

Australians at War Film Archive

Tony Ey - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 15th April 2004

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1836>

Tape 1

00:40 **Okay if we get started with the short version of your life.**

My name is Tony Ey. I was born on the 19th of May 1948 in South Australia. I was born in the country. My father was a farmer. We moved

01:00 to the city when I was a young fellow. I went to Glenelg Primary School and then to Mitchell Park High School and then from there Urrbrae Park Agricultural College. Went on the land for about 6 months after I finished school and joined the navy at 17 ½. I spent 20 years in the navy. I did my recruit training obviously at the Navy Recruit Centre in Melbourne, Cerberus. I went on to become a

01:30 navy clearance diver and spent 20 years in the service and in that time I served in almost every role within the CD [Clearance Diving] branch including a tour of Vietnam. I did a 3 year exchange with the US Navy and lived in Hawaii for 3 years. I basically travelled the world with the diving teams and retired from the navy in 1985. I immediately went to the States and I worked

02:00 with a friend of mine in Bridge Demolition using explosive techniques, blowing up old bridges. Came back to Australia. I then gained employment with Dupont and spent the next 10 or so years in the explosives industry. Both domestic and international and then went back to Vietnam and started a business

02:30 with 2 other fellows in Vietnam and finally gave it all away about 5 years ago. I've 2 children. Son Jason and a daughter Kimberley and now I'm just relaxing and trying to enjoy myself with my hobbies.

That's a great nutshell. Let's go back and start with your very earliest

03:00 **memory.**

I'm not sure I have, well I say that my first recollection but probably the things that stick in my mind as a child is spending time with my grandparents' property just out of Adelaide. They had a growing property, almond growing property and that was the highlight of my childhood

03:30 was being able to spend time with them. I do have some quite early memories of being on the property but other than that I know some people can bring up some particular instance or memory but I can't.

Whereabouts in the country were you born?

A little one horse town called Yundi down on the Fleurieu Peninsula just south of Adelaide. Between Adelaide and Victor Harbor. Dad has just, well he hadn't been back from the war that long and

04:00 he had a little dairy and he grew a bit of wheat and so and feed and so on.

Is that near your grandparents?

Wasn't too far but I was still very young when Dad decided to move to the city.

Do you have any recollections of being on that property?

No, too long ago.

Where exactly was your grandparents' dairy then?

They lived in a town called Langhorne Creek only about

04:30 40-50 miles out of Adelaide. Quite a big wine growing area. In fact all my relations are in that area. Bleasdale Winery which I think is the second oldest winery in Australia is the family winery and we used to go to the property we were surrounded by uncles and aunts and one owned the pub and most of them had properties or vineyards and the winery of course. They were great times.

05:00 **What sort of things did you get up to on your grandparents' property?**

I used to love driving the tractor. They had a motorbike. I used to, there were a lot of rabbits on the property in those days and as a young fellow I used to set a lot of traps for rabbits because we loved to eat rabbit. I learned to shoot at a very young age so we used to shoot rabbits. We had a ute [utility - small truck] on the property which I just loved to drive when I was a

05:30 little fellow and I can remember my grandmother letting me drive my grandfather's car which he didn't know about to the next nearest town which was Strathalbyn and I was such a little fellow and I can clearly remember sitting in the car and looking below the steering wheel because I couldn't see above the steering wheel so I looked above the dashboard and I can still see this in my memory, a car coming the opposite way and their jaws dropped because they looked at this car and

06:00 they couldn't see the driver because I was below the steering wheel. They couldn't see me but my grandmother trusted me and it was quite safe in old slow cars. I just loved driving any vehicles.

How old would you have been when you learned to drive?

7 or 8 I think and they wouldn't let me ride the motorbikes until I was about 12.

Who taught you to drive?

Dad used to let me sit on his knee when I was a little fellow and steer

06:30 but I always had a, I always felt I had a bit of a natural inclination to mechanical things. I took to driving quite easily and so driving around the paddocks and the property you soon learn to handle a vehicle okay.

So would it be sort of weekend trips out to your grandparents or school holidays?

Mainly school holidays. The odd weekend because Dad worked shift work. He was with TAA [Trans Australian Airways] at the time

07:00 so yeah, once a month we would get up there and of course school holidays particularly my older brother and I would fight over who would go and spend the school holidays on the property. In the end we used to split the time and get half each because we both loved it.

So when you used to go and visit your grandparents were there other kids around?

No. No. Nearest town was Langhorne Creek but we didn't need other kids. We just, even to this day we are

07:30 sort of outdoor sort of people. We loved going bush and fishing and so on.

What were your grandma and grandad like?

Fantastic. I suppose everybody says that but my grandmother was one of the warmest people I have ever known. A bit of a character and my grandfather was a typical tough farmer. His nickname was 'The Brown Bomber' in the district.

08:00 Like Joe Louis [American boxer] because he could fight. I'll give you an idea of the character. My grandfather, he and his mates apparently played for the local football team in Australia Rules Football and the stories still get around Langhorne Creek about them. For example, there was a fight started on the field one day and the three brothers actually cleaned up the entire other team so they

08:30 liked a bit of knuckle. They were tough buggers. It was a tough world I suppose but he was a hell of a nice bloke but a tough man, a very hard man, but we loved him.

What sort of things would you say you learned from spending time with your grandparents?

Well I think you learn a lot from people's character and the way they treat other people. Country people are so honest and down to earth. You learn a lot of basic

09:00 values of life. You're close to nature. You just, yeah I think you learnt the important things in life and the important things in life aren't bricks and mortar. They are grass and animals and things like that that are beautiful.

When you spent time with your grandparents would you say they spoiled you like typical grandparents?

My grandfather didn't spoil anyone.

09:30 but my grandmother certainly did. My memory of Granny was I was on school holidays. I guess I was about 12 years old I might have been a little bit older and all kids like to sneak a cigarette now and again and anyway my grandmother sat me down one day and she had the occasional cigarette and she actually said, "Would you like to have a cigarette with me?" because she knew that kids were sneaking around the back having cigarettes and that and I was quite surprised

10:00 and she sat down with me and I had a cigarette with her and it sort of, it was good for me because it

sort of took this, kids like to do things behind their parent's back and this sort of thing and that sort of made me realise it wasn't so much fun after all.

Do you remember when you did first sneak a cigarette?

Yes. My mother smoked for a while and I pinched one of her cigarettes from a

10:30 packet and went down behind the shed and lit it up and nearly choked. I smoked until I was 21. Not heavily but just the occasional cigarette but in the diving branch they frowned on smoking and one day the doctor of underwater medicine put out a decree that anyone who smoked from that time on was out of the diving branch so I went up to the nearest fellow, I had a packet of cigarettes in my pocket and I said, "Do you smoke?"

11:00 He was just a sailor and he said, "Yeah." and I said, "Here you can have these." So I never had a cigarette to this day since.

Did you get in trouble for smoking as a kid?

No I was never caught.

So apart from spending time on the property with your grandparents whereabouts did your family live?

When we moved to the city we moved to a place called Burnside which is up in almost

11:30 in the foothills of Adelaide. My only memories of that place were my brother and I going down to the local river catching tadpoles and my young brother used to just go run and Dad had to build a high fence to keep him in and I remember Dad had only just finished this fence about 6ft high. My brother was only a little tiny tot and Dad is standing by admiring the fence

12:00 and my young brother came bolting around the corner and went straight over the top of the fence and gone and then we moved to Glenelg down near the beach. I went to Glenelg Primary School and Wingham [Mitchell Park?] High School. Did a lot of swimming and snorkelling and didn't have a bad childhood.

What was the family home like?

You mean as far as the atmosphere?

Physically what sort of home was it?

Just an old, well not old, it was

12:30 brand new. Dad had it built. An old double brick type home. 4 bedroom. Corner block. Walking distance to the beach. Not a bad spot.

So how many kids were in the family?

I have 2 brothers, 1 older and 1 younger. I've always wanted to, right from a very young age I wanted to join the navy. I had a fascination with warships.

13:00 and it wasn't my brother being older he had no interest in the navy until he became an apprentice printer and then after a while he decided that was not the way to spend the rest of his life and he'd listened enough about the navy and then one day he said, "Bugger it, I'm going to join the navy." and off he went and I was as jealous as hell. So he went off to the navy and I followed suit and of course, my younger brother there was no option he had to join the navy as well.

What was the age difference between you?

2 ½ years to my older brother and 3 ½ years to my younger brother.

How did you get along as kids?

I think like all kids we fought like hell. My older brother and I had a bit of a love/hate relationship. He always used to knock me around and hated me to follow him around as a kid yet if anybody tried

14:00 to do the wrong thing by me he would sort them out, but when I was a baby apparently, on my grandparents' property they had a big old stone cellar to keep the butter and so on and I was only a baby and apparently he threw me down the stone stairs. I still have a scar you can just see when he split my head where he threw me down the stairs. So that went on quite often. We would always fight.

14:30 I'd say it was our mid teens when it started to turn around a bit and from then on we have been best mates. My younger brother a bigger gap so perhaps I didn't know him as well and of course I left home at 17 and I went bush for 6 months and then joined the navy so David, my younger brother was still a little fellow basically so yeah, I didn't see as much of him

15:00 and of course, once he got in the navy you all go your own way. Yeah, not quite the same relationship perhaps as with my older brother.

Did you get your payback on him?

Not really. Never had the chance.

So as young fellows what sort of stuff would you and your older brother sort of bicker about?

Just, he was annoyed at me being around because you

15:30 tend to look up to your big brother. He does things that you can't do and he's got older mates and you see that they are going to dances and doing all these things so especially in your early teens you tend to want to be part of the group and of course, he's trying to get rid of you all the time. I suppose I did give a payback, well it wasn't a payback, once we were on our bikes and he was off to catch up to his mates and I thought I

16:00 would follow him and he was going pretty fast trying to get away from me and I was trying to catch up and he actually came out of a side street onto a main road and he was looking at me over his shoulder trying to get away from me and he didn't see a car and the car was coming along and just whack. Luckily it wasn't going very fast but knocked him off his bike and wrecked his bike and he had to go to hospital to be checked out. So

16:30 at the end of the day he was okay. So I suppose that was a bit of payback. Serves him right.

As young kids what sort of things would you do for entertainment?

Well when we were really young we used to love roaming around. There was an old quarry and we loved roaming around the old quarry. In fact we found one quarry nearest that had a lot of tunnels in it. I mean not normal tunnels but almost like Second World War

17:00 tunnels. We used to love running around those. We used to go tadpoling, riding our bikes. We liked our sport. I got into baseball at quite a young age. I loved baseball. Just basically doing what young fellows do. Trying to get into trouble. Doing what your parents tell you not to do.

What were those old tunnels like that you found?

Well there was

17:30 nothing in them. We were always sort of hoping we would find weapons and this sort of thing but they were cleaned out. They weren't very large. In some cases they went quite deep and we didn't have the gear, the lights and so on to go too far. We were a bit scared to go in too deep. We didn't know where they went. It was quite a news item. In fact I hadn't thought about them since but they probably were to do with World War II I would say.

18:00 **When you were roaming around the quarries as kids what sort of things were you getting up to?**

I think it was more exploring you know. There really wasn't much there to do. I mean today's kids play computers and watch television. We didn't have that so you really just explored. You just roamed and looked for things. Look for pets. Get an animal for pet or something. Look for birds' eggs and tadpoles and

18:30 frogs and we would bring all this stuff home. In fact as kids we had possums for pets and magpies and we found all these things in the bush. They would fall out of the nest or lost their mothers or something so yeah.

Some of the other blokes we've spoken to have told us when they were out doing similar things they were playing cowboys and Indians and you know imagining they were part of the Famous Five [Enid Blyton stories] or things like that. Were you having any things like that?

Yes at a young age of course

19:00 cowboys and Indians was the big thing. That was my favourite. In fact I got into a lot of trouble with cowboys and Indians because we had to go to Sunday school and my father always said to us, my parents didn't go to church they weren't particularly religious, "You have to go to Sunday school so you can make up your own mind about it." So we were only little fellows and Mike, my older brother and I

19:30 we didn't like this Sunday school business very much started to wag Sunday school and Mum used to give us sixpence each to put in the plate so we couldn't go home with the money. We thought that was too dangerous so we used to hide the money in the neighbour's hedge sixpence at a time and anyway one day someone from the church, one of the lay sort of preacher types came and knocked on the

20:00 door and, sorry I digress. One day I came home from Sunday school and Mum said, very innocently, "What did you learn today in Sunday school darling?" and I'm only a little fellow and I didn't know what to say here and I couldn't think of anything and she said, "What did you learn about today?" and I said, "Cowboys and Indians." And she looked at me a bit funnily and she said, "Cowboys and Indians?"

20:30 and then they started to twig that we were wagging Sunday school and she asked Mike and Mike said, "No, no." He was a bit older and a bit smarter and he said, "We learned about...." He knew enough

about the Bible to come up with a reason and the fact this lay fellow I was telling you about he eventually came to our place and banged on the door and Dad answered the door and Dad was a bit of a tough old bugger and he made us go to Sunday school up to this point.

- 21:00 And this fellow said, almost poking his finger at Dad and said, "Your sons have not been going to Sunday school." and Dad sort of got his back up and said, "If you can't keep them interested enough to make them want to go that's enough for me. Now get the hell off my property." So a lot of respect for my father and more respect after that day.

Did you get pocket money as kids?

Yeah. For years we used to get 2 shillings, 2 shillings a week

- 21:30 and that used to get us into the movies. We'd go to the movies and see a film for about 1 [shilling] and 6 [pence] and with the other 6 [pence] I used to buy a packet of liquorice and that was my big day out. 2 shillings a week.

Did you have to do chores?

Yes, Dad. Not around the house. The three boys, and Mum never used to make us do anything around the house but Dad made us help him weed the lawn

- 22:00 and so my brother and I would go out there and weed the lawn and Dad would give us a bucket and fluff all the weeds up. He used to say we had to fill the bucket so we would fluff all the weeds up so it looked it was totally full and we'd take it into Dad and say, "We've finished Dad." and he'd go whack and push it down and, "Oh no, away you go." So we would do that all day for our 2 shillings.

Did the family ever go on holidays?

Yes. Mum and Dad loved caravanning so

- 22:30 every school holidays Dad would get a caravan. Hire a caravan we didn't own one and we'd head off. Generally across to Port Lincoln because my father was a mad fisherman and the odd year we would go east towards Mt Gambier and so on, towards the Blue Lake. So that was our main holiday and because Dad worked for TAA we used to get discount fares
- 23:00 as well and I can remember it used to cost us kids 17 and 6 each to go to Melbourne from Adelaide and quite often we'd talk Mum into taking us to the movies in Melbourne so would fly over to Melbourne that Saturday morning, go to the movies and fly home that afternoon. But I used to, I loved aeroplanes too and Dad used to take me out to the airport and get a ride with, if they
- 23:30 were taking a test flight after an engine overhaul on an aircraft or something like that. Get to go on a ride and check the engine out. It's quite safe. They wouldn't allow it these days probably but I had a love of aviation and consequently got a pilot's licence and stuck with it. In fact my hobby now is gliding, one of my main hobbies. Stuck with me all these years.

What did your dad do for TAA?

He was a, I don't know what they called them

- 24:00 He was responsible for actually releasing the aircraft. He was responsible for making sure the weight and balance was correct. In those days it wasn't computerised of course and in those days the weight and balance had to be worked out. The passenger load and fuel and so on and the pilot couldn't go until he was physically handed this piece of paper, this release showing him that the aircraft was in fact ready for flight and
- 24:30 that was Dad's main job making sure the aircraft were ready to go safely.

Tell us about your dad. What was he like?

Well he's still going, 90 odd. Well yeah I mean obviously he's my father and I think the world of him but he's probably the most down to earth man I've ever met in my life. He went through a lot. Of course he grew up

- 25:00 in the Depression. He was a farmer when war broke out and he walked off his farm to volunteer. He was the first fellow to volunteer from his town. A place called Coomandook in South Australia and joined the air force just because it happened to be, I think he walked in and spoke to the air force guy first and he went off to Western Australia. He was older than most of the other fellows who joined up with him
- 25:30 and he might have been too old to be a pilot I think, so he became an observer/navigator and then he was sent off to the Middle East. He went over on the Queen Mary I think to the Middle East and did a few years in the Middle East. He had been married about less than a year I think when he went off. Got shot down about 5 times in the Western Desert and chased [Field Marshall] Rommel all over the Middle East,
- 26:00 all over Africa. A lot of operations against submarines using bombers. A lot of submarine operations, anti-submarine operations in the Mediterranean. Across to Greece and crashed about 5 times and

survived. The worst one was he crashed out in the middle of the Libyan Desert behind enemy lines and the 3 of them, the crew walked back across the desert without any food or water. He was very lucky he made it and that made him

26:30 into a very, very, I wouldn't say tough man but a, what would I say? You know a man amongst men. There's no frills about him and very down to earth. Very straightforward, very honest man but he went through a lot. I have a lot of respect for him. In fact I think his story, because there is a lot of books that he has mentioned

27:00 and he belongs to a very exclusive club actually. It's called the Late Arrivals Club and there are a few men in it from World War II, but to be a member of the club you had to have crashed behind enemy lines and walked home. Yeah, so I'd say reading about his exploits and not that he talked about it much but that sort of got me interested in war, wars.

27:30 Not so much fighting wars but the machinery of war. You know, big aircraft and ships and I suppose that got me started and decided that I wanted to be in the navy.

As a young fellow what did you know of your dad's service?

Not a lot. Not until you know, I don't know what age I was but where you actually start to stop and take notice and read things and Dad used to go to the odd Anzac Day march

28:00 and the occasional reunion although there weren't too many of them left. But I had an interest and when I became older I started to read everything I could find and Mum had a lot of newspaper clippings of Dad when he came home and when he got shot down he was always in the Adelaide papers and in fact what probably really got me going was

28:30 Mum still had the telegrams she received from the Department of Air Force or whatever they called themselves in those days and the first telegram was on the 10 day trip, 'We regret to inform you your husband missing in action, shot down behind enemy lines presumed dead.' My mother was a nurse during the war and she told me that she figured out that he could

29:00 probably survive a maximum of about 10 days in knowing what she knew and on the 11th day she got a telegram saying, 'Pleased to inform you that your husband has been found alive.'

Did your dad ever talk about any of his experiences?

He does now but as a young fellow he didn't, well when I was young but he talks about it now. I'm more interested and I ask a lot of questions and also the fact that

29:30 I suppose I had had a taste of war as well, he is quite happy to talk to us about it.

Did your mum discuss it with you when you were a kid?

No. Not at all. I don't think women liked to dwell too much on war and the effects it has. I think it affected my father quite a lot. As I look back

30:00 I can see things in my father's behaviour that I now understand. He was quite alone in a way. He only had one or two good friends. He avoided social events and he wasn't a social person and you just put it down to him being him but I put it down to his war experiences. He was a loner. He very often went off on his own fishing, just alone and you know, so at the time

30:30 you just thought, "Dad likes to fish." but now you can see he just wanted to be away and I think that's the result perhaps of what he went through.

So all of those telegrams and things that your mum kept, how old do you think you would have been when you first saw those?

I suppose 7 or 8. I started to be interested and dig through his old photo albums because he had a lot of photos taken in the Middle East. Being an observer

31:00 on the aircraft he was responsible for the aerial photography too because they used to photograph their targets so he had some good old photos. Yeah I was always fascinated to look at those and find out more about it, read more about it.

When you started to develop your interest in war machines and possibly having a service career did you talk about that with your dad?

Oh yeah.

31:30 He knew about it and encouraged it. He thought it was great that I wanted to be in the navy. He never really said why but I just, I thought it was a great career. In those days it was a good career and I could never ever entertain the thought of doing a 9-5 job or sitting in an office or being a panel beater or a hairdresser or that

32:00 never ever entered my mind. I always had this, I suppose spending my time on the farm as a young fellow gave me that. I always loved the outdoors and I wanted a bit of adventure. They say never

volunteer for anything but I've spent my life in the military volunteering for everything and it's a hard habit to break.

Did your dad ever try and encourage you to follow in his footsteps into the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force]?

No, not at all. He never tried to influence any of us

32:30 other than that prompting now and again where you've got to think about your future and you need a good career. In fact when I went into the navy I had no idea what I wanted to do. I just wanted to be in the navy. I just wanted to be on a warship at sea and Dad, that's the only time when he did make a comment on what I should do. He said, "Get a trade. Get something you can use when you come out." and I just pulled out of my head, electrician, and thought

33:00 that sounds good and he said, "That'll do." so I went into the navy and I was going to be an electrician.

What sort of woman was your mum?

Very much like my grandmother. A country girl. In the bush sort of the person who had to walk 3 or 4 miles every morning to school or ride a horse to school. A real country lady. Very warm.

33:30 Very warm person. Very loving. Great cook. Great role model. Lovely person.

What sort of things would she cook?

Oh well I suppose you know like most women in the old days they all cooked their own cakes and roast dinners. She could cook anything really.

34:00 Unheard of in those days to use a packet anything. Everything was made from scratch. Yeah, I mean other than your usual run everything was home made and plenty of it. It was great.

Did she ever discuss with you what it was like having your dad away?

No not really. She was, actually she stayed at home

34:30 during the war with her parents and nursed in the local hospital. But yeah I gather from the odd comment that she did make that it was pretty worrying, lonely time. I mean her husband, newly wedded husband had just gone off to war on the other side of the world and not knowing when he was coming home and get these telegrams saying he had been shot down. Obviously a bit unsettling. I think she was pretty pleased to see him back.

Do you know how they met?

Yes, I think Dad when he was farming down at Coomandook, he was a wheat and sheep farmer before the war and of course Mum living on her parents' property and Dad had a big Panther motorcycle he used to ride to town on and apparently a friend of his was from Langhorne Creek and he said, "Come over to Langhorne Creek and stay with me for a while."

35:30 Dad went over for a weekend or something and met Mum at a local dance or something and then from then on he used to ride the bike from Coomandook to Langhorne Creek every weekend.

When you were saying your mum did some nursing during the war, was she a civilian nurse?

Yes, civilian nurse. Yes.

And do you know she just started doing that because of the war or was that something....?

No, I think it was something that, she just decided on nursing as a vocation

36:00 and by the time war broke out she was a qualified nurse. I never really thought about why she wasn't asked to join the military. Maybe because nurses were still needed at home.

So as a young fellow then with that sort of fascination with the navy and the services did you get to have any kind of exposure to the navy as a kid?

