that we use, the electronic gear I mean you can buy most of it at Dick Smith's [electronics stores] and our guys put it together, absolutely brilliant. It's like, we've got so many brilliant people in Australia

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it's just a shame our Government doesn't back them a little better or put them in a situation where they don't have to leave.

**How long did you spend on Onslow?**

Oh a couple of years, yeah a couple of years. Good boat, had an excellent captain and that's where we had a captain who done too much for his crew and then we got a new captain and -

**Hang on, what do you mean by that?**

Well he just looked after us too much and then we got a captain

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who came on and didn't look after us as much and we failed at a lot of things. When I say a lot of things I mean ?Hang on, the old man used to do this and do that? but this bloke, no. So the onus was back on us and I remember failing an operational workup and that really hit home and, ?That's not on.? So we had to get out and practise more until we got it right.

**So the good captain was doing work that?**

Well they were all good captains it was just some

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better than others.

**But when you say he was doing too much for you, doing too much of what?**

Well I think he was babysitting us too much. It's hard to put a handle on it. He was just a lovely man and he was a brilliant captain but some of these other storm tossed blokes that perhaps you want to go into battle with because they have a better attack ability or something like that, I'm not sure. This same captain he was just a lovely man and

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any time we were in the UK we were quite welcome to stay at his place. Yeah, I just remember that. Being an older bloke I just look at these things but goodness, we failed and I couldn't believe we'd failed a workup. We got slack.

**Were there a lot of British officers in the submarine squadron?**

Oh yeah, over the years, yeah over the years, on exchange and there was a carrot dangled in front of them and why wouldn't you want to leave

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that climate and come out here and most of them did, a lot of them did. So it's like a second home, yeah. We had a good affiliation with the Poms.

**So just touching on that, what do you reckon makes a good submarine captain?**

Well I reckon, look I haven't been in long enough to be able to

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answer that honestly. I've watched the captains that are on the patrol boats, they're signed up and I watch them change and they've got to come out and re-enter the human race when we surface and it's a hard, hard thing to say and I see them sort of age over the three months we dive but that's only because I was old. I wasn't a young man see and coming from

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engines and they'd come out and because they can't leave the control room area and oh, they're assigned to this state of the war vessel and this crew and they've got to do these tasks and it's just mind boggling and any of them that get to captain have got the nod as far as I'm concerned.

**And do you think that by the time you left submarines you mentioned you might have left your edge a little bit?**

Yeah, yeah,

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I was definitely too old, didn't understand the big picture and that's like getting out of the old Morris Minor, into a Monaro, there's a difference, a difference. Needed to be there as a young man.

**What do you mean you'd lost the big picture? What do you consider the big picture?**

Well I needed to be a younger man to be able to fit everywhere and squeeze and

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spend more time doing that particular job. I was coming up to my use by date and that's a hard thing to realise because you do change and that's what was happening. Call it submarine male menopause, I don't know but you do want the creature comforts. You don't want to be in that environment any more. When I say in that environment

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you want to be close to it and around it but you don't actually want to be on patrol. It's just not yeah, it's up to the



younger members to do that.

**So you said it was tough to realise that, that you were getting old and not?**

Well I remember on the workup sliding backwards and you've got two and a half thousand ton of steel and we're going backwards and I'm thinking, 'God.' I'm trying to get a door shut during the exercise and the door was

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come off the clips and probably would have been cut in half against the ballast pumps started. The young kids reckoned this was great and I was screaming at another bloke 'come and help us push this door shut?' and then the kids said, 'It's great, chief.' and I just stood there and, 'Don't need this, don't need this.' but as I say you do your job.

**Interviewee: David Williams Archive ID 2362 Tape 07**

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**Well we'll start with the patrol boats that you were working on between 1971 and 72, just give us an idea of what that work involved?**

Well it was mainly patrolling, the southern patrol was from Gladstone to Rockhampton I think, or maybe Townsville and the central patrol was from Townsville,

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Cairns to Thursday Island and the other patrol was all the way around to Weipa and because there were three boats up there. One was the senior boat, which I think was, Hollywood Mike we used to call the captain of that boat, Mike Ashton. He always smelled of perfume and reckoned he was the ants pants and we always got the crap jobs but our skipper was Artie White and he was in rugby and our boat was stacked with sportsmen

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so we won everything and be in everything. And so it didn't really matter to us what patrol we were doing but I can remember water skiing behind the boat once and our boss liked fishing so stop engines and we'd all have to go fishing. I remember one particular time I had the hundred and twenty pound breaking strain line wrapped around my arm and I'd snagged a big coral cod and the next minute I'm in the ocean and so anyway never did that trick again.