Yes, when we

36:30 lived in Glenelg and I was at primary school every time a navy ship came into Adelaide I used to be onto Dad's back, "Come on Dad I want to see the ships." so every ship that came in we went down there and I was in the queue and walked all over that ship and thought it was fantastic. One memory I have was the [HMAS] Melbourne came in and she was the carrier, the flagship, and we went down to Outer Harbour to see her the morning she was sailing

37:00 and it was a beautiful clear morning and the water was green and clear and there's this huge aircraft carrier there and the fans are humming and everything's happening and the sailors are running around and it's just a moment that is frozen in my mind. I'll never forget I was standing down near the stern of the ship down near the big quarterdeck and I noticed that the ship's divers were in the water, something to do with the propellers. They were in the water and I looked down and there's this

37:30 huge warship towering above them and the divers in the water and such a beautiful day and I went, "There's nothing else in the world for me. This is what I have to do." and at that stage I had no idea that one of these days I would be one of those fellows in the water.

When you'd go and see the navy ships like that would your brothers go as well?

No, occasionally but they didn't have the interest at all. I think I instigated it.

38:00 My brother just joined of the navy more of a, "I'm sick of what I'm doing I'll give that a go." I lived and breathed the navy. Every book I could get a hold of, everything I could read about World War II and World War I and warships and then as I said when my brother and I were both in the navy and Dave was old enough he just felt that why not. He'd better be in there as well.

Those days that your dad

38:30 **took you down to the naval ships were they really special times to get to hang out one on one with your dad?**

Yes they were because generally it was just Dad and I and I think Dad was a little proud that his son wanted to go down that track because Dad's very patriotic. Yeah I think and he thought it was a great career.

39:00 He stumbled into the air force really. He could have been in any branch, whoever took him he would have walked through. He just wanted to be in the war but Dad's always loved the sea and is a keen fisherman and he thought it was pretty good that his son wanted to be in the navy.

Did you have any uncles or grandparents that served?

Well my grandfather, Dad's father died before the war

39:30 but his brother was in Gallipoli and in France. He was wounded about three times. As a matter of fact I only just discovered this particular uncle of Dad's was the sergeant of the very last company to be withdrawn off Gallipoli that night and he was the sergeant of the last company off the beach and I was fascinated to read about that. My two uncles both were in the war, one was army and one was

40:00 air force. The fellow in the army I think he was in the Middle East but no navy. There is no navy in my background at all. They are all army or air force. My mother's father being a farmer, a primary producer he had to stay at home. Another uncle, my mother's younger brother he was air force as well. So probably more air force in my background.

Tape 2

00:31 **So the great uncle that was at Gallipoli did you know him? Was he still around?**

No. Well he was still alive when I was a young fellow but you know I suppose uncles at that age you don't see a lot of all your relatives but Dad's often talked to me about him because I have asked him and he said he was a lovely old fellow but very quiet. He married a French girl in France and brought

01:00 her home. Had no children unfortunately but yeah, Dad's memories of him were just a lovely old fellow but very, very reserved. Didn't have any friends, didn't socialise with anybody. Didn't mention the war. Just sort of withdrew into himself but still a lovely old fellow.

What about your uncles that had served, you said one was in New Guinea?

In New Guinea yes, in the army and the other fellow was in the air force.

01:30 No, when I was growing up they never talked about the war. Never talked about it. I suppose when I was young the Second World War was reasonably recent. It had only been finished 10 years when I was 7 years old so no I suppose a bit like Vietnam, for years and years everybody kept it, didn't want to know about it. I suppose it was a bit different but sometimes when you get a bit older you are prepared

02:00 to revisit some of the memories.

What about at school did you learn anything of or what did you learn about Australia's military history?

Not enough I don't think. Yeah probably not a lot at school because as I say the Second World War was reasonably recent and of course the Korean War, so I suppose most people just wanted to forget

02:30 war and get on with it. The generation before me had had too much of it I imagine and I mean at school it was very patriotic. They played the National Anthem every morning and we all had to fall in and form up while the flag was being raised and that was good but I wouldn't say we learnt a lot. You just touched basically on the war but very, very lightly. No detail.

Which flag and National Anthem?

03:00 'God Save the Queen' and the Australian flag. When I was a kid, people find it hard to believe now but even when I was a kid going to the movies at the picture theatre before the picture started they played, 'God Save the Queen.' They wouldn't believe that.

Did people sing?

No, no they didn't sing. It was just. I think people were very patriotic particularly after the war.

03:30 I think a recent war and having been through a war makes people a bit that way. I think we've lost a bit of that.

When you are talking about that sense of patriotism do you think that was an Australian patriotism or British?

Australian. Absolutely Australian. I think, or what I've read the post World War I, that era was very much the old,

04:00 they still felt the Mother Country and England and part of the Empire and we had to do what we were told and all for the Queen and country but no, I think my generation and even Dad's generation were very much Australian. In fact Dad, when he did talk about the war he would basically tell you about the incompetence of the Poms. He couldn't stand working with the English and he tells you stories about the absolute incompetence and people getting killed and failing

04:30 and they were given rubbish so Dad if anything was in fact anti-English.

Tony what are your recollections of starting school?

Pretty exciting. I thought kindergarten was fantastic. I fell in love with all the girls in kindergarten. Yeah I didn't mind school as a young fellow.

05:00 I thought it was pretty interesting. I've always had a pretty inquisitive mind. In fact I used to follow my mother around and ask her questions and right throughout my life have always commented on how they could never shut me up because I was always asking questions so yeah, I had an inquisitive mind. I quite enjoyed primary school and I liked the sport. I had some good mates and it was a mixed school which was good.

05:30 But yeah I think by the time I got to high school I was getting a bit old and ready to go into the navy at that stage.

Who was the little girl you fell in love with in kindergarten?

I can't remember her name but she was a cute little thing with long blonde locks. I probably only talked to her twice I think. I just a little crush I suppose.

And what about primary school? Where did you go to primary school?

I went to Glenelg Primary School.

06:00 I moved next door basically, sorry from the primary school into the main school they split it and you crossed this line and you went into the senior school. Yeah, most of the memories of that were more playing sport. That's where I started to get stuck into the baseball. I loved the baseball. Funny, our coach was a woman teacher. She coached the baseball team. Mrs

06:30 Roberts yeah, I'll never forget but it was good. We were living on the bay and I liked to swim and we used to go snorkelling and spear fishing all the time and I was always fascinated by, in those days they called them the, 'Bay Boys' on the motorbikes. I always loved the motorbikes and you'd see these fellows riding around, only young fellows of course but with the big British machines. No Japanese bikes in those days.

07:00 No helmets and I thought that was pretty neat these fellows riding their bikes around the place so eventually I got one.

Did you become a 'Bay Boy'?

No, no well I had a, no I didn't. I never got into the sort of leathers although in those days we you know, the brushed back hairstyles and the ducktails and that sort of thing. Quite common for us to wear all black. That was the trendy thing with the pointy toed shoes and

07:30 at the local dances driving and they were good times.

Were the Bay Boys, were they a sort of a gang?

Not in the sense of a bad bike gang like you hear about now. They were just fellows 16, 17 because you'd get your licence in those days at 17. They were just young fellows who loved to ride motorbikes and make a lot of noise and you know, but

08:00 they weren't bad in any shape or form but I loved their motorbikes. They used to cruise down the main

street of Glenelg and park them all in a row outside the pub and they are all sparkling and great.

Were there any teachers that stand out as being a big influence on you?

Yes, a couple that I do remember clearly that I respected.

- 08:30 One actually, one fellow played baseball for South Australia and I had a lot of respect for him. He was a very tough teacher, a very stern teacher but a hell of a nice fellow. If you behaved yourself you were okay but no one would ever play up in his class because he was a baseball player and along the front of his desk he used to keep a row of tennis balls or if he had a box of chalk and if anybody did anything in that class they weren't paying attention you had a tennis ball or a bit of chalk
- 09:00 in the head and I mean he was accurate. He would hit you every time so he sort of spurred me on a bit. I wanted to take baseball more seriously. I had another teacher and I always respected the, I liked manly teachers. I liked teachers I could look on as men and I think they needed a bit of role model to be teachers. I had another fellow, he was Deputy Principal but he was my maths teacher and he was
- 09:30 actually a maths professor and he was a great bit strapping fellow. About six foot three and just a man amongst men you know. He stood out to me as a man and you respected him and he was the sort of fellow that nobody did anything his class. Not that he had to do anything just his presence. You were a good boy and sit here quietly and, "Yes Sir, "No Sir." and want to do well you know. So those fellows yeah, I
- 10:00 think they sort of pass on to a certain extent as a role model what a boy should be and how he should behave and carry yourself and yeah.

With the baseball that you were doing at school did you play that outside of school as well?

No there was enough, serious enough thing at school particularly when I got to high school I was the pitcher and I mean every lunch time I was down with the catcher and we would do throws for

- 10:30 the entire lunch period. We had training 2 or 3 days after school and on Saturdays there would be competition with other schools so I played baseball up until I left school and I was quite disappointed when I joined the navy that the navy didn't play baseball. They played softball but they didn't play baseball.

Girls' game?

Just the big ball. I mean baseball is a very fast game and I love pitching, I love throwing the ball hard and the softball was

- 11:00 just too big to be able to throw properly and of course the underarm pitching didn't do anything for me at all so no, I changed over and played rugby.

Did you play any other sports when you were at school?

Not really. I was never really interested in Australian Rules. I played a bit but I just loved throwing the ball. Baseball was what appealed to me most so no; I don't recall doing anything other than baseball.

- 11:30 There weren't that many sports. There was football, baseball, oh cricket but cricket didn't appeal to me much either. I'd rather be down the beach in summer.

Did you ever get in trouble when you were in school?

I really can't remember what for but I certainly remember being marched up to the Principal's office for the cuts [strokes of the cane] and they didn't mess about in those days. You did anything wrong and it was straight up to the Headmaster and he kept a whopping big

- 12:00 cane and hold out your hand. I don't remember being whacked on the backside but you used to have to hold your hand out and he would give you cuts across the fingers and pretty big welts and sore hands. Didn't want to go back in a hurry. As I say I really don't remember what that was for but it was probably just something in the classroom. I got into strife a few times but a lot of them I wasn't caught. I got into a couple of fights
- 12:30 in school. In one instance I got in a real good stoush down on the oval and one of the teachers actually saw it and it was with the bully of the school and he was a real loudmouth and in fact after the teacher said, when it was over and I walked away from it and left this fellow, the teacher actually met me on a collision course as I was walking back up the classroom. I thought, "I'm in strife here." and of course everybody knew this joker was a big, tough, loudmouth
- 13:00 with all the young fellows and he just walked up and he walked past me said, "Good on you Ey." and I thought, "Oh great. I'm not in strife." But no, I didn't get into a lot of trouble.

Were your brothers at the same school?

We all went to Glenelg. My older brother went to Mitchell Park Technical High School which I went to and left to go to high school but I think he had left

13:30 when I started. He was 2 ½ years ahead so Mike had actually left after second year high school to take up an apprenticeship as a printer. In those days education wasn't the be all and end all, it was getting an apprenticeship as soon as you could and they used to give them out pretty young. So he had left Mitchell Park. I spent 2 years at Mitchell Park and my parents pulled me out of the place because it had a bit of reputation of being a pretty tough school. There were some pretty tough nuts were coming out of the school so

14:00 they moved me to Urrbrae of all places. Here's a young fellow who wants to join the navy and go to sea and they sent me to an agricultural high school. But I enjoyed it. It was a great school. Most of the fellows at the school were farmers' sons boarding in the city and we learned things that you don't learn at other schools like farm mechanics, how to drive tractors and how to cut hay and how to breed chickens. It was really, I really enjoyed that.

14:30 The best part about it was on school holidays the school would arrange for you to go to work on a property for the holidays and that was fantastic. So I would be out there driving tractors and good fun. Baling hay and wheat and so on.

Would more than one student go to the same property?

No. No. There were enough properties. It was set up so that just about every farm in the state was aware of the

15:00 program and they would just let the school know, "Yes I'm happy to have a young fellow here for 2 weeks over the holidays." and I can remember going to one on the Peninsula. I was 14 and this fellow had a 13 year old daughter. But I really loved it. He used a Land Rover. I wasn't old enough to drive but I could drive this and he soon figured I could and he used to let me have the run of the

15:30 property in the Land Rover and drive the tractor at harvesting. Bagging wheat and on Saturday I remember, not just Saturday but a couple of nights we would go to town and they would have a function or they would have a dance or something and she was quite a nice girl and here I was driving tractors and taking out a girl to the dances and I thought, "This is all right."

Did you have any girlfriends when you were coming through school?

16:00 Through high school. I don't think I had a girlfriend in primary school but by the time I got to Urrbrae I was thinking about girls. It was good fun. I used to ride to school on a motorbike too. As I say you could get your licence at 16 and my brother had a big 500cc BMW and of course, he was off in the navy so I used to ride

16:30 this big, gleaming black machine to school and driving past the girls schools in my uniform and got a bit of attention. So no, I had 1 or 2 quite serious girlfriends through high school.

It's been interesting for us because we are speaking to several different generations in this project of learning how it changed through the generations of where people learned about the birds and bees. Where did you learn?

17:00 At school. At primary school. I can remember some of the guys in my class talking about the birds and the bees and I remember my first reaction was that's disgusting and I said, "That's bullshit because my parents wouldn't do that." So I came home quite disgusted and not believing it thinking Mum and Dad wouldn't do that

17:30 so that sort of opens the door and you think, "Well maybe there is a bit of truth in this." And of course young boys at school that's all they talk about eventually so you start to realise what it's all about and you learn by word of mouth from your mates. Well you know what they've heard at that age.

Did you ever talk about it with mum and dad?

No. No. No, I think in those days things were still a bit too prim and proper so no,

18:00 you'd never mentioned it. You never brought it up and they never brought it up.

What about when you started dating girls were their parents very strict?

Oh yes. I think my first real girlfriend. I'm just trying to think when it was. I was probably about 14 or 15 and when I say girlfriend I only ever saw her on the Saturday

18:30 nights at the dance and we thought it was pretty serious but her parents were so strict that I couldn't see her any other time than the dances and her father would bring her to the dances and then he was there on the spot on the dot when the dance finished and took her home so we held hands between dances and things like that but that was a girlfriend. But yeah, the parents were very, very strict in those days. They watched their daughters very closely.

19:00 And I always felt a little uncomfortable around girls because I had 2 brothers. I think fellows who grow up with sisters are a bit different and Urrbrae, Mitchell Park was an all boys school, Urrbrae was an all boys school so you didn't mix much with girls except the weekends and so on but you, I think I was always a bit stand offish and didn't know how to treat these strange human beings.

19:30 They were different.

So not having sisters and not really going to school with girls how did you sort of formulate your ideas and I guess standards about how to treat girls?

Well I always had that's probably part of the difficulty for me I had a respect, I was taught to respect and I thought all girls were lovely, nice girls.

20:00 You know you'd never make advances to a girl because she was a decent girl and you just assume they are all the same and that they, you know what it was like in those days. Of course they weren't all like that but that's what I thought of most girls. I had a lot of respect for them and that's probably part of the reason I found it difficult. I didn't know how to treat them. You were polite and nice to them but I would never think of going up and asking a girl out. You know,

20:30 I had another girl I really fancied when I was a young fellow in my early teens. She was a neighbour of my best mate and I just thought she was the greatest but it was always from a distance. I never fool enough to actually go up and ask her out so I fell in love with her from a distance and it remained at a distance.

Did you ever find out later if she felt the same?

No I didn't because I ended up, well

21:00 I got another girlfriend and I went bush and then joined the navy and once I joined the navy that was pretty much the end of your childhood. Everything that you had grown up with.

Having that opinion of girls that you respected them all and that they were all sort of decent girls did any of them ever give you a shock?

I don't think any of the girls that I was sort of keen on or

21:30 because I liked those sorts of girls but I do remember there were a few girls in the bay that were a bit loose and pretty well known but yeah, I never liked them. I had a pretty bad opinion of them. But you can't help it. I don't know what it's like these days but you grew up comparing a lot of girls to your mother too

22:00 and you sort of put them in the same mould as your mother and expect them to be like that and I suppose you build a bit of a barrier for yourself and put all women in a box and almost untouchable you know in your own mind.

The girls that had reputations, what would a girl have to do to get a reputation like that?

Well there were girls that and I

22:30 not, I don't think my mates that were like that but there were blokes that used to roam around looking for girls you know. Like they do today I suppose. Car loads of blokes, getting alcohol illegally I suppose and they would see these girls and pick them up off the street and these girls were quite happy to jump in a car and go with them. So they very quickly had a bad reputation but they didn't seem to mind and that's all they did

23:00 because they never had any boyfriends. They never had any respect from any of the blokes. I think my mates were a bit like me and we got into trouble. We drank when we were too young to drink and my mates used to do wheelies because I didn't have a car then. Get into mischief, parties and late nights and drink too much, perhaps smoking and carrying on but I don't think we ever associated with those sorts of girls

23:30 I mean the girls we did associate with weren't even the types to come out to our parties. Our parties ended up being bucks' parties because all the girls we liked and girlfriends all had to be home at a certain time and their parents kept an eye on them. A bit different today I think.

I'm curious to know though the girls that actually had a reputation as being loose girls; does that mean that they were actually sexually active?

Very, very much so. They were roaming the streets waiting to be picked up.

24:00 Some of them were pretty bad. They didn't care. Complete strangers, a car load of boys going past and you'd see them jump in the car and they were gone so I mean that was, we weren't particularly impressed with that. It's funny the one that sticks in my mind she was in the Salvation Army. She used, we used to see her in the Salvo Band. We'd see her banging; she used to bang one of those the whatever they are called.

24:30 **The cymbal or the tambourine.**

Yeah, yeah in the full uniform and obviously a very strict religious upbringing but once she got that uniform off she was the worst of the lot. They used to call her Salvation Jane. She was terrible. I don't understand it but I never thought about it too much.

The dances that you and your friends used to go to who would they be run by?

- 25:00 I think a lot of like halls whether they be church halls or public sort of halls they used to organise dances every Saturday night for the young people. A couple of big proper dance halls in Adelaide, they were pretty big. But they were great. That was the place you had to be. Some of the blokes would pull up outside on their motorbikes and most of the time they would sit
- 25:30 around on the motorbikes rather than go inside and dance, but real rock n roll bands. You know the real old jive of the 60s and Bill Haley and the Comets sort of music. Everybody with their ducktails, their haircuts and the girls with their short skirts and the blokes with their pointy toe shoes but I was never a dancer. We used to tend to sit around amongst ourselves and watch and go look at the motorbikes
- 26:00 and sneak out the back and have a beer. Yeah but they were great.

Did kids go to the dances with a partner or was that where you went to meet people?

No, you went there to meet people. You didn't go with a girl. Girls would show up and boys would show up. They sort of, people stuck very much in their groups. The girls would be in their groups and the boys would be in their groups and of course,

- 26:30 the girls would show up to the dance in a group and you couldn't split them up. They'd stay in their group and the odd occasion you would go over and ask a girl to dance some of them were that shy they didn't know what to do. It was really strange. We were quiet in a lot of ways, I don't know about a protected society it was more closed in their outlook. We weren't as open
- 27:00 minded as they are today. I know that young fellows today treat girls just like another bloke. It's that sort of open relationship but in those days girls were girls. They were almost like foreign, they were almost from another planet you know. Especially growing up amongst boys you didn't know how to treat them.

A few people have told us boys sneaking a beer for Dutch courage to go ask a girl out?

Oh yeah of course. You wouldn't go to these dances without having a few bottles.

- 27:30 The oldest bloke in the group, usually someone would have a car whether borrow it from mum or whatever but the oldest bloke would go in and we used to get the big tallies and you'd get ½ dozen bottles and everyone would be pouring down at least a bottle or two before you got the dance. Oh yeah, Dutch courage. You could never go talk to a girl sober.

What beer would you drink?

Just the local brew. Southwark. I don't think they make it anymore. We used to call it, 'green death' because it had a green label.

- 28:00 The, 'green death'. It wasn't, it was okay but in those days you couldn't handle it very well and I can remember a lot of blokes being sick.

With say a lot of girls having strict parents like the one you described before dropping them off and picking them up where could you pursue any sort of physical relationship with a girl?

Very difficult. Very, very difficult.

- 28:30 At that age I suppose it was quite different from 17 on but I wasn't there, I was in the navy but that period in my early teens you probably didn't know what to do anyway. But you just didn't have the opportunity because fathers were very, very protective of their daughters. During the day of course we did have a group of girls that we knew quite well and blokes had girlfriends amongst

- 29:00 them so on the weekends it was okay during the day you would go to the beach or you'd go swimming or you'd go to the movies and I suppose the movies was the only opportunity anyone got to do anything and of course pretty limited. But no you just didn't have the opportunity. After dark they disappeared I think.

At those dances was there a particular song or couple of songs that were favourites for you?

- 29:30 Oh yes. Roy Orbison and one that sticks in my mind is, 'Only the Lonely' and I do remember a girlfriend I had before I went in the navy. Well a couple of years before and we used to quite often we would meet in town in Adelaide and coffee lounges were the big thing. You would go and sit in the coffee lounge and they'd have a juke box and just sit there
- 30:00 and listen to, 'Only the Lonely' and drink coffee at about 15 years of age and thinking was great. But we used to go to the movies. The movies were a great place to have a bit of a kiss and a cuddle and I can remember going to see an Elvis. They had a run of Elvis movies over a period of a few weeks and I can remember going and seeing the same Elvis movie 3 times. I never saw the movie but
- 30:30 just to get in the dark and into the theatre with her.

What were the sort of movies that were around then?

A lot of war movies. A lot of cowboy movies. Some of the great movies of all time I think. Yeah Elvis movies were just coming out. They were a complete disaster. Nobody liked them but you used to go along. The girls used to like to listen to the music

31:00 but his movies were terrible. But I would say cowboys actually. I can remember going to the movies every Saturday and there was a very strict you know, not today there's an ad and the main movie but in those days they would have like serials to start the show off and there might be Hopalong Cassidy and it was an ongoing serial so you had to go every week to see the next episode and they'd run for 10-15 minutes

31:30 and then you'd see the second best film and then they would have intermission and then they would have the main feature. So you go the movies plus all these other things that they had. But I can remember some great movies. I loved things like, there's one called, 'The Enemy Below' a navy film. Kurt Jurgen and Robert Mitchum. I thought they were fantastic and it was about

32:00 the battle of wits basically between the submarine, the German submarine and the commander and the captain of an American destroyer and those movies I just absolutely loved them of course. Thinking about the navy of course it was pretty obvious.

Did you have any favourite movie stars?

Oh yeah I liked blokes like Robert Mitchum, Audie Murphy.

32:30 I thought he was pretty good. He always played cowboy movies and war movies. He was in fact the highest decorated soldier in World War II before he became an actor. A few favourite female stars. I loved Elke Summer. I thought she was the most gorgeous woman in the world. I actually met her a few years later. She was still gorgeous.

Where did you meet her?

In Honolulu.

33:00 She was, she'd stopped acting but she was took up painting and she was having a painting exhibition in Honolulu and she was a Swede. Blonde Swede. Tall blonde she was, short hair and I was pretty good friends with the Australian consul in Honolulu and he invited my wife and I to this exhibition and Elke Summer was there and

33:30 I couldn't believe it and even my wife said to me that I was gawking at her and my wife said, "She is beautiful." She was.

Were there many rules at home when you were growing up?

Do as you're told. Being boys you sort of, Mum wouldn't give you a belt but what she would do was say, "I'll tell your father when he gets home."

34:00 and that was enough to slow us down and she would. If you did something that was worth a belt she would tell Dad and Dad wouldn't question it, Mum said we'd done something wrong Dad would say. He would walk in the door and she would tell him what it was and we would know what it's for and he'd say, "In the bathroom." and he had a big razor strop and you'd cop a few belts with the razor strop and I mean he never really hurt you but it was enough to injure your pride,

34:30 but it was enough to put you off misbehaving too. I can remember Mum sometimes chasing us around the house trying to catch us and eventually she'd say, "Right I'll tell your father." and, "Hell I'm in for it now."

Should have just let her catch you.

It would have been easier exactly.

So your love for the sea developed at an early age. How did that develop?

As I say

35:00 I don't really know what triggered it but it started with the fascination from my father's background and the war being quite recent and a lot of war movies being on. I can remember as a little fellow going to see, 'Sinking the Bismarck' and the whole movie is at sea. It's black and white, a black and white film and just these massive warships. I just yeah I mean

35:30 I just had a one track mind about warships. I loved warships. There was something about them. The power and speed. Like a racehorse and the ocean. I had a fascination with. I remember the series, 'Victory at Sea' the things that stick in my mind from that series are the huge rolling waves and you know 30, 40, 50ft waves and that always fascinated me. I love rough weather and I love being at sea

36:00 when there is a huge sea rolling and everything feels like it alive and it's just stuck with me. The navy is an addiction. I read everything about the navy. In fact I went, I was that keen I talked my Mum into taking me into the recruiting office when I was about 14 and I knew I was way too young and so did she but I just wanted to get in there and be a sailor and it was quite funny because Mum took me in

36:30 and said, "I realise my son's far too young and he loves the navy but if you could at least give him some photos or talk to him what it's like and when he can join." so the recruiting petty officer was quite good and yeah, made a few comments about I was a little too young at that stage and that kept me satisfied for a little while.

What sort of chat did he have with you about it?

Oh he actually told me what it was like to be in the

37:00 navy. What the recruiting process was like. What I had to do and what recruit school was like and what it was like to be at sea so he was, I mean he indulged me with a grin on his face the whole time and told me all about the navy and I just sat there in absolute awe. So I was definitely navy material.

Where did you learn to swim?

I never formally learnt. I was never taught

37:30 to swim. They didn't teach you in those days. I think just living near the beach, I just naturally went to the beach on the weekends and swam. Off Glenelg there's an old breakwater and an old wharf from the days when the old sailing clippers used to come in and most of it was broken down and it was a great place to fish so we ended up with a face mask and a snorkel and fins and spear gun and we

38:00 just moved on from just swimming, going swimming and going out and spear fishing and I did enjoy the feeling of being underwater and being able to swim around with the fish. Not that it made me think about ever wanting to be a diver but I just enjoyed it.

Who would you do that with?

Oh my brother sometimes but I had two or three mates that were quite interested, quite keen on that sort of thing. As I said we didn't

38:30 have computers so those were the sort of things that you did.

Did you ever have any frights or fears around the ocean?

Not really. We knew there were sharks around but where we used to, off Glenelg it wasn't a problem although they did have a few shark attacks there but no, you never really thought about it. I think

39:00 probably from memory the thing that I was most careful of underwater, because we didn't wear gloves, there are a lot of little prickly things down there and I was always very careful. It worried me more than anything, it always worried me getting these spines on me because I had a few and they fester up and give you all sorts of trouble so that was probably my biggest worry. Be careful what you touch.

Those shark attacks that you mentioned, were they when you were a kid or

39:30 **in the navy?**

Yeah it was quite common in South Australia because that's the, you know, the home of the white pointer around Australia. There's a lot in South Australia and it wasn't that long I suppose. I was suppose when I was in primary school there was a couple of big shark attacks down at a place called Aldinga. Rodney Fox. Have you heard of Rodney Fox? Well he was almost bitten in half by a shark and in fact, my cousin he actually held

40:00 a couple of Australian skin diving titles and he used to spear fish with Rodney Fox all the time. He was a good friend of his so that brought this home but yeah, I mean a lot of the attacks took place at Aldinga. That was very famous for shark attacks and our attitude was we're not at Aldinga so we're pretty safe here, but when you are young you are bullet proof. You don't think about things like that.

Did you do any diving when you were growing up?

No, no, never.

40:30 The opportunity was just never there. No I didn't know what a diving set looked like.

Tape 3

00:30 **Ey?**

It's German. It took me a long time to find out. I actually researched the family history. My father didn't even know what nationality it was but the first Eys came out from Germany in 1847 I think to South Australia. They all settled in South Australia but they were miners in the Harz Mountains in Central Germany and escaped. The mine industry was going broke and they came out. Dad actually thought we were Scandinavian.

01:00 He was quite surprised when I said, "Dad, hey Krauts [Germans]."

Yeah well he would have had a particular interest in that wouldn't he?

Yes that's right. "Dad you were probably fighting Eys in the German infantry!" In fact I stumbled on a book recently on German U-boats and it just opened up and it fell open to a page with photos in it and there was a photograph of a U-boat commander which his white cap on the bridge of the U-boat with a pipe and it said, 'Caption:

01:30 Lieutenant Hans Ey'. I couldn't believe it. I showed Dad and said, "There you go Dad, we were in the war on the other side."

Incredible. So 1965 you join up?

August, yeah 28 August 1965.

What was the process of actually enlisting?

Quite simple I think compared to today. I just went into the recruiting centre and said I wanted to join the navy. They gave me a maths and English

02:00 examination, medical examination and said, "Be here on the 28th August you are on a train to [HMAS] Cerberus." Simple as that.

How hard was the test?

Very basic. I think I got 100% on both tests. It was very basic, can you read, can you count all your fingers. Very basic.

Any sort of medical?

Oh yes they did a thorough medical but not many fellows failed the medical I don't think.

02:30 You can run and yeah, no it was pretty straightforward. Actually I was working in the bush at the time. I loved the bush but the time had come. I actually delayed my entry. I mean I could have joined at 17 but once I went on this sheep property I was having a great time and the navy was always in the back of my head and after 6 months I thought, "I've got to go to sea. The time has come." So away I went.

And did mum and dad have to sign anything at all?

03:00 I don't remember. I probably would've because I was under 18. I'm sure they would have had to sign a parental consent.

At that stage when you were sort of going in had you already let them know that you were keen on becoming an electrician?

Well I said when Dad said to me, "Get a trade boy." and I said, "All right an electrician sounds pretty good." and I was thinking that I would fall into it. I knew nothing about electricity. I couldn't change a light bulb

03:30 but I just wanted to be in the navy.

But nothing was indicated at that stage. You were just going in as a rookie?

Well in those days you just went in the navy or the army or whatever. You just joined as a soldier or a sailor. They didn't care less what you wanted to be whereas these days you go in in a specific category but no, in recruit school they go through the processes and let you know what the different branches are and then you get 3 choices.

So before going in what sort of preparations did you do?

04:00 Nothing. I knew exactly what I was for. No I don't think I did anything. As I say I was working on a sheep property at the time and I was just ready to go.

No big goodbyes at home or anything like that?

Yeah I had a girlfriend and that was pretty serious. She actually followed me to Sydney once I got settled in Sydney. I had no regrets because for years and years this had been in mind that I wanted to be in the navy

04:30 so there was no sort of sadness about leaving home or leaving my mates. This was a big adventure and I was off on the adventure of my life and everything else was second.

And what did they tell you to bring?

Toothbrush I think. They basically supplied everything. From the moment you arrived at Cerberus they started to issue you with your kit and yeah, the navy looked after you.

05:00 They looked after. They gave you everything. I don't recall having to take anything other than a bit of pocket money to get you through to the first payday and a toothbrush.

So what did they tell you had to rock up to Adelaide?

You had to be at Adelaide station at a certain night one evening for the overnight trip on the cattle train which it was. There were a few navy people there to tick us off to make sure we showed up and from that point on you were in the navy.

How many other young blokes were there?

05:30 From memory I think about a dozen from Adelaide.

Any ladies?

Any?

Any ladies joining up?

No there was none. In fact to this day I don't know where they trained the WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Naval Service] because there were no WRANS at Cerberus under training at all. They must have trained them somewhere else.

And how were the navy staff treating you at this stage?

Very nicely until we arrived at Cerberus. I don't think we were accompanied on the train by anyone in the navy but

06:00 they were very friendly but that soon changed.

And did you already have expectations about how you would be treated at basic training?

Probably not aware of the full extent of recruit training but I didn't care. I knew it was going to be a lot of bullshit but I realised this is the price you had to pay to get in and it was only for 12 weeks, 3 months

06:30 so I thought I could handle 12 weeks of anything.

Did your dad give you any words of wisdom before you left?

Just do your best. Be as good as you can.

So you arrive at Cerberus.

Yeah. These days they fly you but terrible train to Melbourne. It was so like a cattle truck. Sit up all night. Horrible damn thing. They met us at Flinders Street I think it was and a bus to Cerberus.

07:00 As you drove in the gate you realised you were in and it was serious stuff and of course they started to issue your uniforms and accommodation and from that time on it was left, right, left, right and stand up straight and don't answer me back, speak when you are spoken to, double up.

Can you recall the feeling sort of coming across the blokes as the bus arrived there changing?

Yeah. Well I, I was excited as hell.

07:30 I mean here after all these years of dreaming I was as you entered the gate and you see the sailors on the gate in their uniforms and gaiters and, "I'm here." I know the other fellows too. I mean in those days they wanted to be there and a lot of excitement and anticipation.

How was the greeting as you stepped off that bus?

I don't really recall because things happen so fast and it's so new.

08:00 'Get off the bus. Fall in. Smarten up you are in the navy now.' And you know, "I'm your mother from this point on look out!" They start to you know; start to give you an indication of the discipline and what is required. It's a bit of a shock to start with.

So the first order of the day was to get your uniform?

I think it was haircuts. March you straight into the barber and gave you a haircut a bit like this. It all came off

08:30 and then they start to issue the uniforms and accommodation and then it's just that gradual process of getting the civilian out of you. You are not allowed to call home. They shut you off basically for I forget how long but the first few weeks basically no contact and it's, yeah they make sure you realised that you are theirs and the gradual transition of

09:00 introducing you to military discipline and slowly but surely they turn you into sailors.

And the group of those young guys going through training what were you collectively known as?

From a navy point of view?

Yeah.

Well I was in what was known as Miran Division but we were addressed as Recruit. Recruit. You are the

lowest of the low.

So Miran Division can you explain?

Well at Recruit School when I was there were three divisions with an intake every month

09:30 and I forget who Miran was but he was obviously some naval hero. There was Rankin Division and I forget the third one so when you arrived at Recruit School there were two divisions there a month and twelve months ahead of you and you even looked at them as very senior people you know but they were still recruits but it was fantastic to be all of a sudden elevated when the new recruit lot came in behind so. So yeah, there were

10:00 three divisions and we were treated, like we fell into together in the morning and we marched together but our tuition was separate. I think there were probably best guess 60 or 70 young fellows.

And did you get any, "You'll be sorry." when you got there?

The navy wasn't too bad. The worst people that I remember. My instructor he was a good fellow. He was only a leading seaman but he was a good bloke.

10:30 The worst people from our point of view were the PTIs, the physical training instructors and the gunnery ranks. Gunnery in the navy was always traditionally the disciplinarians of the navy. They were always very regimented. They had us marching dressed up in fancy stuff and they just lived and breathed discipline and some of the more senior gunnery chiefs were, for want of a better word,

11:00 absolute mongrels. To us they were sadistic bastards but they loved to get a hold of recruits and just march them off their feet and the slightest infringement you spent from 4.00 in the afternoon doubling around the parade ground with a 303 rifle above your head for an hour or two. The PTIs liked to get a hold of us and run you into the ground but that was for our own good, that was okay. But

11:30 we all appreciated that there was a process taking place and a bit of character building and we would come out as sailors.

How quickly did the blokes gel as a team?

I would think that within, the first week is difficult because everything is so new and you are not used to be yelled at and you are not used to having to be at this spot at a certain time and in the navy in those days if they said you have to be here at this time it didn't mean 1 second or 2 seconds

12:00 after it meant you were there and that existed right through my navy career. You had to be on time but I would think that after the second or third week you started to come together. You all looked the same, you all dressed the same and you are starting to learn how to fall in and look like sailors and marching and you are starting to learn to do what you are told and respect perhaps, that this is the way it is, so I would say

12:30 by the second week we are starting to pull together as a team and looking forward to learning as much as we could.

Were there any blokes that couldn't handle it?

Oh yeah from memory I think about the sixth week they gave you the option to say, "No, I am out of here." and I think there were two or three blokes that pulled the pin. They were sort of soft type blokes who missed their mums. You know that sort of fellow.

13:00 But no I think most of the fellows were having a good time.

How long were the days?

I couldn't tell you exactly but I think we were getting up before dawn and you would start with PT [physical training]. After PT you would come in and clean up your bed space, make your beds exactly to the navy standard and every crease had to be spot on. Shower, shave, uniform,

13:30 breakfast. The breakfast was a very short period and if you weren't there on time you missed out and 8.00am I think you would fall in. Inspection of your dress and your appearance and then inspection of your rooms and they would inspect your lockers and everything had to be in a particular place and perfect and if it wasn't they would just rip it all out and throw it all over the floor and tear your bed up and then you had to do that in your own time.

14:00 Spit polish your boots. Polish all the brass in your gaiters and belts and then it was into the day and the day there was always squad drill marching around. There was always PT during the day with the PTIs. Rope climbing and things like that but then as time wore on we got more into the instruction of basic seamanship and what a ship looks like compartment wise and duty watches and navy talk

14:30 and phonetic alphabets and you started to learn more about the real navy and that's when we all started to get a bit interested. The Recruit School was a time you would rather forget. Not very pleasant and you feel a bit it was a bit demeaning in a lot ways but you have to do it.

What was the barrack situation like in housing you blokes?

It wasn't bad. Communal bathrooms and long 2 or 3 storey buildings with cabins off either side of the passageway and they were 4 berth cabins.

15:00 You had a bunk and your own locker. You had to keep it absolutely spotless of course so that wasn't too bad. We had no wet canteen privileges. We weren't allowed to drink. You were allowed to go to the dry canteen and you would buy your washing powder and toothpaste and Mars bars or whatever you wanted and that was about it. We weren't allowed leave. I think we had one leave in the 12 weeks and that was towards the end.

15:30 About the 9th or 10th week from memory and we had to go ashore in uniform. We all jumped on the train and went to Melbourne and had a ball.

What did you get up to in Melbourne?

Well the first thing we wanted to do was get drunk but we felt we had a uniform on and even though we had no badges we knew we were recruits. We kept away from other sailors because you know they were real sailors and they'd probably make fun of us. There were a lot of ships in Melbourne at Williamstown dockyard.

16:00 But basically went to have a beer and try and find some girlfriends if we could. We stayed at a place called the White Ensign Club in Melbourne. It had some sort of affiliation with the navy but I think it was privately owned but it was a great little place. It had a bar and it had accommodation and it cost you about a couple of quid a night or something or whatever it was. A good breakfast and somewhere to camp for the weekend. We just went out on the town and managed to meet a few girls and

16:30 went to a party too and had a great time. I thought if this is what being a sailor is about it's good fun.

Was it handy having the uniform as part of your repertoire?

Absolutely. Absolutely. In those days a sailor's uniform definitely attracted the girls. No doubt about it. The old bell bottoms and the more as time went on even more so as soon as you start to get a few badges and ribbons on it was like a lure.

17:00 **And when was the first time in training that you actually stepped onto a ship?**

During recruit school training you never saw a ship. There were no ships at Cerberus. Only boats, smallish boats. We would go out in boats occasionally but no, you saw nothing of the real navy except for videos and lectures and diagrams. No, there was no interest at that stage or requirement to introduce a ship life.

17:30 **And did they give you any sort of aptitude test to decide where they want you and where you want to go?**

We knew a day or so within arriving at recruit school we did another aptitude test. What do they call it? The ETI, education and something. I can't remember but that was basically again a maths examination and English examination. I was always very good at maths at school so I was pretty pleased to be the only one

18:00 to get 100% in maths and I got 96 in English so I actually topped the whole intake for those examinations but I knew that would help me when I decided what I wanted to be that would help me with my first choice.

And you had three choices?

Yes. Towards the end of the training they started to bring in specialised branches and they would give a bit of a lecture on their job and yeah, you then the last week I think

18:30 you put in a written list of the 3. 1, 2, 3 of your preferences but luckily by that stage I had done a diving test and I had already decided to be a diver by the time that came up.

Can you tell us about the diving test?

They called for volunteers and I think out of my intake about 5 or 6 fellows said they wouldn't mind having a go at being a diver because by that time we had already heard

19:00 that the clearance divers were the toughest branch of the navy and the hardest branch to get in there. There was a lot of esteem there and people were quite interested. Perhaps to have a go, have an inclination for that but my room mate at Cerberus he represented Western Australia in schoolboy water polo and he joined the navy to be nothing else but a clearance diver so when the time came and they asked for volunteers I didn't even give it a thought and he said,

19:30 "Come with me for a bit of company and support." He was a good mate of mine by then so I said, "Yeah, we'll go do the test together." So I volunteered. We went down to the wharf and this big old cranky ex-Royal Navy lieutenant commander who had a ship's diving qualification. He wasn't a clearance diver but he had a basic air qualification. All he did was throw us into the water. Jump in the water with a diving surface supplied

20:00 set on and freezing cold water. Off the wharf, no visibility, no explanation. Took us to the bottom, about

20 ft and the first thing he did was rip our face masks off and you think, "Jesus, what do I do here?" But we had been, we were told, I'm sorry, when you clear a facemask how to put it on so you had to find the facemask at the end and put it back on and keep breathing and

20:30 once you'd done that he ripped the demand valve out of your mouth and flooded the demand valve and kept it for a while and you had to clear that and keep breathing which in hindsight all of that was very, very dangerous things to do to an inexperienced young fellow because if you panicked and shot to the surface you could burst your lung and all sorts of things. But anyway I breathed and it didn't bother me having my facemask ripped off so out of that group of people he recommended three fellows

21:00 for clearance water so I put in my request at number one for CD [Clearance Diving] and because there were only three that's what I got.

So what's going on in your mind when these tests are being done to you? Your mask is being ripped off and?

Who's this idiot? There's a bit of, I don't remember panic but you are sort of pretty concerned. "What the hell is he doing? I'm not trained to do this?"

21:30 I could get in a bit of trouble here." But really it's just a frantic I've got to do this and I've got to recover from this and I've got to do it. I was determined that whatever they did I was going to pass it. That was uppermost in my mind. The fact that I decided I was going to have a go at it I was going to do a damn good job of it. I was going to pass it.

So your mate that conned you into giving it a go he passed as well?

He passed.

22:00 Unfortunately he didn't make it through the clearance dive. I was the only one that did out of the group so I felt that was quite strange that here was I who never had any intention of being a clearance diver and I was the only one to get through but that's another story. He just couldn't handle oxygen. That was his downfall.

Can you tell us about this sort of regard for CDs amongst the navy blokes?

Well I think it was a,

22:30 probably a bit like the average soldier in the army hold the SAS [Special Air Service] in awe because they know that they are the sort of super grunts and in my day I remember in recruit school people talked about clearance diver and the PI [?] branch. Even the PI branch they said was a pretty tough course to get through, very physical but the diving course had a reputation of being hard and nasty and they just pushed you in all sorts of horrible

23:00 conditions. So and a lot of people were put off by just perhaps the fear that they wouldn't be up to it but also the unknown. If you know nothing about diving it's like totally unknown and do you want to have a go at this. But yeah there was definitely this, the navy called them 'bubblied' but it was a sort of a fond name.

23:30 We definitely knew that was the elite of the navy so once I got a taste and started to have an interest I was determined that was going to be the first choice and I wanted to do it with all my heart.

And before you did that test did the clearance divers actually come and give you a talk too?

No. No. No. We didn't get talks from all the branches. Just generally but yeah, you see the clearance divers there weren't any in Melbourne

24:00 and they weren't going to bring one down to talk to us. But there were people who knew, they could talk about other branches and give you a bit of rundown so they could give you an idea. Very basic.

So how was the end of basic training for you?

Fantastic. You knew that when you left recruit school you were in the real navy even though you were only very junior and no qualifications but you are in the real navy and all of my intake

24:30 already had postings to the Melbourne. They were going straight from Recruit School to the flagship, the aircraft carrier whereas I didn't. They sent me off to [HMAS] Rushcutter to do the initial part of the diving course.

Was there any sort of marching out parade or anything like that?

Yeah we had a marching out parade, formal, but I don't recall too much about it. I don't recall any family being there. Now they invite all the families to these passing out parades but it was just another military

25:00 deal but it was pretty exciting for us because we were on the bus and out of there because none of us like Cerberus.

So you finally get to HMAS Rushcutter.

Yes as I say the rest of the intake went to sea direct to the Melbourne but because those that wanted to be clearance divers in those days they would send you direct to the diving school at HMAS Rushcutter in Sydney and you would do what they called the Ship's Divers Course which was a basic 3 week

- 25:30 diving course and with that qualification you got to wear a nice gold diving cuff on your right arm and you were qualified in air diving and you became a useful member of the diving team. So when you went to sea as what they called an ordinary seaman clearance diver you could dive and you were getting diving experience and that was necessary for when you came back to do the full course. So yeah, it was a three week course and we were on that course with other sailors because
- 26:00 other sailor rates can become ship's divers. So yeah I was on a course with a bunch of other qualified sailors from different branches. At the end of the three weeks they all went back to their ships and they kept us budding CDs on for another week and we did what they called the CD Acceptance Course and for that week they just ran you a bit harder. They started to test you on,
- 26:30 well the most important thing was oxygen because one of the rigs that CDs use is pure oxygen and not everyone can tolerate pure oxygen surprisingly enough. They need to see how you handle it. How you can react to carbon dioxide build ups and so on. You actually fall over unconscious and all the doctors are there and they see how you respond to it and if you get through all that then they
- 27:00 recommend you. You remain an ordinary seaman clearance diver and they send you off to sea to get some sea experience and to set you up for the course when you come back.

So that initial 3 week air course what did that involve basically?

Can I swear here?

You may.