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But that was mainly looking for, setting up for fishing and coastal surveillance and things like that and we'd pull into all those islands, South Molle and Daydream and Hamilton and all the rest of them and spread the goodwill there and challenge them to whatever and yeah I remember a few good times there. Like in Bowen we pulled in there and go through

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the public relations business and then they put on a dance for us and there was the old sawdust on the dance floor and I think the old matron from the hospital was out watching all the young nurses and it was my job to, it was the first lieutenant's job to keep matron happy while giving the rest of the crew time to chase young nurses around the back paddock. Oh it was funny, I just remember these incidents.

**Was that because you were fairly newly married that they gave you that job?**

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Oh no, it was just that the first lieutenant and myself we were good talkers and that's how it was. The things you do and anyway everyone had a good time. It was all above board and she was like that Hattie Jacques out of the Carry On mob, this lady, this matron and we were just the Carry On crew if you looked at that way. It was funny. And yeah,

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but there was a serious side to it too, helping stranded fishermen and shipwrecked people and also liaising with the Aboriginal remote areas up north Queensland and that was good and they got to see that there was a black man on patrol boats and there was perhaps an opportunity for some of their kids if they ever decided to go that so there was a serious side as well. I was always mindful of that.

**Liaison work with the Aboriginal communities, what kind of**

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**liaison? Would it be just to check on them or?**

No, no, we might go alongside with some fresh water or some oil or something and we'd get to talk with the locals and sit down and perhaps have a barby or maybe play, if it was down time maybe a game of cricket if we were in for a weekend or something and yeah, just exchange information. And as a result of that they'd say, 'Where are you from?' and all the rest of it, so yeah, I was always

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mindful of that. And Thursday Island was a refuelling stop and we used to play sport and blend in with the community, socially as well as, and it was good stuff, good stuff. I didn't mind that sort of job and also help after cyclones had gone through and heavy weathers, so yeah, it was great.

**Are you talking about Cyclone Tracy in 74?**

No, that was, no that was a different set up with Cyclone Tracy.

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Thank goodness I wasn't on a patrol boat then. The bloke I relieved on HMAS Marimba he was on the Arrow and he was killed in that cyclone. I relieved him as the bar manager at HMAS Marimba which is the naval apprenticeship training establishment and he was caught on Arrow and went under the wharf.

**So after the patrol boats you worked on HMAS Moresby?**

Yeah, I went back to Stalwart and then after, there was a chappie who couldn't go to Moresby so he was whingeing, he was just getting married

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so I took up his post on Moresby.

**And that was 1979?**

Yeah.

**What were your duties on Moresby?**

'78, '79, yeah. I was outside staff. Well I was engine room when we were steaming and 2IC and also outside, what they call outside tiffy and it was my job to make sure that the ship's boats were operational, all the outside machinery which was outside

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the actual engine room, like your pumps and your little portable generators and that, that was my responsibility and yeah, the fire hydrants and things like that that you flush through and all those other basic maintenance things you do. And yeah, that was a pretty good job actually.

**Where did you work? Where did you work mainly? What areas did you work in?**

Well on the Moresby there was like what they called a work deck and there was a big roller shutter door and that was my actual workshop so if I had to pull an engine apart

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or something like that I'd do it in there, or a generator and service it but if we were steaming at sea I'd be naturally on watch in the engine room and that was a controlled NCR Control Room] environment where you sit in a control room and you watch all your gauges and every now and again you go out and monitor and feel and touch the rotating machinery to make sure everything is correct. Then you wear headsets or ear sets because with those screaming turbines if you didn't have them you'd probably be stone deaf within three months

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because of the frequency of the turbines screaming.

**And the HMAS Moresby was a survey ship?**

Yeah, and interesting thing about it was the readings we were getting with modern equipment would have been six to seven inches off what Matthew Flinders got in a twenty seven foot whale boat using a lead line, absolutely brilliant, absolutely brilliant them old sailors. And yeah, admittedly we would take more soundings but that

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really impressed me from the old charts and we found a few rocks and bumps and caves that may have been formed over the years, recently but it was fantastic that side of it but everyone on that ship had a job. And you got to see parts of Australia that you'd never normally see because you're doing that survey and the ship's boats are about twenty five to thirty foot long and they go along and do the inshore, really close to the coast

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and the Moresby, being the mother ship, it does the long grids, does a grid pattern off the coast so that you marry it up and now it's all satellite positioning and all that so it's fine and you're using lasers and so forth but we were still using the old echo sounders and all that sort of stuff in those days so it's pretty good. And you form a new chart so you're basically making a Gregory's [street directory].

**You spend a lot of time on the coast of Western Australia?**

Mh, well we were getting a new boat

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so we had to do the southern area and Adelaide and Esperance and also up in St Joseph Bonaparte Gulf up north and as a result of that, well that was heading towards the Eighties when we were doing that and that was the time when my mother was sick and passed on. And also I'd done my subset so I was ready to come off it but yeah I remember we were off Esperance when the signal came through. My family was here

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in Sydney and my daughter was sick at the time of my mother's death, through that period and my wife put it together that it must have been Mum sending a signal, mental telepathy, that something was wrong and as soon as Mum had passed over my daughter was well, ready to go to school but my wife put that together some time later. But yeah, I just remember coming off the boat and they flew me off in the chopper and we come into Esperance and I seen all these

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black fellas and so forth and some of them had been drinking too much but these little kids were playing and I said to my mate who was the pilot, I said, 'Look the last thing these kids expect to see get out of this chopper is a black fella, in flying gear, so I'll tell you when to take off back to the ship and you throw me the usual goffer.' which means a salute. And I just want one of them out of that might see, 'Why can't I be like that fella?' And I just remember landing on the esplanade on the front there and all these

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little kids watching and when I took my flying helmet they just, I can still see their eyes, and they ran back to their parents, 'Look mummy, look at that fellow, that fellow there is one of our fellows.' and so hopefully you pass it on. There's some talent but they just need the opportunity, that's all but yeah the navy was good. So it was Esperance to Perth, Perth to Sydney, pick up some pay and then pay up to Mount Isa to bury my mother and

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they were lovely people up in Mount Isa by that way.

**That's where your mother was originally from?**

No, no, she was, all from Grafton, Beagle.

**So why was she getting buried up there?**

Oh she was staying with her sister and her sister and her husband and he was a sort of a jackaroo cum roo shooter and that and that's where he was operating out of Mount Isa.

**Had you seen much of her, given that you were away so much?**

My mum, yeah, I'd seen her, like if you

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put it on a, I suppose if I ever had to add it up, not really but enough to know it's Mum and she'd come to some football games when we lived in Bourke Street and she was always quite proud of us but she had to work so we accepted that.

My grandmother was more of an influence on my upbringing than Mother was I'd say.

**And in later years before her death had you seen much of her?**

Well yeah, I had her living here with us and

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then she left here to go up to Queensland to live with her sister because it got a bit hard on my wife and the two children, so she decided to head north. Yeah and by that time my stepfather he was sick and they were living in a van up the back there and he was sick and then he passed on and then it was time, and my wife was looking after an extra two and it was pretty hard to

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have them. Yeah, if I had the time over again I should have picked the signs earlier, looking at the health of my sort of step-father failing and then dragging Mum's self down. I was away a lot see so I didn't see that and by the time I got some help the horse had bolted and yeah, so. So

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because Mum always had high blood pressure and so forth, so they always had a couple of beers after the day was finished so that didn't help, oh well.

**Did she pass that down to you, the high blood pressure? Is that something you suffer from?**

I'd say so, I'd say so and glaucoma and that's hereditary. I've told my kids so yeah and heart attacks are quite common in the Williams family, uncles have had it and some of the

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aunties, so we are quite aware of it.

**So after the HMAS Moresby where did you go next?**

Well that was straight to submarines then.

**That was submarine training, okay.**

Yeah, and yeah Moresby was an excellent ship because as I said everyone had a job. You didn't have day wallahs. They're the guys that just do day work. They don't keep watches. When you come off watches you might be in your overalls and

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you sit down and you've got one of these day wallahs saying, 'Don't sit there, your overalls are dirty.' It just gets to you when you know that he's going to be able to watch the ship's company movie that night and you're going to be on watch or something, but I mean, yeah, so I liked that, being on Moresby, it was a good boat. It's probably only one of the only things still floating around that I was on in that era.

**It must have been a big contrast, you were talking about being out in Western Australia, it's beautiful out there, out to sea and then suddenly being down in the depths of the sea in the**

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**cold parts of the world, was that, I mean the submarines, how did you cope with that contrast?**

I remember coming around the south island of New Zealand and I had a submarine jumper on, overalls, undershirt and that and I'm freezing because we were charging the batteries and the air is being sucked down the induction mast and then comes through, through the engine room hatch and then into the engines and it was about minus whatever. Yeah, I mean you did your job and you did it.

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At other times I've been in the tropics where the water temperature is nearly a hundred degrees and you've got no air-conditioning.