To use the diver's term you learn how to run, fuck, fight. Basically that just

- 27:30 means it's tough bullshit. It's the ship's divers' course so it's not the full hard core CD course but they still demand quite a level of fitness so that initially it's a hell of a lot of running and jumping. Swimming in the water all day. The first few days is just physical fitness. You run all over Sydney in bare feet and bloody overalls. Your fins under your arms. Back into the water you swim a few miles with overalls,
- 28:00 wet overalls on. You dive into mud and yeah, they just run you into the ground. All sorts of physical exercise and then they slowly start to, they introduce you into the various forms of air diving. You do theory on physical aspects of diving and then it's a gradual process of getting comfortable with the diving gear and being underwater and then they get you to work under water and then they'll advance to night diving and that's where a lot of the fellows fall by the
- 28:30 wayside. They don't like that and I think from memory the failure rate on just the basic ship's diving course was somewhere around the 60-70% would drop off towards the end of the course so you were left with a core of people. By the end of the 3 weeks you were quite comfortable in the water. You would do ship's bottom searches because that was your primary job as a ship's diver. You learn how to do seabed searches. Basic seabed
- 29:00 searches. You were qualified to dive to 66ft on air and as I say that was my first qualification in the navy. I was a ship's diver. I was qualified to dive to 66ft.

And how many blokes straight out of recruits were there?

Three. My mate who talked me into it he breezed through the diving of course. It didn't bother him and in the final week they discovered he couldn't handle oxygen so that was it, finished, out of it.

- 29:30 He was a very disappointed man and the other fellow packed it in so I was the only one left.

Can you remember your first night dive?

Oh yeah roughly. I think, yeah a bit weird. A bit scary you know because your imagination runs riot. What else is swimming around you? You tend to look over your shoulder even though you can't see. Yeah I think the uncomfortable part,

- 30:00 because we had to go down and do a task and it might be as stupid as having a hammer and chisel and having to cut through a link of a chain with a cold chisel. Bang, bang, bang for an hour or two but the thing is you're working or doing something or it might be a seabed search where they give you signals to direct you around and you are doing everything by hand. They used to have a saying that CDs don't need to see underwater they have 10 eyes; the tips of your fingers.
- 30:30 Initially I can remember that first night dive of thinking what am I touching here? What am I putting my hand into you know? Because a lot of junk on the bottom around the diving school. All sorts of sharp stuff and railway line everywhere but yeah, I didn't mind it actually. I found it quite exciting.

And that whole thing with some blokes not being able to handle oxygen well is that more so when they start working?

No that's just purely in their makeup.

31:00 It's not a fitness thing or it's nothing. It's just a medical thing that you physically you can't handle oxygen well at all because it is a very dangerous substance. Very dangerous breathing medium under water. You can't breathe oxygen below about 33ft of seawater which is equivalent of 3 atmospheres absolute. It becomes toxic. It's poisonous to everybody.

31:30 Pure oxygen will kill below 33 ft of seawater so you've got to be very careful of the rig. It's very dangerous and if you have any intolerance to pure oxygen there's no way. We lost enough fellows anyway. Quite a few fellows died using that rig.

What was the hardest thing for you doing that training?

I think the physical side. I just wasn't used to, none of us were used to that intensity of physical training because

32:00 they pushed you to your limit. They tried to, one way of getting people off the course, there was no ten people started so they wanted ten to finish. They didn't care how many finished. They didn't care if the whole course threw it in. They didn't care. They had a certain standard and they just pushed you and pushed you until people started to fall off the wayside until they got to a point where they realised that these fellows aren't going to be pushed off so now we'll concentrate on teaching them. So that

32:30 physical intensity was pretty heavy because you went until you dropped. They pushed you until you just thought you were going to die, you couldn't go any further and then you start the day's diving. So you are pretty exhausted.

And how would you when you got to that point know you've got to go the extra yard?

Well your body is screaming at you but it's all in the mind. It's in your frame of mind and how you look at it

33:00 so I got that far and I was just so determined that nothing was going to stop me. If there's another fellow standing on the course there's no reason I can't be standing so I would be the last bloke on the course if I had to be. So I had already developed that frame of mind that they weren't going to beat me. In fact I can remember thinking of some of my instructors, "One day I'm going to be better than you mate."

33:30 **And despite how hard it was were you still enjoying it?**

I loved it. I took to it like a duck to water. To me that was the navy. That was what I had really joined for. This was fantastic and I really enjoyed Rushcutter. Rushcutter was a bit like McHale's Navy [American television show]. We had come from the discipline of Cerberus, full navy discipline to Rushcutter where the divers walked around in bare feet around the navy depot. Pair of shorts, no shirt, called all the officers

34:00 'Boss' instead of, 'Sir'. Everybody was sort of, you could see the camaraderie there. You could see it amongst the clearance divers. They were a real special group of people here and you just thought, "Hey I want to be a part of this. This is different." So the longer you were there the more determined you were that this was the only thing to do in the navy. Nothing compares to this.

Did you ever feel that bonding itself was part of the training?

Oh absolutely. Very important and that's

34:30 part of the reason they pushed the hell out of you because of the physical point of view obviously but to breakdown and get the chaff, separate the wheat from the chaff but also when you suffer alongside somebody you bond with that person because you have been through the same thing. Both, we did it you know so there's definitely a bonding and camaraderie starting to build.

Being such a physical course could you afford to sort of

35:00 **play hard as well?**

You had to be careful. We were young enough and fit enough at that stage that you could handle Saturday nights because we had weekends off at that time. We could handle it but you need the Sunday to get over it for Monday and you suffered for it on Monday. But at that age you could bounce back and handle it.

What sort of ages were the instructors?

The instructors were all petty officers, the

35:30 course instructors and they probably were in mid 20s perhaps. Mid to late 20s possibly. They all had what they called a second dickie. He was the qualified clearance diver, able seaman clearance diver and he could have just come off course. He could be 18, 19, 21. The second dickie's job was to watch you and kiss your ass and he had an attitude not so much on the Ship's Diver Course but more on the Clearance Diver Course

36:00 it was you're not going to suffer any less than I did mate, you are going to cop it. You know give me fifty, get in the water, get in the mud. On your back all the time. If you weren't involved in diving you were doubling somewhere and push ups and trying to give you a hard time.

You are saying how much it changes from being a basic sort of recruit

36:30 **to now you are an able seaman?**

No, no ordinary seaman.

Ordinary seaman. So you are going out on the town you are above those other lowly blokes now.

You feel better but you've still got nothing to show because you are still on training. You didn't have any badges or anything. You still felt like what they call an OD [Ordinary Seaman] but you know, you were on a diving course. You were an Ord Sea, well you weren't even an Ord Sea at that stage because you were still in Ship's Divers but

37:00 yeah, there was already the sense of pride. You stood taller and threw your chest out a bit because you were fitter and you looked fitter and you had the HMAS Rushcutter tally band which told a lot. But you didn't have time really to, it was such a full on course that you. I mean a three week course you didn't have much time on the grog really or on shore.

On the Saturday nights was there a regular hang out where everyone would kind of go to?

Well at Rushcutters Bay

37:30 it's right next to the Cross [King's Cross] so most of the CDs were out at the Cross and they knew the Cross pretty well and there were a few pubs there that they used to drink at.

Was there any after hours fraternisation with the instructors?

No, not at that stage. They would have nothing to do with you.

So at the end of your three week course what happens?

At the end of the three week course we were all qualified and there was a formal ceremony

38:00 where the captain gives all these fellows their diver's rate to wear on their dress uniform and we were included in that. That was a great moment but the rest all went back to their ships and us few would be CDs stayed back for an extra week. When we finished the week, passed it, well when I passed it I was told that I would then join the rest of my division on the Melbourne.

38:30 So off I went. I was the only fellow out of my entire intake that actually had a badge so I used to walk around with the right arm you know. Very proud of it and they posted me to Melbourne but unfortunately the Melbourne was off Jervis Bay exercising so I thought they would keep me around until she came back to Sydney but they said, "Get on the train to Nowra and get down there and wait until the Melbourne comes into Jervis Bay." So I got there

39:00 and was at Jervis Bay waiting for the Melbourne and next thing I was told to report to the parade ground and there was a helicopter waiting for me and I thought, "This is pretty good." and there was a big old Wessex and the Melbourne had changed plans. She wasn't coming back into Jervis Bay so they sent a chopper in for me and I never forget that moment. We came in, angled in astern of Melbourne and here's this flagship at sea.

39:30 Great big white wake and flat blue sea and I'm coming in by helicopter to the deck of this carrier and that was quite a moment. I'll forget that so my first day on the Melbourne was quite exciting. And then I spent, Melbourne was getting ready to deploy to the Far East. They were just starting to load all the squadrons from Nowra. The air defence crew and all the air crew so we up and down a few times to Jervis Bay and we spent that time loading

40:00 crew and so on and a memory of that that sticks in my mind was we had been at anchor in Jervis Bay and we put to sea in this morning, early morning and there was a huge sea running. It was massive and the Melbourne was heading out on an easterly swell and really for a young sailor you had to hang on. You weren't used to this bloody big aircraft carrier rolling and anyway, it was payday and we formed in on the quarterdeck and these huge waves rolling past and we were paid

40:30 in the first decimal currency. Dollars and cents. I'll never forget that so after we loaded everyone on board Melbourne went back to Sydney and loaded all the stores and so on and we headed off to the Far East. My first trip to Singapore.

Tape 4

00:31 **So if someone sees you and they see your badge and they realise you are a clearance diver and**

they say, "What do you do?" what do you tell them?

Well at that stage I was a ship's diver and a long way from being a clearance diver. Well in the navy you didn't have to because the badge said everything. But yeah most people are pretty interested to know what we did and of course they don't know the scale of things in the navy.

01:00 So to them a diver is a diver so you're pretty proud of your cuff rate even though you were only a shallow dive and on air but you were part of the diving team. Once you get to sea every ship carries a diving team made up of ship's divers and their responsibility is basically to keep the hull clean and in foreign waters the possibility of a sabotage attack and they do hull searches and make sure there is nothing attached to the hull. Any problems

01:30 with the propellers or something falls over the side that's their job. There is usually a clearance diver posted to a ship with the diving team but it was good to be a part of that and to do ship bottom searches on a ship of that size was pretty interesting because a keel swimmer for example, on the bottom is so black and dark even in daylight because there's this huge flat hull that seems to go on forever. But it was yeah, that was pretty interesting.

02:00 I was enjoying it.

So how many weeks from enlistment to flying and landing on the Melbourne, how many weeks was that?

12 weeks recruit school, 4 weeks ship's diver, I'd say 17 weeks.

That's a pretty short time to transform your life isn't it?

It's incredible. It's very exciting for a 17 year old to all of sudden you are important enough to be

02:30 flown in a navy helicopter and come in on the flight deck of a flagship. Yeah, quite a feeling.

And when you first joined up Vietnam was on the horizon, it was happening. What did you know about what was happening there?

I wouldn't say a lot. All I knew was that I knew fellows before I joined the navy whose names were going in the ballot box and you didn't know much about it. The coverage back here was you know

03:00 the boys were in Vietnam and you heard of the occasional fellow getting killed but there wasn't a great deal of publicity about it. There wasn't the anti-Vietnam sentiment at that stage so it was like a deployment it was happening. But even in the navy it wasn't discussed greatly but they hadn't committed any sailors at that stage. That didn't start until about 67.

Was part of the attraction to the navy for you was it the amount of travel that you did?

03:30 I think it was a combination. I loved the idea of going to foreign ports. You see photographs of sailors standing in their whites and grins on their faces. It must be pretty exciting stuff to wake up one day and be in another port but as I say, the travel was a big attraction but I just wanted to be at sea. I just wanted to be on a warship. That was a bit of an obsession.

So how was the

04:00 **reception from the other blokes that you went through basic training with when you got to the Melbourne?**

Yeah I think some of them were glad to see me I think. Quite interested. A bit jealous that I was wearing a badge. They didn't have a badge. Pretty interested to know what it was about because I was the first one to do a formal course out of the whole group but that wears off pretty quickly and they are just blokes again.

And you had to do other duties as well?

Oh yes

04:30 as an ordinary seaman on a ship especially like the Melbourne a lot of chipping rust and painting and scrubbing decks and washing dishes and you did all the lousy jobs. Someone had to do them. Perhaps not me as much as others because I at least had the opportunity of going down to dive and talk to the CD and he used to put me to work on diving equipment, preparing for dives when the ship came to port so I didn't do

05:00 quite as much of the scrubbing as the other blokes.

What sort of maintenance did you have to do on the gear?

It has to be stripped and cleaned and reset, the timers have to be reset, cylinders have to be recharged. Just general, salt water is the biggest killer of anything so the equipment has to be absolutely spotless. As I say general maintenance, parts had to be replaced, rubber perishes, and general maintenance things.

So how excited was the

05:30 **ship's crew when it was being sent to the Far East?**

The ship comes alive. Everybody comes alive. This is what the navy is about. You are off to the Far East. It's not South East Asia it was the Far East and in those days of course there weren't jumbo jets. There weren't huge numbers of civilians travelling so we would pull into port and you were the only Australians in uniform. I mean it was just

06:00 fantastic and the orient was still the orient. Singapore was still old and rundown and the smells of Singapore were fantastic and there were no modern high rises and it was fantastic to be in the navy and travel.

When you finally got onto the Melbourne was that basically the first time you had been on a ship?

Of course.

Were there any worries about seasickness?

No, not at all. I was just like a fish in water. I thought it was great.

06:30 I've never been seasick in my life. In fact I sort of get excited in big seas and when other fellows were getting sick I would out on the deck and I love to see the big rollers coming in and break across the bow and I love being wet and cold and it's exciting. It's good stuff.

And what was your accommodation like on the ship?

Not too good. For ordinary, well for all sailors on a ship like the Melbourne they were just mess decks and actually

07:00 my mess deck was off the main passageway so the main passageway for the ship came through our mess deck and either side there were stacked across towards the ship's side were just rows and rows of bunks and I think from memory they were four high so you are packed in like sardines. You didn't have a lot of room but that doesn't matter. You keep watches on board so you are only getting one night in four where you sleep all night. There is always

07:30 you are always busy. You've always got watches, duty watches so you are working during the day and during the night.

You start finding yourself looking forward to those nights?

Oh yeah, an all nighter they were called. Everybody looked forward to their all nighter because you either had the, for three nights you either had the eight to midnight watch, the midnight to four am or the four am eight am so you never had a full night during those watches.

So when blokes are not on duty and they are not looking after

08:00 **their other jobs that have to do and that sort of stuff what do you do for recreation?**

Sailors are a great one for playing cards or Mahjong or they have these dice games and yeah, if you walk through a mess deck of a night you would see groups of fellows playing cards because you got a beer issue as well. They would have their beer. They might be writing home. Yeah.

And were you still smoking

08:30 **at that stage?**

Yes I was. I was only a social smoker. If I had a beer I would have a cigarette with a beer. That was about it.

Some of the navy blokes who were non-smokers always comment about how the mess deck was full of smoke.

You didn't notice it. I mean I never noticed it. You weren't allowed to smoke in certain spaces. That's right. There was no ban on smoking in the military in those days. Everyone, most people smoked

09:00 and yeah, they smoked in the mess decks. It's a wonder we don't all have lung cancer.

And we have also been told about the big gambling culture.

Yeah, yeah. A lot of blokes played cards for money. I know fellows on their all nighters would stay up to two or three in the morning playing cards. They would get their money for the next run on shore but it never interested me though. I've never been a card player. I never, I don't think I played one game of cards at sea.

09:30 **So where was your first port of call?**

Melbourne. I think we went straight through to Singapore. Straight through. You have an entering harbour procedure where you all form up in your whites and I can remember waking up and you are still miles and miles out of Singapore and not due until about ten am and you can already smell the

smells of Singapore, the cooking and the food.

10:00 Fantastic. And there is quite a good run up to the base and it's a very, very exciting time to be in the navy, on the flagship and here you are entering a foreign port, Singapore of all places. Very exciting and one thing that was traditional in those days was anyone who hadn't been to the Far East before was called a Cherry Boy and the older sailors

10:30 the able seamen, when I saw older sailors I mean 21, 22 used to reckon it was a great joke to take the ordinary seaman and they take you to some of these sleazy bars in Singapore and they'd try to sell you to the mamasan [Madam in charge of brothel] as a Cherry Boy. When I say sell you know for the price of a few cheap beers and the mamasans that ran the bars used to love it. They loved getting these young Cherry Boy sailors and pick out some of the girls and look after this boy but yeah, it was a lot of fun

11:00 and a lot of laughs and you get ashore in uniform with your mates and drinking different beer and a great atmosphere and great.

And how was the scrum [food] on board the ships?

It wasn't bad. I think the Melbourne, the big ships are not as good as the smaller ships. You have a couple of choices most meals but in those days the cooks were cooks.

11:30 And I think today you would probably call them chefs because of the high standard. It was pretty basic tucker. You used to love going ashore and going to a restaurant and eating some really good Asian food. That was great.

So how long did you spend there in Singapore?

I think on the Melbourne it was probably, it might have been in for a week and then you are off on exercises and then you're next port of call

12:00 was Hong Kong. On that trip I think we did Manila, I think we might have gone up to Penang. Back to Singapore. It was only a short trip, about 3 months. Pretty interesting. I think we lost two aircraft in that three months I was up there. A couple of aircraft went over the side. A couple of blokes killed and then back to Australia and I already had my marching orders.

12:30 The minute Melbourne reached Sydney I was back to Rushcutter and to do the able seaman course, the Clearance Diving Course. The serious stuff.

Tell us about that.

Excited. Absolutely. I was really looking forward to it. In a sense I was dreading it. Dreading the unknown but you've heard so much about it that you are dreading it but in the other sense you can't wait to get stuck into the serious stuff.

13:00 So yeah back to Rushcutter and of course, they were pulling in fellows from other, other clearance divers that had been at sea many times. It's not all exact. Some fellows had been at sea longer than me. Some fellows, in fact most of my course were off the Sydney. They were all CDs off the Sydney and I think we started off it might have been 12 or 16 fellows and I remember the petty officer saying we only want 6 of you.

13:30 I thought, "Hell, that's not a good start." Told us that on day one.

What does that do to the team dynamic when all of a sudden it has to be culled down to a few blokes?

It makes you just so damn determined that you are not going to be, give them no excuse to kick you off because they do. They just kick you off. The saying was, 'if your face didn't fit' and in some respects that was true not only if you couldn't handle it

14:00 but if the petty officer didn't like you or he felt you weren't suitable material in his opinion he could tell you to pack your bags and go.

Did you see blokes that you thought were capable just on the grounds of personality?

One day, every Friday once we started the CD school, every Friday they used to 'read our horoscopes' and you would go in one by one to the petty officer on the diving

14:30 school and he'd sit down and review the week with you and tell you where you went wrong and give you a bit of a pep talk and so on and I never forget one day we were about to finish the course and four blokes came out of the cabin with the longest faces. He just said, "You would make a better UC or radar pilot." and there's no comeback. There's no appeal in any shape or form. He decided you weren't for whatever reason

15:00 and of course you didn't know what the reason was. It may have been things you didn't see. I remember a couple of fellows I thought were good divers and he didn't agree. They were gone one morning and off the course as simple as that. A few fellows threw it in. Not many at that stage but a few threw it in and we got down to six.

And all good reports for yourself?

I topped the course

- 15:30 so there was a damn good reason why, I was determined to top the course. I had it in me anyway in that I was going to be a clearance diver at that stage. Nothing was going to stop me but I had no sort of vision of topping this course. I didn't think I was that good but about a month or so into the course I got into a bit of strife and of course any reason at all they would kick you off the course.
- 16:00 It didn't take much reason at all. So anyway to cut a long story short we had been night diving and we used to live at Watson so it was a bus trip back to Watson after the night diving and Watson was the real navy again so we had to arrive at Watson after a night of diving you know, wet, salty, tired. You had to get back in uniform which was long sleeve shirt, shorts and shoes and hat. Anyway this night we went back in the
- 16:30 bus and most of the bus drivers they were just stokers and so on from Rushcutters they were pretty good. They would drive us down to the block at the front so we couldn't be seen from the gangway staff and we would race in with our shoes under our arms and bare feet but this, this particular driver wasn't a very nice fellow and he decided he would drop us off at the gangway and we had to get out in front of all the gangway staff and walk down to our barracks. I was at the back of the bus and I didn't have my shoes on and he stopped and I thought, "Oh hell"
- 17:00 and I was putting on my shoes and socks and I held him up for 30 seconds and as I was getting off the bus he said, "You weren't in the dress of the day. Report to the petty officer in the morning I'm going to run you in and charge you." So I thought okay. So the next morning he had picked us up and down to Rushcutter and the bus used to arrive at about five minutes to eight and at eight am we had to be formed up on the parade ground in dry suits and these dry suits, buggers
- 17:30 of things. Takes two people to get you into it and it takes you two or three minutes to get into the damn things and I was more frightened of my instructor than I was of this idiot. He was a leading seaman and the bastard said, "Report to the duty petty officer you are being charged." And I said, "Okay, I'll be there straight after colours. I've got to report to my petty officer first." And I thought that was the right thing to do and jumped into the dry suit and fell in. As soon as the parade was over I went straight to the
- 18:00 coxswain's office in my dry suit and reported and this bloke had said I disobeyed a direct order so he had me charged and disobeying a direct order and contempt and that was the charge in those days, silent contempt. A pretty serious charge and the duty petty officer was a clearance diver and he said, "I'm sorry I've got no choice but to follow through. He's pressed on with the charges." And not to bore you. I got charged.
- 18:30 I knew I was in trouble when the captain cleared lower deck and the whole ship's company of Rushcutter was fallen in and I was paraded in front, read out the charge, guilty obviously and sentenced to five days in cells. So before you know it there's a patrol wagon pulled up, grilles and everything. They got out, handcuffed me and put me in the back of this truck. I couldn't believe it. I was in total shock. The company was in shock too. They couldn't believe this crappy charge. They carted me off
- 19:00 to Penguin for five days solitary confinement. No food for five days other than eighteen Sao biscuits a day. All the water you wanted and the bed was a hard timber plank and the pillow was a bit of 4 x 4 wood and I got these big sections of about eighteen inch rope and I had to sit there all day and unpick it strand by strand and I had a Bible to read. That was it for five days. I was sitting there for
- 19:30 five days I couldn't believe it but the worse thing for me was I thought, "That's it. I'm off course." There's no way in the world I would still be on the course after five days in cells and missing five days of the course. I thought that was it. The navy was over. Finished. So anyway I got out and went back to Rushcutter and I went straight up to see the course diving instructor and I thought this is it and he said to me,
- 20:00 first thing he said to me was, "I was a young sailor and I came up through the ranks and I spent time in the cells. I made lieutenant. You can do the same. I want you to get your ass out there and show me that you've got clearance diver material. Now go." I couldn't believe it. I went down, back to my course and they were already five days ahead of me and the petty officer a fellow by the name of Badgedore didn't say a thing. Just said,
- 20:30 "Get in there." And I just fitted straight back into the course and for the next two weeks probably two weeks, he and the dickie just hounded, without ever mentioning it, they just hounded the hell out of me. I had to do twice as much as everybody else and the fact that they'd given me a chance from that moment on I was determined to make them proud of me. I was going to be the best clearance diver they had ever had so
- 21:00 I just knuckled down. Whatever they did I just did it and I came back with a smile on my face. It was two weeks because I went down to the second horoscope session with Badger and he said, "We have given you a bit of a hard time the last two weeks haven't we?" and I said, "Yes PO [Petty Officer] I know." He said, "Well you've come up with a smile on your face. You've done everything and you've excelled. As far as I'm concerned from this point you are back on course and you are CD material."