**Was it at times like that that you thought, 'God, I'd rather be back on the HMAS Moresby rather than in a submarine'??**

I'd rather be anywhere, anywhere but where I was but it wasn't the case but if you can understand I wasn't the only one suffering. We were all suffering and that makes a difference.

**Was the pay any better working the submarines?**

Yeah, but it's not the pay, well not in my case.

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The pay was always better, I can get say, if you want a basic example, ten dollars less than this bloke, say he's getting twenty and I'm getting ten and if I can get my troops to perform as a unit and enjoy it and I'll get more productivity by saying please and thank you than that guy with the bigger pay.

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**Once you become a submariner, your pay goes up because of commissions I guess? Can you tell us in monetary terms at that time, which was early Eighties I guess, what was the pay difference?**

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I mean about seventeen hundred dollars more than general service, that's about it.

**Seventeen hundred dollars?**

Maybe a bit more.

**Annually?**

Yeah, see they used that as an excuse to say well you get paid more and that's why you don't get this and this and this, so there is consequences and I'd certainly rather my health than the dollars and that was just a carrot and a quick fix way for people who've never done the job to attract

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by dangling the carrot in front of them or the trip to UK to do that. I mean it's got to come from here, (demonstrates) and if you're going to be any good at something it's got to come from your ticker, so unless it comes from there the dollars are irrelevant. Sure it's nice to get them but I'd rather my health.

**What was your official title on the submarines?**

Chief petty officer, MTP, SM,

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submarines.

**What does that stand for?**

Chief petty officer is the rank, then marine technical propulsion, a marine engineer.

**All right, we'll just go back to a lovely story of mateship, an example of mateship, of why you didn't go to South Africa, we touched on it before, can you tell us the story?**

Oh well

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unbeknownst to us there is programs that come out and the fleet program comes out and there was an opportunity for Vampire to on it's way to the UK to call into a South African ports. And unbeknownst to us at the time, well there was about six or seven of us black fellows on board Vampire, but unbeknownst to us

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they had a bit of a chat between the ship's company and certain officers of the ship's company and so forth and obviously, it would have been the regulating or the coxswain of the ship and a number of other heads of the department and it was decided that well if we can't take all our crew into South Africa, which they could have done, but if we can't all be treated the same and drink with each other at the same bar, they're not to go. And

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I didn't know about it until years later and neither did some of my colleagues and it was just nice to know that we were respected that well as part of the ship's company and the crew the same as anyone else. It was just brilliant and yeah, I thought that was pretty impressive.

**That was about '67 that that happened?**

Oh it would have been around about '67, early '68 I'd say, yeah.

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Yeah, it gets a bit dodgy at times and I'll have to chase up some of my old colleagues from the Vampire Association as it's sitting down there at Darling Harbour, rest it's soul.

**That's a fairly maybe good illustration of how you as an indigenous person were treated in the defence force as compared to someone who is an indigenous person in civilian life because there was a fair few problems about that time, '67,**

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**and that was a real something great really for you?**

There was a fair few problems and it's like there is still today a fair few problems and until we have that one door to travel through, either you're in the police force for instance or you're not, so what's the good of having an Aboriginal liaison officer, it's just ridiculous.

**In the police force or?**

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Yeah.

**Or the defence force or anywhere?**

Oh anywhere, either you're a soldier or you're not. We don't have pretend soldiers. You have soldiers that are fully trained and I suggest all the other departments do the same thing.

**Get rid of liaison officers?**

Well sure have them but start putting qualified people in the job. I mean it's a Clayton's [substitute] policing situation where you expect, they have got some fully qualified persons

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but not enough and that's a problem. They don't promote the indigenous people's role in mainstream as they should. For instance if you're going to take a job and you must be of Aboriginal origin you must have the same qualifications as your white counterpart over there and be in the same building and office, not in a separate one.

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This is precisely what happened to me. I'm a qualified sailor, I was on the same ship as this bloke and I had the same qualifications and passed the same exam as him, so that's it. I wasn't over that section, ?Oh that's the Aboriginal section of the ship.? it's absolutely ridiculous and that's how they should apply these things in civvy street, so you're either fully qualified or not. And most of my family are fully qualified, although

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all of them are and that's the way I expect it from everyone else but by dragging it out which happens, and I blame a lot of our Aboriginal people too, for wanting separate roads to travel, it's just not good enough. You get on the same road as the rest of us, heading in the same direction.