21:30 Make me proud of you.” So I walked out of there feeling about eight feet tall and I was absolutely determined that I was going to prove their trust in me and I topped the course.

So losing that course and then pushing you is that what got you back up to speed?

Yeah well they had to but they were pushing me for a reason. They had to in a sense punish me as well and test me, really test me.

But essentially did you miss or lose anything out of that week?

22:00 A bit of theory I had to catch up on and of course, a bit of practical diving and that sort of stuff so I was a bit behind the eight ball on the physical side. I had to get back into that because I had a very bad ear infection while I was in cells which they didn’t care about. That’s another story in the navy but in those days, they wouldn’t tolerate it these days. But I had come down with a very bad ear infection I had just come out of the water basically and I was in cells. Freezing cold and in the middle of winter and every night the medical, the senior medical officer

22:30 on duty would do a tour of the cells and check the prisoners and this arrogant mongrel came in his bow tie and dress uniform stinking of port and about eight at night and I’m there freezing and there’s my wooden bunk and he said, “Is everything all right sailor?” and I said, “No Sir, I have a very bad ear infection.”, “Okay, okay.” Off he went. He couldn’t care less and it just got worse and worse and I think on the second night he came back or it might have been a different officer

23:00 and I said, “Yeah my head is throbbing. I’ve got a very serious ear infection.” The hospital was a hundred metres away and he said, “You can go and see the doctor in the morning.” And in the morning two naval patrolmen came and got me, handcuffed me behind my back like I was a murderer and they marched me up to the hospital. I never felt so belittled in my life. What the hell had I done? But that was the navy in those times.

23:30 I went in to see the doctor and the doctor looked at me with the handcuffs on. He knew I couldn’t have done anything too serious and he said to the naval patrolmen, ‘Get those handcuffs off. I’m not examining a man with handcuffs on.’ And these two jokers were like, “We can’t do this Sir.” I’m like a vicious murderer. Anyway they finally took my handcuffs off and the doctor examined me and put me on the antibiotics and so forth and marched me back to the cell with handcuffs on again.

24:00 I couldn’t believe it. I learned a valuable lesson about the navy though.

Besides the treatment you had in the cells was there any other bastardisation while you were in there?

No not really. You were in solitary so you only saw your guard. Every morning he would deliver you a new piece of rope and your eighteen dry Sao biscuits for the day and a bucket of water. That was it and of course the

24:30 duty rounds at night when the medical officer would come through very briefly and one of the petty officers, ‘crushers’ as we called the mongrels, as we used to call him, would come along and collect the rope and make sure that every single strand, if there was not a single strand, because it would take you all day to do it. He would leave it in and say, “Keep going, you are not going to sleep until you finish that.” But I wouldn’t say bastardisation. It was just belittling and demeaning and locking you up like an animal you know.

Despite your eagerness to do the CD course and

25:00 **everything did that episode embitter you towards the navy?**

A little in that I formed an opinion of the military discipline system as it was in those days. I formed certain opinions of the military police side of the navy and I lost a lot of respect for regular senior officers like

25:30 the fellow who sent me up to the commander, petty officer and the talk at Rushcutter was at the time that he was really anti the diving attitude. You know walk around like McHale’s Navy. He didn’t understand clearance divers at all. He thought we should all be marching around in military discipline and he hated that I was a great example. He really made an example of me because all I did was not wear my shoes and socks. I put them off before I left the bus. That was my sole

26:00 crime and he was sending me up the creek to make an example of me but as I say I learnt a valuable lesson but the diving section closed around me. Even though I was an ordinary seaman I felt that they had closed around me and they kept me in their lock you know and I thought that was a very valuable lesson. I thought these jokers are something and I want to be a part of this. It didn’t make you want to leave the navy but I

26:30 became very wary and distrustful and dislike naval police in any shape or form. To my mind they were all a bunch of bloody wimps with sadistic leanings. They like to hassle people but it didn’t matter because I was in the part of the navy that was the best you know.

So that final week?

It got better. I got stuck into it and

27:00 that faded from my memory very quickly and you didn't have time to think about anything anyway because it was a very intensive seven month course and you just bonded as a team and you were constantly going onto new equipment and you advanced to explosives and bomb disposal and demolitions and exciting stuff. It just never stopped but you always dreaded you know. They used to call it hate week. The final

27:30 week of the clearance diving course. All through the course the second dickie used to say, "You guys aren't going to handle the hate week. It's too tough for you jokers." and everyone was living in fear of where they just lay it on you non-stop for 24 hours, 7 days and you dread it and you've still got to get through that to qualify. And yeah you are worrying about what's down the track but all of a sudden you get through it and bingo, next thing you've got a gold diving helmet on this arm up here

28:00 with a, 'C' under it. It's just the, that was it, the be all and end all.

What are some of the things that stand out for you in that training that you did?

The one thing that I found that I had a natural affinity working with explosives. I loved explosives and I took to it, you know I really loved it. We did a lot of shore based demolitions as well as having to learn everything in the water you learned it on land and applied it under water but I really enjoyed the explosives part

28:30 of it. The diving was quite a, you can't explain the feeling of being down deep where there are no reds or greens or yellows. It's just blue and it's eerie when you can't see the surface and you are on your own basically. It's a very eerie, lonesome experience. I remember one deep dive off the harbour, off the Heads

29:00 I was down on my own and the sandy, as far as you could see just sandy bottom and quite cold and just blue, deep, dark blue and I clearly remember thinking, "This is the loneliest place in the world." It was a buzz. It was fantastic. I loved oxygen. I loved the oxygen set. To this day that was the best set that I've ever dived on. Pure oxygen. It doesn't give off any tell tale bubbles and

29:30 you use that for ship attack. But yeah, some of the swims. We used to do a lot of compass swimming, like attack swimming and that was a lot of fun. I really loved that. There wasn't anything on the course that I didn't enjoy. This is for me.

So you know going through your basic training and then this air, this legend of clearance divers did that become even more magnified when you were doing the course?

Oh absolutely.

30:00 The more you got into it the more you felt you were joining, day by day you felt you were getting closer to being a part of this. There was only, never more than 100 strong. You were part of this group that was very special and you were right there and you realised how tough it was and what these other fellows had gone through and to be part of it and the camaraderie was

30:30 amazing. Every lunchtime there was volleyball in the parade ground and the chiefs and petty officers and officers were down there with the CDs on course playing volleyball and, "Come on mate. You're on my side." or it was something you didn't experience in the rest of the navy. It was really McHale's Navy there was no doubt about that.

It seems to be that, like from blokes we've spoken to like SAS blokes the more elite it gets those barriers are broken down within that group.

Absolutely.

Can you explain why that is?

31:00 The way I feel about this and first and foremost you are a very small and very specialised group and it has been very hard to get there so you are very proud of where, that you are a part of this group. The other side of the coin is that you are doing, both us and the SAS are doing a job that depends entirely on your mates.

31:30 The rest of the navy can't help you. I mean a lot of the work and the training you do is designed ultimately to be done behind enemy lines. Now the SAS go out on deep patrols and they are on their own. You imagine on a wartime situation if you are doing a ship attack on a foreign ship and if you don't get killed in the meantime just trying to get there but if they catch you or if the shit hits the fan

32:00 there is no one else that can help you. You are in enemy territory completely and in our case there's no helicopter can come and pick you up. You are in an environment which is out of your natural environment and it's just you and your buddy. No one else can help you. You are entirely on your own so this creates this tremendous bond of you and your mates and to this day, especially the fellows that I was in Vietnam with,

32:30 I think that I still could put my life and trust my life to any of those fellows at any time and there is no

one else in the world that you would even consider taking that risk with but those jokers you would trust with your life. If you've been through these things together. So I don't know if that answers your question.

And speaking of what you have just told us how far did that training extend above the water?

The training?

- 33:00 There's a hell of a lot of theory from your basic diving theory. You're dealing with quite a high pressure environment, changing pressures which is quite dangerous. The human body has to be treated properly it affects the diving. You almost become a qualified medico because of the knowledge you need on diving. Through to I mean,
- 33:30 not just the theory of the equipment and how to operate it but formulas and calculations that need to be done but then you have the BD side, the bomb disposal. Learning to identify and recognise every known mine and bomb in the world and how to deal with them. You know how to make your own booby traps, dispose of booby traps and what to look for and then there's the straight explosives. Demolitions both under water and on the surface. Blowing things up and destroying things
- 34:00 on the surface using a tool just like a carpenter uses his tool. There is a huge amount of theory. It's just not all under the water and in fact, the diving side is probably the least of the whole thing. I could teach a monkey to dive. Basically it was the means of getting to the job. You've got to be good at your job and it was just another means of getting to that job.
- 34:30 **Because most people would assume a clearance diver 100% of your work is going to be under the water. It's not is it?**
- Oh no. For example on Team 3 in Vietnam I would think, crikey it wouldn't have accounted for 1% of our work because you..... Divers, clearance divers have got a reputation of being a jack of all trades. Just because of your training you are self sufficient. You have to be able to
- 35:00 do anything that sort of comes up so that became very apparent with Vietnam. They realised that we were just not the run of the mill EOD [Explosive Ordnance Divers] type divers, bomb disposal type that we had tremendous skills in other areas so the Americans used us more and more to do shore based type tasks so the water side was only when we had a call that there was a saboteur being spotted you know that was the only time you were in the water.
- 35:30 **How old does the clearance diving sort of thing go back in the navy?**
- Well it really got its start I think in World War II with the bomb and mine disposal fellows. Most of those blokes were navy actually back in London that used to diffuse the big German bombs. So out of that the navy had the hard hat divers. You know the old standard hard hat divers and from that they decided that, I think they
- 36:00 learned their lessons from the Italians. A fellow called Buster Crabbe, the Italian frogman who sank some of those big battleships. Well the British Navy had nothing like that. They just had the standard old hard hat divers and they developed these human chariots and they could put swimmers in that would come in, sabotage and sink a battleship. It was pretty nasty sort of potential so the British navy decided they had to develop something like that so they actually recovered the body
- 36:30 of an Italian frogman and copied his set and that set was still in use when I was in training. Brilliant set but very dangerous. It developed from that and then the RAN [Royal Australian Navy] decided I think in probably, in the mid 50s I think from memory that they should form a clearance diving branch as well so the first fellows went to England and they did a basic clearance diving course. They came back and really started the
- 37:00 clearance diving branch as such. Initially it was a mine clearance. That was the role of clearance divers. They were mine clearance but that's expanded and took on everything until now they are basically the Australian equivalent of the American Navy SEAL [Sea, Air Land personnel]. They parachute, they shore base, they are weapon specialist, anti-terrorist the whole box and dice so. But Vietnam kicked it off. That really kicked off the clearance diving branch.
- 37:30 **So at the time that you did your course what would the Australian clearance divers be on a comparable level to as far as say Britain and the USA?**
- Just because they were Aussies they were more than equivalent to the British. The British were very regimented in their thinking and whereas their clearance diving branch hasn't moved out of mine clearance ours was already a jack of all trades attitude. This 'can do', easy attitude. We can do anything.
- 38:00 It took on; they are all great volunteers the clearance divers. They will volunteer for anything so they are already trying to grab, "We'll do this. We'll do that. We'll take that on." So it expands but the US Navy had nothing even close. Their SEAL teams weren't formed in Vietnam so they had, they had a number of divers. They had scuba divers, they EOD divers, just explosive ordnance divers, they had ordnance divers
- 38:30 and half a dozen different types of divers and very, very specialised so the clearance diver, we weren't a

big navy so we had to do anything. It all got rolled up into a clearance diver so we just left the Yanks for dead. They didn't even have the capability to search a ship's hull. If a saboteur put a charge on a ship's hull they didn't have the means to find the thing and remove it whereas we had all these searches already worked out and we developed a lot of things

- 39:00 in the Australian Navy that I think particularly the mine identification system was the best in the world. Probably still is. Very simple but it worked so clearance divers were very, very, from my experience. As I say I did 20 years they are the most adaptable, versatile soldier/sailor.

The sense at the time, like we know now

- 39:30 **how the US Navy SEALs are used, was there the thought at the time of using clearance divers in that kind of role?**

Not initially. I think our attitude, our system's attitude was that the SEALs were a lot of piss in the wind. A lot of show but not really doing much, so when we went to Vietnam, if I can talk about that

- 40:00 we were sent up there because of our ability to search a ship's hull and deal with a booby trap because their major concern initially was that [HMAS] Sydney was loaded up with troops and anchored in Vung Tau what if they attack the Sydney and put some explosive charges on the Sydney. What are we going to do? You get a clearance diving team in so they sent up the first team and based them in Vung Tau

- 40:30 and it wasn't long before, because they were actually attached, worked for the Americans. There wasn't any option. They weren't anywhere near any Australian forces. Well being navy they were separate but they worked for the Americans and the Americans all of a sudden thought, "Hell." They realised these jokers they can do this and they can do that so they started to use them more and more in other roles. You know the Sydney came in once every whatever it was, few months so really what are they going to do with them. So the Yanks said,

- 41:00 "Great, you are the boys." so they ended up. They used to use them. They would go out and set ambushes. They would roam around the country blowing things up. Barricades. Charlie [the enemy] would barricade a river or mine a river and it just slowly grew from team to team to where we were called on to do everything and yeah, the Yanks really appreciated our skills really.

Tape 5

- 00:30 **So Tony when was the first time that you thought it might be possible that you would be going to Vietnam?**

Well while I was doing my training as a naval clearance diver. Actually it's now the first clearance divers to be sent to Vietnam and towards the end of my course the team going to Vietnam had already been picked and they were undergoing their pre-deployment training which

- 01:00 took about 3 months. I actually ran into them on a number of occasions especially during the demolition phases and bomb phases where they were doing work ups and refreshers so we were doing work alongside these fellows knowing they were about to go to Vietnam so I think it was too far in the future for me to even think that I might be going but it was pretty exciting. We knew that there were big moves happening within the branch. For the first time clearance divers were going to war

- 01:30 but yeah, at that young stage I wasn't really thinking I could be going one day.

Did you have any kind of discussions with that team that was going?

Not really. We were on course. They were the front line, these fellows about to go and they were busy. We weren't drinking much at night. You didn't have time to go to the mess at that stage.

- 02:00 We were studying our thing. We just ran into them during the day as our ongoing training sort of time. But no, no real discussion with them.

So when did you get the first whisper that you might be going?

Well I was the 8th team. I was the last team to go. I didn't go until 1970 so the teams had been going for 4 years. We all wanted to go.

- 02:30 Everybody that was there, every diver's ambition was to get on the team, Team 3. There were only 6 fellows at a time so no one was retiring in the navy, from the branch. They were all staying in on the chance that they might get in. It was a pretty big thing and after I finished my diving course I went to sea for 2 years on the [HMAS] Yarra. So I was out of the selection process for 2 years during which time my brother he went. So it wasn't until I came

- 03:00 back from the Yarra in 1969 and I was posted into Team 2 that I started to think I'm in the running now. I could be in the slot here and sure enough I was, I found out that I was selected on my birthday, my 22nd birthday and for me that was the best birthday present I could have had.

When you say

03:30 **you found out on your 22nd birthday that was as in you found out you were definitely going?**

I was posted. Well that leads to another story but I was actually posted to CDT3. That was my posting and they, the way the team worked they always trained an extra 1 or 2 fellows just in case someone got killed in Vietnam there was an immediate replacement ready who got ready with that team so we usually started with an extra 1 or 2 and of course, the fellow from the previous team

04:00 who hadn't gone he was guaranteed a slot in your team so your 6 that were selected or 7, 6 that were selected one of you was going to stay behind for the following team. We knew one of us was going to stay behind but we had no idea but you were in the team then you started that 3 months intensive training as a team in preparation for Vietnam. And then at the very last when we had finished

04:30 we had to sit down and then that dreaded moment when the Boss told us who wasn't going.

How was that decided?

He made that decision on his own. No explanation. He just said, "Sorry, but you are staying behind." It would be a very hard decision to make because it would be like being hit and kicked in the guts with a sledgehammer to find out you weren't going. I thought I was the one who wasn't going. We all did I suppose. I was a happy boy

05:00 when I found out I was going.

During that 3 month training knowing that one of you wasn't going to go did that create any kind of tension or competitiveness?

Perhaps a little bit of competitiveness but there was nothing else. There was no, "Oh you buggers might go and I mightn't go." Everybody thought that they wouldn't go. It would be dreadful of course but you obviously did your best, you tried to excel at everything you did but you knew one of you

05:30 couldn't go and that was the way it went. You just hoped it wasn't you but it didn't make anybody, I don't think it changed anything at all.

What was involved in that 3 months intensive training?

Of course the team has to come together because they have been posted from all different areas and may not have worked together before so the first phase is to get to know one another and by this, you start by diving together.

06:00 Just basic refresher, getting used to working as a team and supporting each other. The refresher of all your diving skills and then they progress to bomb disposal, sabotage which is based on the previous teams that came back all ended up being instructions especially within the bomb disposal section and they were teaching current Viet Cong, North Vietnamese, Russian

06:30 technology and methods so you had very much up to date, the latest instruction what we could expect in Vietnam. We went off to Woodside in South Australia with the army and did what they call their staff officer briefing which was quite an intensive intelligence overview of the current situation in Vietnam including just a touch on language, traditions of

07:00 Vietnam. We had to do the very, very intensive weapons training course on every weapon used in Vietnam until we thought we were all Wyatt Earp and then the final. There may have been a few things in between I forget and then the final course was to go to Canungra to do the full battle efficiency or jungle training with the army.

How many of you were there in CDT3?

There were 7 but 6 went to Vietnam so there were 7 in training.

07:30 So yeah we went off and did the full 3 weeks with the army which was a pain in the neck. 6 of us amongst about 90 soldiers.

Of the 7 of you that came together had you known any of the other guys previously?

Well I was only an able seaman but yes, one of the other fellows of the team had actually been posted from Team 2 with me so we were good mates by that stage and knew each other very well. The others 2 fellows, the other came

08:00 to the diving school. I think some of them came from Team 1 so it was a bit of mix. I had obviously heard or knew of the boss. The officer but had never worked for him and there was a petty officer and chief petty officer in the team who I knew but hadn't worked with them before. It didn't take long, it doesn't take long for a team to gel.

And where did you come together initially?

Our parent establishment I think was HMAS Waterhen

08:30 and I remember the first day we met. We came together in CDT1's building and Jake gave us a lecture. He said, "Don't call me Jake my name is Boss." He straightened out that rule. That was about the only rule we had and I think Waterhen was the base of CDT1 and was the base of the minesweepers. From memory I think they were responsible for our pay and so on

09:00 but we effectively became a unit that was subject to the fleet commander. We became CDT3 was apart from anything else and under the direct command of the fleet commander until we went to Vietnam where we were handed over to the Americans.

So, can you run through who was in your team?

Sure. The fellow in charge was a fellow by the name of Jake Linton. He was a bit of a legend. He was one of the original CDs who worked his way up through the ranks. He got to chief

09:30 became an officer, got the BEM [British Empire Medal] for a very dangerous, famous dive in Lake Eucumbene. They set records for air diving in subzero temperatures working on grates in the lake. The chief was a fellow by the name of John Gilchrist. Petty officer was Phil Naramore and there were the troops. There was myself, Larry Digney

10:00 known as Digger and he's the fellow who came from Team 2 with me. A great mate of mine. Bluey Furner, a red headed fellow and Tom McNabb and Tom was a leading able seaman so we felt as time went on that they would take the leading seaman but it turned out at the end that Tom as leading seaman was the one left behind.

Which of you had been the one who was sort of added from the previous team?

Larry Digney, he came from the previous team

10:30 so he was guaranteed a spot so in the end it came down between Bluey, Tom McNabb and myself. We had, there was no indication. There was no idea who was left behind. There was no reason to think that I was going to be the one or he was going to be the one but I remember we'd finished Canungra and we were sitting in the Coolangatta Airport waiting for the flight home and that was basically it. Once Canungra was over we went back to Sydney and went on pre-embarkation leave. They sent you home and so that was our last

11:00 that was it all over. And we were sitting in the airport and Jake said, "Sit down boys, grab a beer. Tom I'm sorry but you've got to stay behind." and he was devastated but it turned out poor old Tom he went into training with the following team and completed all the training second time around and when that training was over he was within a month of ready to deploy and replace us the Australian Government said, "We are shutting down

11:30 the Vietnam effort." The diving team was in fact the first group they pulled out. There was only 6 of us so it was easy to make a big statement, we have started the withdrawal. There was only 6 of us and there was only 5 by the helicopter flight and the gunline and troops.

So when you came together in Sydney you started doing some basic diving and getting to know you sort of stuff.

Yes.

And then went to South Australia.

The bomb disposal or the

12:00 explosive ordnance disposal. They used to call it the bomb and mine disposal school or section so the diving was purely to get us back as a team because diving wasn't important. We were all qualified clearance divers so that was basically refreshing and pulling together as a team and but then I was into the serious stuff. From that point we changed into greens and yeah, we got down to the serious nitty gritty about learning about Vietnam and what was being used there

12:30 and the practical side. There wasn't a standard training system because it was constantly updated on information being fed to us because actually my brother's team found a Russian limpet in use in Vietnam by the North Vietnamese and it had never been seen before and it is a very, very complicated mine or limpet with all sorts of anti-removal devices and

13:00 never been seen before and his team found it. So obviously they stripped it down and the information being sent back to us was integrated into the training so you are getting the most up to date. In fact we knew about the limpet mine before the Americans had ever heard of the thing so I think our training was very good in that respect. I don't think the army and so on had that direct feedback that we had.

Knowing that you were getting the latest information like that that must have given you a great level of confidence?

Oh yeah, totally.

13:30 When you are posted to Team 3 you felt like you had just won the Sydney Opera House lottery. That was about the same thing and we knew that the training because all the fellows who were involved in our training were ex Team 3 so we were getting it from the horse's mouth. There was no bullshit it was

straight from their mouth. They had done this. They were telling us directly and passing this onto us and even, we went to, like Canungra

- 14:00 most of the instructors had done 1 or 2 tours of Vietnam and that gives you a lot of confidence. We went out to the Army School of Military Engineering at Liverpool where they had mock up Vietnamese villages set up with booby traps and so on and you are doing, you feel like you are there. So the training was outstanding. I think the Australians were very, very well prepared for Vietnam whereas the Americans weren't at all.

Was there anything that stood out to

- 14:30 **you at the bomb and mine training, was there anything that sort of surprised you in that training or was it fairly tough?**

I wouldn't say tough. The thing that did surprise me was up until the Vietnam War all our training was based on World War II ordnance. The mines we were dealing with were all World War II German and Japanese. We didn't have anything else to go on.

- 15:00 Once our fellows went into Vietnam and started to feed back this information the game changed because we were dealing all of sudden with Chinese Communist manufactured weapons. Russian weapons. Stuff we'd never seen, never heard of and we were also obviously getting the direct feedback how the VC [Viet Cong] manufactured booby traps and what sort of gear they used and how they did it and all the devices they used to use to make them
- 15:30 anti-personnel so the idea is trying to get the guy who is trying to disarm it if you can. So they were quite, it was another ballgame. On a different level all of sudden. Instead of just dealing with theory stuff, you know World War II we were dealing with here and there. This is the stuff that is being used at this minute and this is what we are going to see in Vietnam so yeah, I think that was a bit of big step forward in our
- 16:00 EOD. Also the weapons training. Up until that point CDs weren't so much involved in land weapons but it very quickly changed in Vietnam and we actually did a much more intensive weapons course than the army. In fact when we went to Canungra the M16 was sort of reasonably new issue to the Australian Army and they only issued it to forward scouts and we
- 16:30 got to Canungra and the sergeants and instructors didn't know much about the M16 it was so new and they soon realised that we knew this thing inside out and back to front and they had us running the M16 courses, instruction so that made, you felt pretty confident that you were going up there ready and in hindsight I think we went into the religions and customs of Vietnam. I think that was very important
- 17:00 I think they understood a bit about the country before we got there whereas the army to a much lesser extent were too many, they couldn't dwell on that type of thing but the Yanks arrived in Vietnam and they didn't have a clue where they were. They didn't know where Vietnam was. They couldn't point it out on a map of the world. No idea, so I think we had a massive advantage.

Within the 7 of you in your team did the different rankings all do the same training?

Exactly.

- 17:30 Exactly. The officer in charge he got his hands dirty and wet and did exactly the same thing because in Vietnam being only a 6 man team very rarely did the whole team deploy or operate as a whole team. Usually it was in dribs and drabs. A pair at least but I could be sent out on a job with an ord seaman or I could be sent out on a job with an officer and you both, I mean you are mates. You are on the job
- 18:00 you both do the same job. It's not I'm in charge you do this, you work as a team and rank had nothing to do with it. So yeah, the training had to be identical.

Can you talk us through a bit of your weapons training?

Yes we went to HMAS Albatross at Nowra to do it which surprised us once again. We expected the army to conduct our weapons training but the navy had a, the gunnery branch within the navy was pretty au fait with weapons.

- 18:30 We went down to Nowra because at the same time as we were in training the navy helicopter flight was in training for Vietnam as a replacement group and of course they have 50 calibres and M60s and God knows what so they had a very intensive weapons training program, so we went there and sort of slipped in on the side and used these weapons trainers but the beauty of our training was, well we used every weapon. We learned to use every weapon in the Australian inventory
- 19:00 plus the American inventory and we fired them until we were red in the face and not many other people had that sort of opportunity being go for your life. Open slather. We used to fire the M60s until the barrels were red hot. I remember there were 6 of us going out with the 9mm Browning pistol and we fired 1,000 rounds through it. I mean just great fun. At the end we were doing quick draws.
- 19:30 Yeah, really good fun but we were really, really proficient with our weapons and we were also good shots. We were taught how to use them. In fact at that stage I was in the rifle shooting team. I was at Penguin and we were all mad shots anyway, shooters. So very valuable fire but when we got to Vietnam

we knew more about weapons than anybody. We could down strip them and use them

20:00 in the pitch black of night it didn't matter, we were so much at home with them.

How many different weapons would you say you would have been trained in?

Quick guess without trying to count them up about a dozen or so which would cover the inventory. The interesting thing was we did the hand, because in Vietnam we all carried a side arm. We all carried a handgun plus our weapon of choice,

20:30 a long barrel weapon of choice but we did all our training with a handgun, with an Australian issue Browning semi-automatic and in Vietnam we worked for the Yanks. They didn't have Browning 9 mm. They had Colt 45s so we all got a Colt 45 which wasn't included in our training which we were all surprised at but that was the standard issue to the American. Well they usually only issued them to officers but we all had a side arm

21:00 so we had to go out and practise with those damn things and you can't hit the side of a barn with a 45. They look good anyway.

Can you describe what some of the weapons were?

Well within the Australian inventory there was the SLR [self loading rifle] which is 7.62 mm. The American M16, 5.56 mm and that's a semi and full automatic weapon which was a standard American issue rifle. The M60 which

21:30 is 7.62 mm. The M79 grenade launcher, 40 mm grenade launcher. 9 mm Browning semi-auto. What else was there? 50 calibre machine gun and we also played with the Vietnamese side like their rocket launchers. Their B40s and B41s which

22:00 launched anti-tanks rounds and so on. So they used pretty old, a pretty fair range of gear and of course we were all learning about, they all had their own characteristics with their mortars and things like. Different calibre mortars to ours. Chinese manufacture, Russian manufacture, so we played with all those things and we needed to know what they were capable of.

Were you using live ammunition in training?

Oh yes, no messing about there.

22:30 Oh yeah out on the range and just let loose. Actually it was interesting. You've probably heard this before, but in Canungra there is one stage of the training what they called, where you are practising and they call it fire and movement and you put your head down and they have an old Vickers water cooled machine gun. 303 calibre and they were firing this particular machine gun across the field about I don't know I suppose

23:00 it was pretty high but I think it was probably 10 or 12 ft above the ground. It was locked so it couldn't come any lower but in fire and movement you've got to keep your head down and this kept your head down because you could hear the bullets whistling over your head so it was the first time you had been shot at effectively. So yeah, it was all live ammunition. It was pretty serious. You were going to Vietnam. There is no use giving a fellow a wooden rifle and blanks to play with when they is going to be the real stuff flying around.

In that weapons training what

23:30 **kind of testing or assessment was there?**

Well I mean you had to, you were obviously examined in field stripping the weapon. General maintenance of your tools, complete stripping and rebuilding the weapon. Everything that could possibly go wrong with the damned thing. You became very familiar with the ranges of the weapon, the round, what that round would do. What sort of failures to expect. Some weapons

24:00 are more prone to failure than others in certain circumstances. So basically know the weapon. When you are up there your weapon becomes, I mean you just don't go anywhere without it. It becomes part of you and you feel naked almost. Almost coming back to your hooch [personal shelter] you would unstrap your 45 because you wouldn't wear it in the hooch as you came in but once you took it off you felt naked. It's an amazing feeling. But you always

24:30 went around with a full magazine and normally one up the spout. We were allowed to move around Da Nang proper with just our handgun but the minute we stepped anywhere past the outskirts of Da Nang we also had to be armed with a variety of long weapons and that was personally.

During your weapons training or after your weapons training what was your weapon of choice?

25:00 I liked the SLR but we couldn't use the SLR in Vietnam because it was Australia inventory and we were working with the Yanks and that didn't bother me a great deal. I liked the power of the SLR. A lot of punch but it was a very heavy weapon and being a bigger calibre the ammunition weighs more so you have to carry less ammunition although the Australian Army used it for all their tour. But when we got to Vietnam our personal issue straight away was the 45 Colt which is

- 25:30 as I say a bit of a useless weapon. It's all right for 10 ft away and it's big enough to scare anyone you point it at them and we were all issued with the M16 which is a smaller calibre. I liked the M16. It didn't have much of a hitting power but you could just click over to full automatic which you couldn't do with the SLR so I mean you could just let the whole magazine rip and that was handy because a quick zip on auto and get anyone's head down
- 26:00 but we also had, the previous teams kept weapons, captured weapons and so on so there was a tremendous choice to choose from. We had everything from pump action 12 gauge shotguns, personal M79 grenade launchers; AK47s captured Soviet weapons which was the weapon of use for the VC and NVA [North Vietnamese Army]. We also had things like SKS' and other foreign European
- 26:30 weapons so we had a hell of a choice to choose from and quite often, I think we had a M60 as well but whenever we left the hooch. So it was up to you but say there was 2 of us going somewhere we would have our own 45s. We would take an M16 each and probably throw in perhaps an M79 grenade launcher or something of a bit heavier calibre or a shotgun so between 2 of you
- 27:00 you've probably got 5 weapons but that was a personal choice of what you took but you had to have long weapons.

With the captured weapons was there any kind of issue getting ammunition for them?

No not really. You wouldn't get to use volumes of them and you wouldn't like the AK47 I can't recall anybody actually taking that out in the field with them.

- 27:30 It is the same calibre as the SLR but it is what they call a short round. It doesn't have the punch of the SLR. A great jungle weapon but yeah, we could get ammunition if we wanted it. We used to use it more for target practice and so on. The biggest trouble with enemy ammunition and it wasn't so bad for us but if you ever found a case of enemy ordnance you immediately suspected it was a booby trap so a lot of people
- 28:00 who found weapons and ammunition and wouldn't touch it. They would call in the EOD people and most of the EOD would just come in and blow it up because they used to booby trap them. For example, they would take the powder out of some of their 7.26 rounds and they would pack it with explosives so if you used the ammunition, it looks for all intents and purposes like a normal round but you put it up the spout and pull the trigger and boom. They would blow up in your face so the average soldier was pretty wary
- 28:30 of using foreign ammunition and I think the Australian Army wouldn't allow it anyway. They wouldn't let their people use anything other than their issue rifles but we were in a bit of a different case and we could use what we wanted to but we did tend to stick to the M16, the 45 and perhaps a grenade launcher and that was, because you had everything from automatic to very close range. Like shotguns and you had the grenade launcher that could be a help to.

Just with that foreign captured weapons

- 29:00 **would the ammunition for that have to be captured as well?**

No we didn't manufacture it. It's a different round. It's a 7.62 short which is a European manufacturer or Chinese Communist. No we didn't manufacture them. In fact you couldn't use our 7.62 in an AK47 for example.

So as you were going through that 3 month training as you got through

- 29:30 **each course and sort of getting that notch on your belt and having completed that and knowing Vietnam was at the end of this training were you getting more and more confident along the way?**

Oh totally. Absolutely because we had a lot of time to talk to previous teams and of course, most of the instructors were ex-team 3 so you, there was a great rapport there and they wanted to pass on anything they could to you. They wanted to prepare you the best way they could.

- 30:00 So I mean it wasn't just work it was social too. You would have a beer after with the fellows and they were just telling you everything about it so when you were prepared. We know what to expect.

Was there any leave or time for socialising between each course?

No, no. You just finish one and straight onto the next but I mean we weren't on course as such we were under training and of a night we would go to the mess or the nearest town and still have a

- 30:30 few beers and so on and relax. Particularly at Canungra.

Were you daunted by the fact that you had to go Canungra?

We had heard some bad stories about it.

What had you heard?

The first one was, you hear stories about fellows having heart attacks going up this hill after you had

been out in the bush a few days. Yeah, the stories were it was just full on. It was pretty heavy stuff and most of the army blokes dreaded the

31:00 thought of going. We looked forward to it in the sense that we were clearance divers we can handle this. That's the attitude we had and we looked forward to getting there and kicking arse and we got there we were the fittest blokes there. We had advantages in weapons training over the army. We knew all the army stuff as well. We camped out in the scrub and played silly buggers like they do. We were prepared for it and actually

31:30 we were split up into sections and 9 times out of 10 every section has a machine gun, an M60 which with 100 gram belt weighs about 100 pounds, pretty heavy so the diver in that section naturally migrated to getting the gun because the other blokes too bloody heavy carrying that all day and the army wouldn't let you have a sling. You had to hold this thing in what was called the high port

32:00 so you had to carry the thing all day long so our guys were, "Yeah we can hack that. Give me the gun." and they carried the gun. So that was the physical side of it. I can't say that we enjoyed the leeches and the ticks or all night ambushes and make you think, "Thank God I'm in the navy." Yeah not the most pleasant place to be. We were glad to see the end of it.

How long were you at Canungra for?

3 weeks.

And there were 6 or 7 of you.

7 of us yeah. No sorry 6.

32:30 Digger didn't go. That's the one thing he didn't have to repeat. They didn't make him repeat Canungra. Yeah from memory 80 or 90 soldiers or something.

What was the interaction of army/navy like?

Not bad because we were in greens we all looked the same. I mean they knew we were sailors. The only difference in our uniform was it had Australia flashes as we called them on our shirts. Well they didn't wear them so they could see that we were sailors but I mean, they were quite happy to see us because as I said we carried the gun.

33:00 But there was no animosity at all. There was no navy V army. We were there all together. We were going to Vietnam. We were all Aussies. It was good actually. We got on real well with them and we showed them a thing or to. I actually topped my map reading course out of the whole Canungra course. Beat them at their own game. I was pretty pleased with that.

How did they react?

Who cares you know, although I think one of the

33:30 army officers congratulated me and said it was pretty good but all of the team did well in marks. We were all up in the top 10% in everything we did but they used to get a bit worried about us sometimes because navy divers have a bit of a reputation of playing tricks on people and there was one incident. It wasn't my team it was one of the other teams but towards the end of the course they put you through an

34:00 obstacle course and jump in the river and all this rubbish and they get you to jump off a tower into the river and it used to be in the scrub and you are filthy and tired and you jump off the tower into the creek off this tower and the army had safety swimmers in the water and the idea was when you got on top of the tower they asked you, "Swimmer or non-swimmer." And if you were a non-swimmer these fellows would and they weren't trained or anything. They might have been army PTIs [Physical Training Instructors]

34:30 or volunteers they weren't necessarily good swimmers themselves but they would come in, non-swimmer they would come grab him so he wouldn't drown and drag him to shore. So you had to say swimmer or non-swimmer and the water was filthy. This fellow got up the top and he was a clearance diver and he said, "Non-swimmer." so all these blokes got ready to come in and he jumped in and didn't come up. He just went to the bottom and swam along the bottom and up under the little bit

35:00 of a wharf thing there and he came up under the wharf and the shit just hit the fan. Here's a non-swimmer and this bloke hasn't come up. All these army blokes out there, duck diving and feeling around the bottom and coming up and, "We can't find him, we can't find him!" And eventually this bloke came out from underneath the wharf and from that point on Canungra, the army made us, gave us direct orders when you get on that tower you sing out, "Clearance diver.

35:30 You don't say swimmer or non-swimmer you say clearance diver." And then they know this bastard we had better watch him but that story went around the whole time. He got into a lot of strife too. The army was very upset about that.

Was there slang or nicknames between the army and the navy?

Yeah the name I remember mostly we called the army, 'Pogos.' I'm not sure what they called us.

36:00 The name that sticks in my memory that everyone called us was, 'Bubblies.' That was typical name. We were Bubblies to most people yeah.

Where did the name Pogos come from?

I don't know. I think it's an army term for something. I'm not sure but they didn't like necessarily like the name Pogo either. But yeah they were Pogos.

Can you talk us through some more of your Canungra training? What specifically were you doing?

36:30 Well you start the day, you slept in tents. Freezing bloody cold in Canungra when we were there. Canungra is probably the most mountainous place in Australia, seemed like it anyway. Overgrown like hell. You start the day with PT in typical army style with bloody big boots and running around the place for ½ hour or so. Destroy your ankles. But that was the way

37:00 the army did it. You might go and do some rope climbing. A bit of an obstacle course, come back, change and breakfast which was bloody awful and then you start the day. It maybe there was some intelligence briefing, perhaps some latest information from Vietnam but most of the day was taken up with. They had a company there that were Vietnam veterans. These fellows would play the game of being

37:30 enemy so you would go out and you would do some instruction in the field on site and then they would say, "Right oh you do this, this is the plan. We are going to patrol and do this. This is the enemy we expect and so on" and these fellows they knew how the VC behaved and so on. So you would go out. It might be something as simple as a patrol and it might be to go through a village and sort out a village and search for cases and they might

38:00 call that they've got booby traps. A lot of weapons training. A lot of live firing on the range. Ambushes. You would set up, you would go in and set up an ambush and the instructors would play VC and they would leave you. You would stay awake in an ambush all night. They would never initiate an ambush until 5.00 am in the morning because they wanted to make sure you didn't go to sleep, that you were awake all night because once the ambush was done it was done

38:30 so they would leave it to the last minute. Of course instruction on how to do all this properly. How to move around the jungle and what to expect. The panji [sharpened bamboo stakes] stakes and what the VC would use to, just jungle training. A lot of marches, forced marches as I say with the gun. A lot of patrolling. You would go for up to 4 nights in the bush and just living off ration packs. You know you are learning

39:00 how to manoeuvre properly in the jungle. How to set up your night harbours and defensive positions and just preparing you for patrolling in Vietnam. Really it wasn't, well I wouldn't say it didn't do us any good but it wasn't aimed at us it was aimed at the army but we were going to Vietnam so we wanted every bit of training that would help.

What was the toughest part of it?

Probably the last 4 days you were buggered. You

39:30 had had it by then and the last 4 days, included in that 4 days was one all night ambush. We were up all night and no sleep and then straight into the next day's program, a forced march and as I say patrolling the whole time. Night harbours where you are up half the night and defensive perimeters and so on so by the time you get to the last day you are buggered and then this last forced march back to

40:00 the live range where you do live shoots again and then this forced march up what they call this Heartbreak Hill. I believe it's true. I believe blokes have suffered, young blokes have suffered heart attacks at this stage. It's a very long winding hill and you've got full packs and ammunition and back to the army base and that's when they put you through that final obstacle course and you know, you are crawling through mud and wire and jumping in the river and

40:30 there was one famous part of the obstacle course. I think they call it the Bear Pit and it was near the sergeant's mess and I mean it was foul. It was just rotten putrid mud and they reckon the sergeant's mess used it as a toilet as well and you actually came out I think it was like a big round corrugated iron pipe and there was no choice. You just had to fall into this damn hole and then climb out and the next thing was you jump in the river. At least you get cleaned up in the river and that was the end of it.

41:00 But it was just army, constant army bullshit.

Tape 6

00:32 **We have to ask you about the WRAN story.**

Well we were doing our weapons training at Nowra and I'd driven down, I had taken the car down to Nowra and I think 3 of us, 3 able seaman had been into the White Ensign Club in Nowra and had a skin full. Of course the cops didn't worry then so I drove back and I drove in through the gate of HMAS Albatross

- 01:00 and we got the bright idea of, "Let's go say hello to the WRANS." They were totally off, out of bounds for sailors and this was 11.30, midnight so, "No worries." Full of grog and not thinking. I've got this big red Falcon, twin exhaust, V8, stands out, gold stripes the lot and we parked it right outside the WRAN's quarters and the 3 of us decide to do this raid on the WRAN's quarters. Anyway they had a duty WRAN on duty. She sat
- 01:30 in the front office and I think we sneaked around and went up the back stairs and making a noise. We were falling over each other and so next thing this duty WRAN spots us and she just goes into flat panic. You know 3 blokes in the WRAN's quarters so she starts to scream and girls are coming out of their cabins and alarms are going and we thought, "Shit, discretion is the better part of valour." so raced outside and jumped in the car and big wheelie and off we go and I
- 02:00 think nothing more of this. So I go and park it in the car park and go to bed. About 1.00 in the morning all the lights come on in the messes and the voice comes through, "Who owns the red Falcon, SA number plate?" "Don't know Chief, not us." But anyway they got my name so first thing in the morning I get piped up to the gangway and at the time at Albatross the most despised naval policeman
- 02:30 in the navy's history, a fellow by the name of Sweep Swimperton was in charge. He hated divers. He hated everybody but he hated divers more than anyone else and this, I'll never forget this as long as I live. He got the three of us into his office and he was just absolutely furious. He was also happy. You could see that he had three CDs in his clutches and he was going to throw the book at us and he said, "You blokes will never see the light of day again. I'm going to do everything. I'm going to throw the book at you
- 03:00 blokes." Anyway next thing Jake the Boss gets word that three of his troops are in gaol and, "Crikey." That was the last day. We were flying out the next day to go to Canungra actually. So Sweeps is happy. He's happy he's got us. He said, "I'm going to keep you locked up and you can go to Canungra the next day." Anyway Jake gets on the phone and says, "I'm sorry Sweeps but we're going to Canungra
- 03:30 today you're going to have to drop all charges." And Sweeps no way. No way. So Jake went and saw the commanding officer at Albatross and said I think in quite polite terms, "I'm sorry Sir but your regulating lieutenant has three of my operational team in his cells and it's not in the program. This is the fleet commander's diving team and the fleet commander will not appreciate this you holding up our training." And
- 04:00 Sweeps still, he didn't want to have anything to do with it. Anyway the commanding officer saw the writing on the wall and, "I'll be in deep trouble here. I can't stop the progression of this training." So he got on the phone to Sweeps and he said, "Drop the charges." And I've never seen a man come unstuck I tell you. He's a navy officer. He got the three of us back in his office and he closed the door and I kid you not he was frothing at the mouth. He was spitting and there was froth on his lips and of course, we knew we were off the hook by then. We thought this was great. These three able
- 04:30 seamen were standing at attention and we were grinning. We couldn't help but grin and he couldn't do a thing. He was furious. He swore, he said, "One day I'll get you blokes." And we just left with a smile on our face and Jake never said a word, the chief never said a word but the petty officer Phil Naramore he smiled at us and said, "You bunch of dickheads." That was his only comment. We didn't care. We were going to Vietnam.
- 05:00 **So with the rest of your navy career did you ever come across Sweeps again?**
- Yes I did. When I was in Team 2 after I'd come back from Vietnam Sweeps was in, of all places he was made the regulation officer at Penguin, the diving school and he used to watch divers like a hawk. When they were going ashore anything he could pick them up on. I took a vehicle to go and
- 05:30 get some stores from Garden Island and I had a couple of other fellows with me in uniform in the middle of the day and we picked up the stores and we said, "We may as well have a beer." So we drove down to a very famous pub called, 'The Rockers' at Woolloomooloo and we parked the vehicle around the back. We were very careful but unfortunately some naval patrolmen drove past and they thought, "We'll just check the pub out to see if there are any sailors." because we were in work uniform. You are not allowed to be
- 06:00 in public basically and they walked in and there are the three of us leaning against the bar drinking beer and of course, they went ballistic and arrested us and took us back to Penguin and Sweeps. You should have seen his face and he recognised me and, "You beauty. I've got you." But I think somehow, I forget the details but I think I got out of that somehow too. I can't remember how but the divers were always one step ahead.
- 06:30 **And did you have another close call just before you left as well in the car?**
- Oh yeah. It was our farewell. The Strata Hotel in Cremorne which is pretty close to the diving school. Obviously before a team deploys the school and all the teams come up and it's a big heavy night and you

get on the job and of course, in those days there was no breathalyser and the police didn't worry you and you thought you could drive all right and I had my big red beast there

07:00 and I was living over on the other side of the bridge I think at Maroubra or something then and anyway, another skinful of grog. Digger was with me because Digger was actually coming to South Australia with me on pre-embarkation leave which was, we were leaving the following day for pre-embarkation and another fellow, another old mate and it was we had a few beers and you don't appreciate how fast you are going so I came down the Cahill Expressway towards the Sydney Harbour Bridge heading south and I had no idea

07:30 I was just cruising along in the red and gold V8 and by the time we were all the length of the Cahill Expressway, crossed the bridge and I was slowing down as we came off the bridge on the south side and the guy in the back said, "There is a blue light behind us mate do you know who that is?" So I looked in the mirror and saw the mini. The cops used to go by themselves in those days in Mini Minors and he'd chased me the whole way. Anyway I pulled over on the bridge and he got out of the car and he just came up and abused the Christ out of me. "Do you know I've been chasing you all the length

08:00 of the Cahill Expressway. You were doing over 80 miles." And I said, "Oh hell sorry I didn't know I was going that fast." And I didn't. I had no idea and I shouldn't have been driving and he said, "What the hell do you think you're doing? You could have killed yourself or killed someone." And I just said, "Sorry mate. We are going to Vietnam next week." And the minute I said that I've never seen a change. I can still remember the look on his face. It just straight away all the anger just fell away

08:30 which speaks highly of the man and he said, "Oh okay. You are right to drive home." I said, "I'll be right. I'll be careful now. My mates will keep an eye on me." And he said, "Okay get your car home and get to bed." And I said, "Thank you very much Sir." And he was ready to shoot us I reckon but he just changed so quickly. You wouldn't see that today would you?