**Some people might say that maybe those people need an extra helping hand because of the situation they've come from, do you not agree with that philosophy that**

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**perhaps sometimes they need help?**

They may need a helping hand but sure give them a helping hand but you certainly won't be picking up the wages, you'll be under traineeship wages. Why should you walk into a big job that's been created and getting this ridiculous amount of money when you can't perform? I certainly didn't or my colleagues certainly didn't and we all need help, but at the end of the day I don't sit there and just do Aboriginal

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welfare and pension matters. I do all welfare and pension matters for all people, all veterans and that's how I see it, a two way street.

**We'll talk about your transition, you retired from the navy in 1993, is that correct?**

That's correct, yeah.

**And we pretty much covered your life as a submariner quite well. Do you think there's anything else you'd like to add to that?**

Oh no,

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just because I've got civilian clothing on doesn't mean that I'm not still heavily involved with the Submarine Association and its welfare and also the surface navy and its welfare.

**So you've retired but you haven't completely retired from the navy?**

No, don't think I ever will.

**Never will?**

No, I make a point of, if I'm at the mess somewhere or the air force base out here talking to the young fellows and letting them know that, 'There's some

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help out here if you need it.' and, 'Make sure you do all this and you record all your injuries.' and, 'Don't blame the service because all the service is interested in are the young, fit healthy persons so as you get sick and they move you to the left or the right, understand that.'

**Okay, well what we might do is if you could walk us through some of the things you've chosen to do in your post-war life and maybe after that you could talk about how that's helped you make that transition or hasn't**

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**helped you make the transition from life working in the defence force? So you became president of the Maryland RSL Youth Club, did that happen soon after?**

No, no.

**No? Well what happened just after you left? What position did you take up?**

I took up a posting, I took up a job at the pub at the Rocks there. I was learning to become manager of the pub and yeah, that was fine but I really wanted

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my own hotel and I had a couple of ex-navy colleagues and we were all going to pool our resources and get our own pub. I'm glad that didn't happen as we may have drank too much of the profits but yeah and it was always in our minds. Yeah, after that I think I had a security job for a while with Alcan and yeah and then I became building engineer, assistant building engineer at the Sydney Hilton Hotel

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in town and I was walking around with a clipboard and a bag of fruit [suit] on and nothing happening and thinking, 'My goodness, this is not me.' And then yeah I also had a job there, no that was after there. Then they, then I was recalled, they were looking for and I went back in and, sorry I left the navy first in '85, that's what happened. In 85

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and then in '86 I went back in and in that short period I had a number of jobs and it wasn't until '93 that I started at the hotel, which I said, yeah, security, then the Sydney Hilton and then I went to the RSL in town at the Hyde Park Anzac War Memorial but I also had a little side maintenance business, so I've got a registered business name and it's a maintenance

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business so if I had to do some property maintenance I could.

**So when did you get involved in the Veterans' Association in New South Wales?**

When Mr Hawke was in Government, so I don't know?

**1983, he got in didn't he?**

Yeah but when did he leave?

**Oh that was '86, was it?**

'86? oh it might have been Mr Keating. One of them sent me a tax bill for three and a half grand and I really was upset and went and seen an advocate



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and I said, 'Look I'm going to put in for my football injuries that I had and a few things like that, a couple of broken bones and that?' and he asked me what else happened to me and I told him. And so he said, 'Well do you know you're entitled to this, this, this, this, this and this??' And I said, 'No.' so he filled it all in and I got some benefits and I was thinking, 'Goodness.' And I thought it was all part of my job, to swallow asbestos dust and everything else, to put up with these things that happened, and tank

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cleaning and a few little other mishaps that we had but it's not the case. It call comes under the department of, the Veterans' Entitlement Act, which was, so when something good happened to me I decided to find out more about it and that's when I, 1994, I really started getting to do the veterans side of it. And then because I travelled a bit and was

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talking to a few different veterans on the Aboriginal side of it and we went to a seminar and it was NAIDOC [National Aboriginal Islander Day Observance Committee] week and word of mouth gets around and I realised the importance of how many Aboriginal veterans are out there suffering , so that's when that came to fruition then and I'm still doing that today. Well that's all veterans but particularly, every chance I get for an Aboriginal meeting or something and I know the number of people that are going to be there I'll take some samples up of

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some literature on their entitlements and so forth.

**How many Aboriginal veterans are in New South Wales now that you?**

Well we wouldn't know because they're identified as Australians. It was only recently that the government decided to, well 1988 they started to distinguish obviously, some order came from the Federal Government, 'We want to find out how many Aboriginals.' some census.

**So you tell them what they might be**

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**entitled to. You obviously have to do a lot of research yourself to keep on this information?**

No, I usually use the existing system so I'll go and link them up with the appropriate people in their communities and if that fails we'll run them through the network we have in place down here.

**So you're a liaison officer of sorts?**

Well yes, but I know my job, not as a liaison, I'm not a liaison officer, I'm a link. I don't liaison, I can go into, what I was

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talking about in the police force, why would you be in that unless you're fully qualified so that you can go into any situation and that's what I could do in the navy. You get any situation and steam anything out those Heads, I wasn't a pretend.

**Okay, so we talked briefly about the Veterans' Association and that included your work trying to help people access**

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**welfare and pensions for the Department of Veterans' Affairs?**

That's correct, yeah and I get a lot of support from the Department with backup and so forth and assistance with memorabilia and also New South Wales Legal Aid Advocacy, Veterans' Affairs Legal Aid Advocacy of taking that

side of it out to the bush and up in Kempsey and so forth. And they have been brilliant and they've come

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into the party and they've realised the difficulties that they have out in the bush with the people talking, it's still a black white thing and it's a shame but I can certainly show the improvements in towns that we've, my colleagues and myself have been to and link people up with and now they've got a face they can trust, that's important.

**In the Department of Veterans' Affairs?**

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As well as in certain town with RSLs and sub-branches.

**Is this volunteer work for you?**

Yeah, it's all volunteer, it's not a paid position.

**And you're also on several committees at the local council? Is that the Auburn Council here in Sydney, which council?**

Well no, that's Holroyd.

**Holroyd Council?**

I'm on a couple of working parties plus the Aboriginal Advisory and Consultancy Committee

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for Prospect Creek, Prospect Hill, which is a walkway in conjunction with Fairfield City Council and it's going to be there for evermore. It's the creeks have been cleaned up and land reused and so forth and it's going to be there for evermore. It's under the heritage side of it now and it can't be touched or built on and there's walkways and cycle tracks and it's beautiful.

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**And you also lecture at schools?**

As well, yeah.

**What sort of lectures do you give them?**

Well it depends. It might be, they might want to know and it won't be just myself. They might want to know what opportunities I've had and some jobs in the defence department or when I take the kids bush I subject them to those sort of skills in conjunction with Aboriginal community as well as taking them to military bases to show them. Like I had the girls talking to one of our

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female helicopter pilots just recently and they'd just come back from East Timor and it was good to see, talking girlie stuff and she's a combat person and there's opportunities there.

**And you said you take Aboriginal kids to the bush?**

Well the city ones because they haven't experienced a lot of that. I mean first two little gay kids, for the want of a better name, Basil and Cecil I call them, haven't been fishing and I mean that's terrible, absolutely terrible.

**How do you link up with these kids, these Aboriginal kids?**

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You've heard my phone ringing regularly and that's usually people asking me to do these things.

**So just word of mouth gets around that you're available?**

And when I go down to the police station and they've got some kid locked up and wants someone outside of the family to talk to I do that and just follow it up and make sure that he has an option. I know what it's like to be alone, it's terrible.

**You say you know what's it's like to be alone but you grew up in a fairly big family?**

Yeah, that's true but I didn't have

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Dad. An uncle or a substitute is not the same and mums can only do so much and I'm always mindful of that. And I get annoyed with a lot of these senior members, or men of my age that are doing nothing, just sitting there, taking it easy and that's both black and white because there's plenty of kids out there that need a hand.

**How did the Aboriginal children respond to you?**

Well they're getting it straight

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from the horse's mouth so it's not a problem and once they hear me talk in normal street language and the rest of it they know it's a case of me been there, done that and I get the respect accordingly. So much so they call me Uncle now so that was a change.

**And also you're the president of the Marylands RSL Youth Club, is that a position you still?**

Yeah.

**How did that come about?**

Well our

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kids went through that when they were young and I was on the board of the RSL as a director and outgoing president and they were looking for a president and yeah, I took over from the retiring president. I was warned as a young up and coming RSL person never go near the youth club and I should have listened. But no, we've got six hundred and twenty kids, thirty two different nationalities, some refugees, twelve refugees. And some of the kids aren't well

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off so the RSL sub-branch supports them, buys some of their soccer gear and so forth, so much so that we've turned out some good products, from gymnasts right through, soccer players and small bore shooting and tae kwon do which seems to be one of the keen sports of the day for young people.

**So as president of that youth club you try and focus on sport**

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**for the children?**

Yeah, but I've got, you've probably seen in my yard a number of old vehicles and things lying around, well once I get my Men's Shed, which is a program run by the Department of Veterans' Affairs, those vehicles will be in that and I will be teaching kids in their time basic engineering skills so they'll have a sense of pride and that and we'll probably do those vehicles up, register it and sell it and reinvest that in another project. Just teach them and it will be a safe

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place for them to hang out while they're being taught by us old veterans.