So pre-embarkation leave you went back home?

I went back to South Australia. Larry Digney

09:00 he was from Tasmania but he was a bit of wild boy in those days. He thought I'll come to the wineries with you because I had relatives who had a winery. So he came to South Australia with me for 5 days and we hit the wineries, after seeing my family I took him up to the winery and he was 19 at the time. Funny fellow. Lovely fellow. Liked his drink and I took him up to the winery and we got stuck into it and tasted everything they had. I'll never forget

09:30 Michael who was a winemaker and owned the winery. We were trying all the wines and Digger was shitfaced by this time and we were about to leave and he said, "You know this is the best plonk I've ever had in my life." And my uncle just broke out in a smile you know, calling wine plonk and then he finished it off by saying, "This is the best brewery I've ever been to in my life." My uncle just shook his head. Old Digger wasn't a wine drinker.

So how long a leave did you get?

10:00 I think it was 5 days pre-embarkation that you get and then I was back. We came straight off leave and met at the airport.

Was saying goodbye to your parents any difficult or anything like that?

Not for me. I don't recall that Mum or Dad were upset. Mike had already been in the teams and came home. To me nothing could distract me from the fact that we were about to leave for Vietnam

10:30 and I was blind to everything else.

Did you have to, did the navy make you fill out a Will?

Oh yeah, you had to have a Will before you left.

Did you stop and ponder for a moment?

No I don't think so. We are bullet proof. It was just another formality. It was just another thing to sign. I mean they filled you full of needles and sign this and sign that what the hell's a Will you know.

11:00 Leave everything to Mum and Dad. Not a problem.

What were your worldly possessions beside the Falcon, the car?

The car. That was probably it. A couple of bob in the bank maybe.

So how did they get you up there?

We flew up with a, on a Qantas charter 787. 6 sailors, no 7 amongst 120 army blokes, 120 on the flight but the seventh navy bloke was a chief writer

11:30 and in Saigon the navy had a full commander a petty officer or chief writer and his responsibility was to look after the paperwork of the helicopter flight and the clearance diving team and I think they also a

bit of co-ordinating with the Sydney company for any navy stuff but he was returning from R & R [rest and recreation] and he came back on our flight. He was the chief so yeah, we arrived up at the airport and we wore the same as the army. We were in polyesters

- 12:00 except for the diving ranks on. The bar was open slather and we got into it and everyone getting a bit full and the flight was due to be called, everyone was saying goodbye and then they said, "There's been a delay. Radio problem." So back into the bar and they had to keep the bar open. We were the last flight out and they kept the bar open and by the time we got on board we were all pretty stonkered.
- 12:30 Took off. I don't know it must have been 11.30, midnight and next stop Darwin but as soon as we got airborne the Qantas stewards popped 120 cans of beer thinking everyone would want some beer and I swear to you that 90% of the soldiers were that tired and that drunk they had they beer and put their head down but not the navy. We got our trays. We were all sitting together and the stewards came wandering down, "Who wants a beer? Who wants a drink?"
- 13:00 So we said, "Yeah put them here mate." So they lined them all up and we all had full trays of beer and they said, "If you want anymore sing out." We shouldn't have done it but we were all young and stupid so we drank all the way to Darwin. Got to Darwin about 3.00 am and totally buggered so Darwin was just a fuel stop. It was stinking hot and that made it worse and then onto Singapore for breakfast. We slept all the way to Singapore. Got to Singapore
- 13:30 we had a 2 ½ hour stopover for breakfast. Strict orders not to leave the confines of the airport and everyone knows this but we had to take off our military shirts. Still had polys and GPs [General Purpose boots] and put on, most of us all had flowery type Hawaiian shirts so you'd see 120 young blokes making out they are not going to Vietnam all identical army gear. But they actually had MPs [Military Police] at the airport to make sure we didn't get out.
- 14:00 So we were happy with that. We just wanted to have a feed and get our head down but our Boss was decided he had an old girlfriend in Singapore from years ago and he was going to go and see her. How he got out I don't know but he got out of the airport. He said, "I'll be back in 2 ½ hours." So we were sitting there happily having breakfast and we had been there for about 1 ¼ and an announcement came over, "Qantas flight such and such we have brought the departure time forward an hour.
- 14:30 We are boarding in 5 minutes." We thought, "Christ, where's the boss." So the airport was parked out. You had the steps out there and so on and we walked out and got on board and I can see this now clearly. We are sitting there and this empty seat and the chief was panicking. "What the hell are we going to do? We've lost the Boss. What do I tell them when we get to Vietnam? How do I explain this?" Jake fortunately decided he'd better come back a bit early but they were actually
- 15:00 about to pull the stairs away from the, they weren't going to wait for him. They were getting ready to pull the stairs away from the aircraft and Jake came out of the, we spotted him. He came out of the terminal and he just, I've never seen him run so fast so he just got on board. That was a bit of relief. So into Saigon with hangovers and about I don't know 11.30 or something in the morning.

Was it just a thing with the CDT's that you wore polys? Was that a normal

- 15:30 **thing for you army blokes to have polyesters?**

Ah no. The helicopter flight had polys and I believe the CDTs on the gunline had polyesters and maybe the chiefs wore polys. I think the idea with them was that they assimilate a bit with the Americans and they could recognise who was an officer and who was a chief because their chiefs wore polys as well as the officers. So I think that was the reason behind them but you know we fitted in with the army. We wore the same gear as them

- 16:00 basically as them until we got in country.

And your polys were essentially the same as them except for the flashes?

All they had, the only difference, our polys had Royal Australian Navy across here but we did wear our badges and badges of rank and so on on those polys as well which made us stand out from the army but the minute we arrived there we were issued with American cammies [camouflage uniforms] and that was the end of the polys.

What was your first impression of Vietnam?

- 16:30 I can remember the steep approach into Tan Son Nhut [airport] and we were advised they come in fast to avoid ground fire and I looked out the country and thought this is a pretty country. There are rice paddies and villages and you saw the odd jet streak past and you saw the odd helicopter flying low and we had been told that they take potshots at aircraft coming in but you just didn't worry too much about it
- 17:00 and my first impression of Tan Son Nhut was pretty awesome really because I can still remember those huts where they parked the fighter jets in and so on. The Phantoms all along one side of the runway and they were just full of fighter jets and then as we taxied off there must have been 30-40 aircraft waiting to take off. It was incredible activity

- 17:30 and as we left the aircraft just choppers going everywhere and jets streaking off into the sky and there were aircraft lined up waiting to come in and the runways or taxiways were chocka block [full]. I've never seen such a busy place. The heat of course hits you. Very quickly processed. We had nothing to do with the army. There were naval officers waiting for us and whipped us straight away to his headquarters
- 18:00 and it was you know you see the buses, all the transports. They all have wire mesh over all the windows and all this sort of thing to stop a grenade coming through the window and you saw troops, hundreds of Americans. Trucks and weapons and, "Hell, we are in a war zone." So yeah then it was basically off to the navy, US Navy EOD villa that they had in a place called Cholon and we were
- 18:30 effectively handed over to them. The chief from the earlier team, previous team had come down from Da Nang and he was going to look after us. He organised the transport north and the Yanks gave us full issue. Camouflage gear, weapons, knives, boots everything, everything and then we got on the grog with them. They took us down town. We had to wait a couple of days in Saigon because a big typhoon came through so we went down and hit the high spots. A place called Tudu Street
- 19:00 which was the hot bar area in Saigon and had an absolute ball. This is no war zone.
- When you were doing your training did you know exactly where in Vietnam you would be deployed?**
- Oh yes. Well not in the very early stages. We assumed we would go to Vung Tau where all the earlier teams had been. In the last I suppose yeah, within a couple of months of
- 19:30 we were told the previous team we being relocated to Da Nang and we would spend our tour in Da Nang. That is about 500 miles north of Vung Tau. It's up near the DMZ [de-militarised zone].
- Before they went to Da Nang were the CDTs attached to the US Navy?**
- Yes. Our designation was EOD Mob Pac Team 35. We weren't known as CDT3. Well for Australian purposes we were but the Americans referred to us as Explosive Ordnance
- 20:00 Disposal Mobile Unit Pacific Team 35 and we came under the umbrella of the EOD system which their group headquarters was in Hawaii and we had boats, vehicles, everything was issued to them and our Boss got direct orders from a US Navy captain.
- So essentially the teams were answerable to the Americans?**
- Totally. The only thing we had to do was
- 20:30 the navy chief from Saigon would fly up every fortnight to pay us. It wasn't worth the trip but he had to do it because we all had our money allotted. I think we used to get I forget what they call it, danger money or combat pay or whatever the hell it was. It amounted to about \$15 or \$20 a fortnight that was your combat pay and we couldn't allot that.
- 21:00 So he physically had to get in an aeroplane and fly to Da Nang and give 6 of us \$15 each and he would stay the night. We would get him drunk and throw him on an aeroplane the next morning and that was the only thing we had to do with the Australians. We had great difficulty getting anything out of the army, any food. We would give anything for a leg of lamb or lamb chops which the Americans didn't have but they wouldn't give us anything but when the Sydney came in the chief would jump on a flight to Vung
- 21:30 Tau and he would scrounge what he could and bring it back and get some beer.
- Did the RAN have any other permanent outpost in Vietnam at that time?**
- Only the helicopter flight which was down south in 3 Corps. They weren't too far from the army. I think they moved, they were in a couple of different places but the helicopter flight was there and there were 2 or 3 navy helicopter flights attached to the RAAF 9 Squadron. Iroquois
- 22:00 and I'd say the 2 administrative staff based in headquarters in Saigon and that was it.
- And how did you find the relationship you had with the Americans?**
- We had a bit to learn about the Americans in dealing with them and working with them. Although we worked very much as a team we would never send one of our own out on his own with the Americans because
- 22:30 we didn't trust them. We always went out in pairs so we could cover each other's tail. The Americans were quite different to us and we found it quite hard to comprehend in a way the lack of training. None of them wanted to be there. They all hated it. They all wanted to get home whereas we were you know, this is good stuff. This is what we are here for, what we train for so yeah, we were all a little surprised by the Americans.
- 23:00 They were probably surprised by us. I remember Digger went into a US facility to try and get something out of stores and a big American Negro was at the desk and Digger was saying, "Can I get this? Can I

get that?" and he said, "Where are you from?" and he said, "Australia." And this guy looked him in the eye and said, "Damn, you speak good English you people." He didn't even know Australians spoke English. Incredible

Yeah we will stop for a moment.

In fact I read something the other day

23:30 they reckon it was the Green Berets and they started and said, "No, we are out of here. This is too much for us.

That's at Canungra?

Yeah I would believe it though. I would, I've been through a lot of the American training camps and a lot of it is you know hooyah, yell, scream we are tough but when it gets down to the nitty gritty they don't really

24:00 they had a lot of bastardisation but I didn't think at that time anyway that their training was anything like ours. They were not as professional. I don't like to put the Yanks down, they are very good people but they sent in some people that shouldn't have been there.

So did you have any sort of autonomy when you were there?

Our boss was our boss. Even though the captain or the American system they would still have to request for us to do a job

24:30 and the boss he could to make the decision to say, "No I don't want the team to do that." That happened a couple of times. We had a lot of things happen with the first week and it gave us a bit of a shock and one of them, our fellows, four of our blokes walked into an ambush and we nearly lost the lot of them and from that day on because previous teams had been involved in ambushes. They would go out on teams and we are here and we'll do anything

25:00 and our boss thought that he had better start to clamp down on certain operations because our primary role was anti-sabotage and bomb disposal and so on and we didn't want to lose blokes. He didn't want to have to write a report saying that he had lost a bloke on an operation that was a little bit divorced from our role. So he started to clamp down on some of those things and he would say, "No." to some of those operations.

Can you recall your first operation?

Very clearly. I wouldn't call it an operation but it was a job.

25:30 We had been there, I think it was the second or third day. The old team was still there because we always did a handover period where they would stay, the sailors would stay for a week but the officer and chief would stay for 2 weeks and they would introduce us basically to procedures and just being in Vietnam and how you go about certain things and working with the Americans. Anyway there is twelve of us there in the hooch and a call came in

26:00 that there was an ammunition barge alight in Da Nang Harbour. This was just after the typhoon. We had heard a lot of big ammunition barges had broken adrift from their moorings in the storm and were high and dry around the bay. So anyway this call came in and said this barge was on fire and loaded with high explosives so okay, we'd better go. One of the bosses said, "Okay one of the old team had better

26:30 go and show them the way." We had to drive to a wharf, to a particular wharf and pick what was called a Harbour Security Boat that was waiting to take us where we wanted to go and the old team said, "No bugger you. We are going home." And, "Okay, right oh." So the three of us jumped in the truck and I was driving and they gave us directions how to get there and I got lost. So we are cruising around going the wrong way and we eventually found the naval base and said, "Where do we go?" and, "Yeah down there."

27:00 So we went down to the wharf and it delayed us maybe 3 or 4 minutes, 5 minutes I don't know but there's this 14ft fibreglass skimmer with 85 horse power waiting and American in the boat and we could see out in the bay this barge and there's quite an intense fire on it. The intensity of the fire looked like it was actually explosives burning because explosives will burn with a very intense fire, flame and we thought, "Hello this isn't looking too good." because we knew it was an ammunition barge.

27:30 So anyway we jumped in the boat and he let go and turned towards the barge and as the bow swung towards the barge the whole barge just went kaboomba and I think there was about 150 tons of high explosives on the barge and I've never seen anything like it. It was, it actually mushroomed. I've never seen, apart from a nuclear barge explosives mushroom and I still can see at the top of this mushroom, the mushroom

28:00 develops quite slowly, I can see the arms and legs splayed flying through the air. So whoever had set the fire was obviously VC and the bloke was still on fire. They reckon 2 blokes were missing from a nearby village and they reckon they were on the barge. The whole thing cooked off. It didn't all go. Some of the stuff was thrown out. We saw pallets of like 81 mm rounds flying through the air and of course we stopped

28:30 and our biggest worry was that we were going to get lobbed on the head by a pallet of ordnance. But yeah, it was lucky because if I hadn't got lost, it was just a matter of the boss saying, "No, one of you blokes take these fellows." We had no choice. We had to go. There was a fire on that barge and we were going to go straight out to that barge, dig out the fire and put it out so those couple of minutes saved our life.

Even in retrospect driving around Da Nang

29:00 **when you really don't know where you are going, how safe was that?**

Who knows. Da Nang actually had a curfew. American troops were allowed leave in Da Nang. You couldn't be in Da Nang unless it was on business, officially condoned the reason to be there however, we had a nice little piece of paper to say that we were authorised to travel anywhere, anytime

29:30 as long as we were conducting EOD work so we would just throw a couple of dummy rounds in the back and of course, MPs used to patrol Da Nang. The Americans, a lot used to slip out and go and visit the houses of ill repute so they were constantly on the lookout for servicemen but they thought it was too dangerous they felt to walk the streets but we used to drive around. We used to go where we liked anytime we liked and no one ever, well actually we did

30:00 I did get shot at once in Da Nang but that wasn't driving the streets, that was in a helicopter. We were coming back from a job. Flying right over Da Nang city about 100 ft off the ground and next thing holes started to appear in the helicopter. Some bastard in the middle of town was shooting at us and it was safe in hindsight because we all came home but you don't know.

How did they originally get you from Saigon up to Da Nang?

Americans Hercules.

30:30 C130. We as EOD we had a very, very high travel priority. Aircraft operated in Vietnam like a taxi service. There were transports operating non-stop from one airport to the other airport non-stop. It was like a taxi rank. You line up waiting. Fill it up and off it goes and you'd have to wait for the next one. There was a set of orders from an officer to say, "This man is travelling from Da Nang to Saigon." for example but there was a

31:00 priority number and depending on the load and who was going you would get off loaded very quickly but we had priority so we would walk in and we were on any flight we wanted to be whether it was a helicopter or an aeroplane. So yeah, old John Donner the previous chief just took us out the airport and walked up to the counter, "We are going to Da Nang. First C130 let's go." "Okay, there's your ticket, there's the aircraft, engines are running." So that was a bit ironic and jumped on.

31:30 There was a mixture of American troops and off we go into Da Nang and the old team was waiting for us. Put on a big BB

They had Victorian Bitter. Fantastic bar. The best bar in Vietnam it was. They inherited it from the Yanks in Da Nang and that first night I was sitting there. I'll never forget it I was sitting there and I'm in a war zone and I'm eating spare ribs and drinking cold beer and nothing is going on. This is fantastic. This is going to be a good trip

32:00 **but that all turned to custard pretty quick.**

Did you find yourself in those early days thinking back to life as a kid reading about war stories and now you are there and doing this sort of, pinching yourself and thinking this can't be real?

I don't recall that feeling but I do recall

32:30 a buzz you know at being, I'm here. This is a war zone and everywhere you look there is wocka, wocka, wocka coming overhead and there's trucks with Americans and helmets and flak jackets and rifles and Phantoms screaming overhead and I found that very exciting. 22 years of age and this is all right. This is boy's stuff. This is fair dinkum. This is a good game you know and

33:00 we had been trained. I had been in the navy for 5 years at that stage so all this training all of a sudden I was able to put the practice and I was with a great bunch of blokes and I was excited just to be there. This was fantastic. I loved every minute of it. I can't remember that I loved every minute while I was there but in hindsight it was probably the best part of my life. The absolute highlight of my life. Adrenalin all the time,

33:30 just on a high. Exciting. You never knew what was going to happen because we were on 24 hour call. Like for example, the army knew they had an operation going bush next week or something or tomorrow but we were 24, we were on tenterhooks 24 hour a day. Any minute the radio, our own radio hooked up to the operation centre, a call could come through and say, "Hey there is a helicopter on its way, incoming." The chopper pad was 200 yards away

34:00 and you are ready to go and 2 minutes later you are on a chopper heading out bush somewhere and no one knew where you were going. So yeah.

Because of being in that sort of situation were you ever able to relax?

Yes. As I say when you are young and bulletproof. You wouldn't be able to do it now and I often wonder how the chief and officer who were older, in their 30s how they handled it but at 22, the youngest bloke was 19 and as I say

34:30 you are bulletproof. , "Let's go this is magic." But there were times when we could relax. Generally our routine was, we could operate in pairs mostly on most jobs so we would have 2 fellows on standby and they weren't allowed to drink and they had their gear packed and were ready to leave the hooch in about 2 minutes. That would be a 24 hour stint and while those 2 fellows were on standby

35:00 another 2 were on stand down which means they could have 1 or 2 beers but they were there to back up the other 2 if they needed back up and the other 2 on the 24 hour period were down. You could get shitfaced if you wanted to at the bar. 4 oz bottle of Bacardi or Jim Beam \$1.45 not real good. So yeah, every third day basically you had a day of stand down

35:30 and you would get on the turps and that was your letdown and did you drink. You just hoped that the shit wouldn't hit the fan and the whole team didn't have to go in a hurry but mostly 2 blokes did most of the jobs and then after your day off, bang you were on a full 24 hour alert.

Because just about everybody we have spoken to talks about the culture of alcohol that sort of grew there.

Well yeah it was so easy. We used to get American beer for nothing

36:00 if we wanted it and we didn't want much of it but the deal with the US Marines at Da Nang airfield the Yanks loved Australian beer and we could actually order Australian beer from Vung Tau and we used to buy 3 pallets at a time and I think it was about 164 cases, 164 dozen. Something like that and we always ordered 3 pallets at a time and the Americans would say

36:30 'Any time you guys want to go anywhere let us know'. And generally they would put on a DC 3 for us and the chief or the petty officer would jump on the flight and they would fly to Vung Tau to pick up 3 pallets of beer. The deal was we would sell them, not give it to them, we would sell them 1 pallet of beer and they would give us an aircraft to do that so we would get topped up with our 2 pallets of beer. That beer cost us 11c a can Aussie beer. VB mostly because they were only one that

37:00 didn't go off and we had our own bar set up and we had an honesty system where we just helped ourselves and we had a card that we filled in, 'I had one beer, I'm shouting you two'. Our deal was that any visitors never paid for a beer and we had a lot of visitors. EOD types they used to come around our place because we were Aussies and we had Aussie beer. Good company and we would give them a good feed and a bit of a break and we said, "No you blokes,

37:30 no visitors pay in this bar." and this might sound a bit silly but Yanks are very generous and we had a beer box and that's where you kept the cards but there is enough room to put money in. 9 times out of 10 and the Yanks would come in and get half shitfaced on our beer and they would walk and \$US30 in the box each so we were that far ahead but we never did it for, we never encouraged that

38:00 but they did it and we never said, "No don't do it." In fact at the end of the time all that money that was left over we gave to our Mammasan because she was finished when we left and that was the end of her employment and we felt pretty sorry for her.

Can you tell us about that?

About Mammasan? We inherited her from the last team because the last team had moved to Da Nang a couple months before

38:30 but she was to us at the time seemed like a very old lady but in hindsight I think she was about 40. She had children and her husband was in the South Vietnamese Army and she couldn't remember the last time she saw him and she lived in a sort of, in fact she didn't live far from China Beach, not far from us. She used to come every day. She had a pass and she used to do some of our laundry.