**Have you ever, you mentioned that you think some of the old vets could do more, do you ever try and convince them of that or?**

Well a lot of the vets are but it's only the same faces and as I said the RSL only reaches about thirty per cent of the veteran population. The rest of them are out there really up to here with the system and what's happened to them and

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they're hurting pretty bad, they're hurting pretty bad, so if I can chase some of them up and make a difference and get some of their entitlements through, I always ask them, ?Just put a bit back in yourselves when you get your benefits

through.?

**You mentioned that you're not a member of the RSL club in your area?**

I'm a member of the RSL club but I'm not a director any more.

**Not a director, and what made you come to that decision not to be a director any more? What happened?**

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Well because I wasn't happy in the road they're travelling. I know their core business is gambling but I wasn't happy with which way the money was going and how it was being spent.

**Can you give us, what happened?**

Well I believe that the club is there as a community thing and more money should be spent on the community and things that are happening in the community and it wasn't and I wanted some extra cash for my youth club and they couldn't afford it but they'll send some manager to some city in South Africa via Las Vegas to find out

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how to gamble when everyone knows that Australians are the best in the world at gambling. To me it's dead money and to me that money should have been spent on the kids and their development, not us old blokes that have been there and our use by dates are up.

**When you look back on the transition period, coming from the submarines into civvy life, it must have been quite hard, how did you kind of cope with that?**

Well it's been

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difficult. Nine times out of ten I turned to the old demon alcohol to try and adjust and that's not the answer so I've just got busier and trying to stay afloat and you feel best when you're helping someone and at the end of the day when you're getting a handshake that sort of justifies you're existence but yeah, I can do more this way than I could before and obviously some people think

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I'm doing the right thing because when your local mob puts you in for an Australia Day award I was quite shocked, so goodness.

**How do you celebrate Anzac Day now?**

Well normally I march with my group, my squadron here in Sydney but circumstances required me to go to Canberra to talk the Aboriginal fellas down there at the Tent Embassy who aren't welcomed by the locals, which is the Nullawalla fellas

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and settle a political situation which I did and advised both sides and the War Memorial is happy, the RSL is happy and the Tent City fellas are happy and the Nullawalla fellas are happy. And we've got the Canberra service that we hold down there advertised through the War Memorial and their pamphlets and brochures and so we kicked a goal, so maybe that was meant to happen. I don't know but I was just the meat in the sandwich for a while.

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**Do you feel happy that people contact you to sort out disputes between indigenous communities?**

Well it's not really my job but what do you say? They say, 'We've got nowhere else to turn to.' so you have a look at it and if you can help, fine, or if you can't well move on, move on and that's what's happening. I've got a case there with a lady who used to go out with one of the sailors in the Sixties and there's children involved and he's since remarried and he's got his own family

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and it's not my job, but apparently one of the boys wants to meet the biological father and yeah, so I don't put them directly in contact. I let people know, this other guy, that this is the situation and, 'If you want to do something here's the number.'

**The community work that you're doing now is this something since you've retired or have you always done a little bit of community work when you were serving?**

No, I was on the sub-branch committee but

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no, I was never heavily involved like I am now, so yeah. And yeah, I see a need for it especially after last night with the local government awards and I seen how important, listening to stories in Junee and different regional councils and how they've gone ahead and put programs in the system to let their town survive and most of all their youth and that's good.

**Interviewee: David Williams Archive ID 2362 Tape 08**

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**You're suffering from a few physical and mental defects from your service,**

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**can you tell us what they are and if you're on some kind of disability pension from the Department of Veterans' Affairs for those?**

Yeah, because I had operational service and a lot of things that happened to me were standard basic injuries but see I never drank and I think I might have mentioned that I had four glasses of Victoria Bitter at recruit school and I was sick for three days. And the next time I was

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drinking was in Vietnam after a diving accident and I was sick again after that and I had a rotten headache and I had a cigarette as well so you know that was sort of forced on me. It was peer group pressure and if you didn't have a beer you were considered a bit of a wuss and I was eighteen and I was eligible to drink so because that was the Defence Service age. I didn't have to wait until I was twenty one but I had some rugby injuries with both knees and

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I was taken to hospital and they said, 'It's his cartilage.' and I said to the sickbay staff, 'It's not my cartilage.' and they said, 'Yes it is.' and the next thing I know I'm waking up and they found it was an accruciment ligament, not my cartilage, so I was cut up so what would I know as a young able seaman? And I had some neck problems from rugby and also I'd

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suffered the bends on a couple of occasions from doing different jobs, diving and all the carcinogenics from perhaps tank cleaning and different environments I was in and also the different places and also the sleep apnoea problem.

**Are you on a pension for any of those?**

Yeah, I am now. I wasn't before, that didn't

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happen until 1996 and that's only because I went and seen an advocate from the RSL sub-branch who's an advocate that knows how the paperwork should be filled in. If I had of filled the paperwork in myself I would have shot myself in the foot so to speak.

**Did you get back pay, compensation?**

No, you get, if they knocked it back and you put in an appeal you get back dated until you actually filled the claim

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in but in my case with alcohol abuse and things like that well it was documented what they give me when I had the diving accident in 1965. And they knew I never drank, so who turned me into being a drunk? I suppose the Defence Department. So they accepted that responsibility. And because of the blood pressure side of that you know alcohol is no good for that so that was accepted and it's a flow on from that. Cigarette smoking, well

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they've banned smoking in submarines now. You can only smoke when you're? the engines are snorting and that means the air is being sucked down an big induction pipe and out through the engine and out the exhaust, so yeah I was a passive smoker and that also gives you sleep apnoea and the rest of that so that was well documented. In my case it was documented because it used to affect me and when I went to complain about this in 1993 the navy never

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did anything for me and as a result of that, I mean the letters were written from Concord Hospital by the specialist and so forth so they have accepted that these injuries I have are service related and as a result of that I get a disability pension because of that.

**Is that adequate, that disability pension for you today?**

I think so, that's quite adequate for me. It mightn't be adequate for someone else.

**It's not the same is it, it will change depending on what kind of disabilities you**

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**have?**

Yeah, yeah, yeah it does.

**Okay, what kind of role do you think the defence forces can play for Aboriginal people in the future, for indigenous people in the future of Australia?**

Well they're playing a leadership role as they always have. We're all soldiers, sailors, or airmen. Just because you're Aboriginal is perhaps these days a bonus because you're cultural side of it, the Defence Department has learnt that and they have a cell set up in Canberra purely for

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that to be maintained and there are offices and middle management is educated accordingly, so they won't have just one defence member drawn out of the system and there on his own amongst two thousand sailors, white sailors that perhaps didn't have the experiences that I had of moving around as a young man and so as I say they've gone out of their way so the Defence Department is in good

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sted to deal with any of the up and coming Aboriginal or indigenous people that want to join and that's well accessed. But you still have ignorance in the system and I have a number of, like one of the guy's was sent back from the Gulf and he's really suffering because he feels he shouldn't have been sent back but his doctor she was probably keen

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to, he feels he was gotten rid of off the boat because he was an Aboriginal so there's a problem there. I don't see it like that. I see the doctor was reasonably young and didn't want to take the chance because he couldn't find the problem but he's suffering because of it and all his mates say, ?Oh you're a malingerer, you couldn't go the distance.?

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**What are some of the, you said there was a cultural department set up now, so what are some of the cultural problems that you suffered when you first entered the defence forces that these guys won't suffer now because this department is set up?**

Well there's more information on where their backgrounds come from and what their, and what was important to them, spiritually and so forth and that has created the? The reason I didn't suffer was I know the white fellows ways

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so they can, there is no way I want to talk about the bloke running around the Middle East in a dress and was called JC, fine, I can do that, but those fellows can't talk about how I was bought up and my cultural matters so it was never a problem. But I know all their skills so as a result of that I was probably put in the smart aleck category, so yeah I make it better because I was told by my grandmother, 'No matter what you do, son, there's always someone watching.' so

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you lead by example.

**Okay. How do you think overall the navy treated you in racial terms?**

Well I learnt at a very early age that I didn't have to wear the red shirt, people were going to notice me and I turned it around and always tried to be best at it so whatever it was and I was treated really well.

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There were a few individuals that may not have liked me because I was black or may not have liked sport or may not have or may not have for what ever reason but the system is in place and they have to please explain why this bloke hasn't done this, this and this, so they don't want that on their resume either so you've got to be mindful of that. I know that but some

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other Diggers probably didn't know that and the army is pretty close knit. You're out in the scrub and that's a different set up.

**Is there anything you'd like to add? Your final note of advice or an insight for us at the Archives?**

Well all I can say is the uniform has a proud tradition and it commands a respect and

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anyone that puts it on and does the job fairly and has been given the opportunity will succeed and I think that's the way it will be and always will be and I wouldn't want to see too much more change. I would just like to let my, the people that follow that they have a responsibility, it's their turn now and they've got to look after us

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and do a better job than we did if possible.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**