39:00 She would keep the place clean. She would make the beds and if we wanted her to cook, she could only cook Vietnamese but every now and again we would have a Vietnamese feed and she just was around the hooch all day during the day and just kept things clean and tidied up and put the coffee on if you wanted a cup of coffee. A good old girl and we paid her and that all came out of the beer kitty and we have photographs of the day we left and

39:30 a group photo with Mammasan and Jake handing her all the money we had and I mean it was quite a, I forget the amount but it was quite a lot, US dollars. It didn't mean a thing to her. She was in tears. She thought her life was over because she could see the Americans were pulling out and Da Nang was only 100 km south of Da Nat, 100 miles or something and they knew damn well, the Vietnamese knew what was happening and they knew what was all over for them

40:00 so we felt pretty sad about it to. We loved our dog and we had to leave old dog with Mammasan and he knew what was going on. He absolutely shaking when we left him, he was petrified. He knew we weren't coming back. A pretty sad day really.

Tape 7

00:30 **Now there is a story about in your first week there some of your fellows going out and one of them getting a medal?**

Yeah. That happened in fact I think that happened prior to the barge blowing up so it would have been the first day. It was part of the and that's why the team, the fellows said, "No, you go on your own." Because it scared the hell out of them too because

01:00 they were on their wind down all week to go but a job came up and it was organised by our fellows that it was a bit of an introduction to the tasks that the team did. It was to accompany an American unit, sorry, yeah American jungle surveillance unit they called them. These blokes used to go out in the scrub and plant sensors so that they could pick up movement, infrared, sounds, movement of VC and there is an island

01:30 a far way south from Da Nang and they were going to go out on this island and do this operation, implant sensors and they had a South Vietnamese unit as a defensive group, 4 of our fellows and the surveillance group. Anyway they landed on the island and they knew it was a VC island. It was known that VC would smuggle stuff down at night and they would plant it on the island and then it would be

02:00 transferred to the mainland. Weapons and food and so on so they expected a bit of action but they thought you know, these are 'milk runs' [easy] . They were pretty easy, no problem. I wasn't there but they were walking through the scrub and someone found what they suspected to be probably a case area which is a plant where the VC are hiding their stuff. So they stopped and our blokes immediately said, "Nobody

02:30 go into this area we want to check it out for booby traps." Because every time the VC case something they didn't want you sniffing around and if you did they wanted you to blow yourself up and our fellows knew that so they said, "Nobody go near the joint. We are going to do a sweep through this area and we'll check it out for booby traps and then we'll check the cases and what's there." Anyway they went to do this and one of the Americans he was going home in a week and he wanted a souvenir

03:00 so he wandered off on his own. Wandering around this area because it was obviously VC area. They could tell and he was looking for a souvenir to take home and he got a souvenir he didn't expect. He trod on a 105 mm booby trapped Howitzer round. You know 105 mm is pretty big and it took both his, blew both his legs clean off. When that happened our fellows

03:30 obviously quickly went to ground. Didn't know what the hell was going on and the VC had actually set up an ambush on the other side of the case. The trail was moving in that direction and they were waiting for these blokes to move through the case area and into the ambush and the kill zone. Now when this fellow trod on the booby trap he had effectively blown the ambush so they decided to open up and fortunately our blokes weren't in the kill zone but fire was coming in pretty quick and

04:00 a lot of the South Vietnamese and, "Didi mau." [Vietnamese slang for 'go quickly'] as they say, cleared off. The 2 youngest blokes, our youngest blokes on the team. One was John Aldenhoven and Bluey Furner their training came into play and one of the things that was absolutely drummed into us was you never leave a weapon behind. That was first and foremost you never leave a weapon behind and they could see all these weapons being dropped by the South Vietnamese so the first thing they did was try and get the weapons back.

04:30 They can't leave them to Charlie and also the explosion has got their attention of course and next thing they heard this Yank screaming and writhing around so they both went over under fire and they dragged this bloke back to a bit of a depression and tried to bandage his legs and stop the massive bleeding. Then they both went out and stupidity under fire they went out to recover these weapons. Just because that was the Australian training. You never leave a weapon.

05:00 Anyway this went on. They went out and did a couple of trips out and immediately the other Americans called in a Medivac [medical evacuation] chopper to get this fellow out. I believe this Medivac chopper came in and just about got shot out of the sky because this firefight was still going on so Medivac cleared off. He couldn't get in and the Medivac called in gunships so a couple of gunships, Cobra gunships

05:30 came in and given the position they just came in and laced the area and that was the end of the VC or they cleared off whatever. Then they brought back the Medivac but by this time a couple of hours had gone back and they medivaced the Yank out but he died on transit to hospital. Just shock and loss of too much blood. Anyway to get back to the story our blokes were extracted and came back to the hooch that night. We thought they had gone out on a real

06:00 sort of lolly run and they walked into the hooch that night and white as sheets they were and they weren't saying a word. We were all having a beer and we said, "What's wrong with you blokes?" and they didn't want to talk about it. Two of them were to go home in a week. Anyway eventually the chief, one of the chiefs said, "Shit hit the fan and we lost a bloke and got into a firefight." and slowly the story

came out

06:30 over the next week or two. But one thing to this day annoys the hell out of me. These two were mates all the way through this whole operation and I remember when they, a couple of days later the chief, the outgoing chief said, "I've put in Mumbles, John Aldenhoven for a Distinguished Service Medal for bravery." and he said to Blue, , "I'm sorry Blue.

07:00 There's only one medal." He'd already called the army down south and he said he wanted to put two of his boys in for DSM and the army said, "No, no. We have an allocation of medals. We don't care what you did you can only have one." So John Dollar didn't have a choice he said, "I've got to give the medal to John because he's going home. Blue you've got the rest of your tour to get another medal mate.'

07:30 So side by side buddies this bloke walks away with a medal and he deserved and this bloke walks away with nothing. Not even a pat on the back or a Mentioned in Dispatches or a, I mean they were handing out medals on ships off shore and this bloke, they both deserved DCs [Distinguished Conduct Medal]. What they did under fire trying to save this poor bloke under fire when it got him but that's the way the system worked

08:00 and I've never forgiven the system for that. A medal, what the hell do they mean but the point is this bloke got no recognition whatsoever for the same act of bravery but that's the Australian system. It was based on the British system and it doesn't matter what you do if there's none left you don't get it. You could earn 3 VCs [Victoria Crosses] in a day but if there are no medals allocated in the system and of course, the army controlled the medals

08:30 and the army said, "We've got several hundred blokes down here and there is only 6 of you. We're not going to give you our allocation of medals. Bigger you." So we were very lucky to get that DCM.

How did that affect Blue?

Couldn't care less. To this day he's never said anything about it. You accept that sort of thing but it annoyed me

09:00 because they were mates of mine and I just thought it was wrong of the system not to recognise this bloke.

Not taking away from the gravity of the situation of the American guy getting killed that must have given you a certain impression of the Americans that he would sort of put himself in that position.

Yeah well it was proven over the war that we didn't really trust them. So it's not a very nice thing to say. It wasn't

09:30 necessarily their fault. We didn't trust them because their level of training was almost non-existent compared to ours. They sent young fellows off to war that didn't have a clue what they were doing. They weren't ready for war. They weren't trained properly. They were just cannon fodder basically. Conscripted. I mean what sort of crazy bloke would do that when you have a week to go home.

10:00 Most blokes when you are getting short of stay you back away. "No way am I doing all this and leaving it to the new fellows." That's why the blokes in our team said, when this barge was alight they said, "No bugger you, you do it." And I don't blame them either. In fact the chief of the outgoing team John Digger very happy-go-lucky fellow but after that, after that day he sat in the mess at the bar and drank all day,

10:30 every day until his plane left. He just sat there and drank beer because it was so close and he nearly lost two of his boys. That rocked the hell out of him and to us from this BBQ and spare ribs and, "What a bloody holiday this is going to be." In the space of about 3 days we had almost lost the entire team so that made us stop and dig in. It was good in that it made us realise

11:00 this is serious, we are in a war zone here. This isn't a game. We need to start taking things seriously so I think we had a bit of turn in attitude.

In the incident in the barge blowing did that create more work for you in terms of recovery ordnance?

Sure. It became our responsibility because a lot of throw outs. In fact we found intact pallets of 80mm mortars and rockets and so on, on the beach here and there and also a lot of pallets

11:30 were just blown apart. When you have a blast like that it doesn't mean that every single piece of explosive ordnance is going to detonate. A lot of it gets thrown for an area of several hundred metres around the barge and there was ammunition ordnance just lying on the seabed. We didn't make it a priority but when we had a quiet time two or three of us would jump in the boat or in low tide we would

12:00 jump in the truck and go down there and just pick up the ordnance, take it out to a range and blow it, get rid of it. That was an ongoing. We probably did that for several months whenever we had a spare moment. Kept us busy.

Did you actually still have to go out to the barge or what was left of it?

Not much. It was just a mangled mess of steel. Yeah a hell of a mess.

When you went back out to it was

12:30 **going through your mind that it could blow again?**

No, no it was safe. Unless, no not really because all the ordnance on board had either detonated or been thrown out by the blast so the barge itself was just a twisted wreck. There was no explosives left on the barge so the biggest, there was imbedded in the sand around it but the biggest risk of going to the barge was sharp steel everywhere, everywhere. But yeah, ordnance were just

13:00 laying all over the seabed. In fact we wouldn't have got half of it. There's no way without a very thorough search. It's still there today probably.

When you are going out to recover the ordnance can you talk me through how you actually do that?

Pick it up because most of this stuff that had been thrown out it's not armed. Like the mortars aren't fused, the rockets aren't fused although they are high explosives and they've already been subjected

13:30 to shock which is a bit of a worry. But basically you find a piece of ordnance and you just look at it and you know straight away whether that is safe to pick up, pick up and carry away as they say. You wouldn't get anyone else to do it although the kids used to come out and help us from the local village because we would give them a packet of cigarettes. So they were only too keen. You couldn't stop them. You'd go out and next thing they were coming over to your boat or your truck and they are

14:00 nursing a 105 howitzer and here you are so in the end you just become very blasé about it, "Yeah okay put it there." and we would toss them some lollies and cigarettes and no worry. No, the risk in that is not great because it is not fused ordnance. It's the fused stuff you've got to worry about.

What actually happens though? If you go out to recover ordnance how many of you go out?

14:30 Well sometimes if things were very quiet the whole team because it was a nice day to go out in the boat and paddle around the water. But generally just 2 of the off blokes would go out there and paddle around for a couple of hours and load up what they could.

When you go out do you drop anchor?

Just and tie it off the wreck and then it's just a matter of you would have a face mask and it was pretty shallow and the visibility wasn't too bad and if you saw anything every now and again you would

15:00 sort of dig in the sand with your toes and find something and pull it out of the sand but most of it was just laying out there like garbage you know. Tons, I don't know the actual figure but I would say there was the best part of 50 ton spread around that bay from the wreck.

So you literally just gone down have a look around and pick it up.

Pick it up and put it on the boat or the truck. Simple as that.

15:30 You wouldn't do that if you suspected it of being booby trapped but coming out and booby trapping the water is not as simple to do and Charlie would rather knock it off rather than booby trap it knowing we were coming back they would go and carry it off. Probably a lot of it probably was knocked off. He would rather carry it away and set up a booby trap on a road or you know, so we weren't concerned at all. The risk was very, very minimal that it was booby trapped and as I say as far

16:00 as the safety of the ordnance to we pick up well we can identify immediately whether it was safe, whether we thought it was safe to pick up. So yeah not a drama.

When you out like that and two of you are underwater is there someone still on the boat on sort of bubble watch?

Oh yeah safety. In peacetime though we needed a minimum of five people to put one diver in the water. Stand by divers and attendants and supervisors and so on but up there all the rules went straight out the window but we would still have one bloke

16:30 was in the water and one bloke was on the surface. Wouldn't necessarily be a standby diver but there would always be someone on the surface. You wouldn't just disappear like a couple of civilian skin divers. There were certain things you have to do. It would be great being under water wouldn't it and the boat's up on the surface and old Charlie comes along and knocks your boat off so always one on the surface, always to cover your back.

And can you talk me through head to toe what

17:00 **your equipment was?**

We used purely American equipment and it was very basic. We had no Australian diving gear so no mixed gear or no oxygen. Just straight old American scuba tanks. We had a pretty fair collection of those. Everything we had from the fins to the knives to the face masks to the command valves, all American. Compressors, the lot. We had nothing that was Australian.

17:30 You would never identify us as Australian unit until we spoke.

What sort of wetsuit and stuff were you in?

No we didn't have wetsuits. We used to dive in a pair of shorts. Too hot for wetsuits. We wore overalls simply for protection so that you didn't cut yourself or scratch yourself but that didn't always work. I've dived on a downed helicopter once

18:00 and the water was full of leeches and the overalls didn't do much for them. But that's an example where you have to be a bit more careful. We got a call that a helicopter gunship was coming back from a mission and had been shot and had crashed and of course they wanted to get back and rescue the crew and recover the chopper as soon as possible.

18:30 It was in Charlie country and Phil Naramore and I went up. Went straight out there and it was in Charlie country. They sent out a bunch of American Rangers for security for us and this chopper was, all you could see was a bit of the blade sticking out of the water and effectively like a huge rice paddy but it was a part of a huge creek system so it wasn't that deep. But the visibility was zero. It was just like mud.

19:00 Security was put out. We came in by chopper. I had a diving set and Phil Naramore. I'm junior so I do the dive. Phil stays on the surface and just keeps an eye on me. I went into the chopper and I couldn't see a thing and it was badly damaged and I was feeling around by hand. You don't know what's there, you don't know what ordnance is on board, you don't know their allotment and of course those choppers were loaded with 2.5 mm rockets

19:30 armed and geared to go. They had 40 mm grenade launchers in the nose. The guns weren't a problem they weren't in the water but the ordnance was and it was armed and it had crashed so everything is potentially ready to go. So my job was to try and recover the bodies and then try and get the ordnance, as much ordnance as we could and the chopper is all twisted and broken and I'm inside the chopper and

20:00 I'm thinking, "If anything goes wrong here I won't get out of here." Because there is all metal twisted and broken and Phil couldn't have pulled me out and he couldn't have gone in and got me because he didn't know where I was. But yeah, that's what I was getting at that's the time when you have to be very, very careful because you can't see the ordnance. You have to feel it and it's a bit of a worry. You have to tread very carefully.

So what happened with that incident with the helicopter? Were you able to recover

20:30 **the bodies?**

As it turned out it wasn't their chopper at all because another chopper returning from a mission had spotted the blade and thought that's our missing chopper because it was on the same track. As it turned out it identified it as a gun ship but we discovered it was shot down in Tet in 68, 1968 so it had been in the water for 2 years so the bodies were just skeletons

21:00 and I couldn't find their weapons and I couldn't physically find because half the chopper was so deep in the mud I didn't actually find any ordnance but I went through the cabin pretty thoroughly. But by then you know if there were bodies we would pull bodies out but we weren't going to pull bones out so we just walked away from it and left it.

What sort of visibility was there?

Nothing. You could see your finger if you put it on your mask

21:30 take your finger out quarter of an inch and you wouldn't see it. It was just zero. It was like being in the black of night so it's all feel. You've got to be careful because if you get hooked up which is very easy. The scuba tanks were big bulky things and anything could hook through them and snag you so I had to be very, very careful going in and out and once you were in you move very, very slowly. You don't want to get hooked up

22:00 because you don't know which way is out. You've got the lifeline and that is the only way out.

Had you dived with the lack of visibility before?

Oh yes, yes. That wasn't a problem but there is the added risk of ordnance down there that may go off so you had to be a bit more careful. During your training you make sure that you get in the very worst of conditions so that's a breeze. I mean to be able

22:30 to work in those conditions is what they, that's the idea.

Was that unusual circumstance to go out on a job with only one dive set?

No, not at all. The rules went out the window. For example, in peacetime to this day an able seaman cannot supervise anything to do with ordnance, demolitions, explosives. Nothing. Diving. A leading seaman can't even...

23:00 but in Vietnam two ABs went out and did everything that normally required a seaman or an officer to

supervise and you didn't have the luxury of the standby divers and helpers. That just went out the door. You couldn't operate otherwise. Yeah, so you had to make the best with two of you and you just relied on your training.

What rank were you at this stage?

Able seaman.

What were the various

23:30 ages of the guys in the CD Team?

I was 22 at the time. I turned twenty three two weeks after I came home. Bluey Furner I think was 2 or 3 months older than me and Larry Digney was the boy. He was 19, 19 or 20. He was the baby of the team. Consequently got into a lot of trouble.

And then Jake and the chief how old would they be?

Well Phil Naramore, the petty officer

24:00 would have been I think only 24 or 25. The chief I think may have been around the 30s. Jake and the chief were around similar ages. Early 30s I think. Yeah to us old fellows but they were young fellows.

I was going to say did they seem like the old guys?

Old fellows yeah, they did.

Was anyone in the team married?

Jake, the chief and Phil. I was engaged.

24:30 I think Digger got engaged when he came home and Blue was thinking about I think. Blue may have been engaged I can't recall.

When had you gotten engaged?

Probably only a few months before I went. Several months before and I got married about 4 months after I got home.

Were you engaged before you knew you were going to Vietnam?

25:00 I think we became engaged after we found out.

Would that have had any bearing in wanting you to officialise your relationship like that?

I don't recall but possibly. Yeah I think I may have felt I should make a commitment before I went up. Probably wasn't fair on her but she was pretty happy about it.

25:30 How did she feel about you going away to Vietnam?

I don't think she liked it but she never, I don't recall her ever saying anything against it or I shouldn't go. She was very supportive. She knew how I felt about it because it was a very big thing to me. Very important.

Do you remember the first time you fired a shot in anger?

There is a bit of joke about that.

26:00 The first shot I fired in Vietnam was in the hooch. We weren't supposed to wear our weapons inside. We were supposed to take them off before we came in. One day, we had our own lockers and we kept our own weapons in our lockers and one day I was in the workshop cleaning my 45 and we weren't that familiar with 45s. We had only been there, this was probably the first week and we hadn't really done any range work with the things.

26:30 We had been shown how to strip them and they operate a little differently from a 9 mm which we knew very well so I was stripping and cleaning my 45 and you treat, you look after your weapon and Jake Linton, the boss, was strolling past and he had just been out and had his belt hanging over his shoulder and he said, "Good on you Tone can you clean mine as well?" so he handed me his 45 and I made an assumption and he made an assumption

27:00 because what you do as you walk in the door you are supposed to clear your weapon. Take the magazine out and clear your weapon. He hadn't for whatever reason and I assumed he had so I started the stripping procedure without double checking the weapon was clear and it wasn't and there is a stage of the stripping process where you actually let the slide go forward which brings the hammer forward and

27:30 luckily this is just training, empty or whatever condition the weapon is. You never point, you always point it in a safe direction so as I was doing it towards the wall in the workbench. As I went to clear it she went bang, 45, and the wall was about 2 ft away from me and it hit a chisel that was sitting up there in the rack. It just destroyed the chisel and ploughed into the wall and everyone in the hooch panicked

28:00 and they all came through the door armed and ready to go and Larry Digney got the cartridge and he mounted it up in the bar and put up a big sign, 'First shot fired in anger.' So I had to live that down for a while.

Did you live that down?

Sure. It's a bit of a joke after a while. It's a bit embarrassing in the military to have what they call an accidental discharge.

28:30 A bit embarrassing but I thought it wasn't all my fault. It was a joint effort. Jake was a bit embarrassed because he hadn't done what he was supposed to do and I had assumed that before he came in the hooch he would clear the weapon. So it was just one of those things that you know, don't assume anything.

Does any accidental discharge have to go on any kind of report or?

In the army they would shoot you. No, not in the navy.

29:00 As I say we were McHale's Navy. We didn't run by routine but yeah, an accidental discharge in the army will cost you punishment, pay the whole lot. It's a very serious offence. But anyway how could Jake do anything or say anything so it was forgotten but the cartridge stayed on the bar for a while.

Did you bring it home?

No, no. I wish I had actually. There are a lot of things I wish

29:30 I'd brought home.

Can you describe the hooch for us?

Yes it was in an American navy compound right on Da Nang Harbour. What was it called? It was called a Naval Support Facility, yeah NSF Da Nang it was called. Camp Henshaw. It had a barbed wire fence around it. They had an armed guard

30:00 and basically just a compound with American equipment and a few buildings in there but our building was, we had inherited this very nice single storey brick building and the American EOD team had set it up. They were there prior to us so when our fellows were sent to Da Nang we replaced the American team. They pulled out and we replaced them so we inherited everything they had. We had our own garage in which we kept our own diving equipment and

30:30 we had a backyard with a BBQ. We had sandbagged areas out there for dismantling booby traps and ordnance waiting to be disposed of. We had a laundry, shower. You walked into the bar. Lovely bar. It had padded, not leather but you know padded area. We had bar stools and had fridges there. Dartboard. Photos of Australia everywhere. Sydney Harbour Bridge and Opera House and things like that.

31:00 A kitchen fully equipped kitchen which had.... one entire wall was centrefold Playboys, about three years worth it was. One whole wall. We had a reel to reel tape deck in there. That's where we kept our radio as well. We had ovens, cooktop, freezers. 2 or 3 big freezers. We had a cold milk dispenser, American. This is American you see.

31:30 You had a choice of chocolate milk or plain milk, cold. You just pulled the handle and out come flavoured milk. Unbelievable. We had a workshop area where we kept all our weapons locked up. We had a workbench; we had a 16 mm movie projector. We had a big lounge chair. We had a little billiard table which we never used and a screen. The Americans would give us the movie,

32:00 the latest recent addition movie any time we wanted it on the 16 mm. The troops all lived in a, it was just one big room and we had double bunks in there. Fully air conditioned and the Boss had his office out the back and there was also a bunkroom that led off the office and he and the chief both slept out there. And that was our hooch. Very, very comfortable. When you walk in from the war into an air conditioned building. Mamma-san would cook up something,

32:30 have a glass of cold milk if you wanted it and go to the bar for an ice cold beer. So we did it pretty well compared to the army. There's no doubt about that. In fact it was the best bar in Vietnam. But we made it that way too. We did a lot of work. We made it our pride and joy. We put a lot of work into it and it was a great distraction and we had a very organised petty officer who liked things that way.

It's sounds great.

It was great,

33:00 yeah, yeah. It sure was and we were very social even though we had blokes on stand to and couldn't drink we virtually had an open bar and any of the EOD teams, the American EOD teams they knew they were welcome at any time of the day. SEAL teams, the underwater demolition teams. They all used to come down to our hooch and we didn't say anything. I mean even if we weren't drinking and we were working we would say, "Come in.

33:30 Make yourself at home. Help yourself to the tucker and drink all the beer you like. Make yourself at

home." We trusted them and if we couldn't drink but now and again we were able to.

If you had the many visitors coming through was there a way of ushering out visitors when you were tired of them?

Yeah Phil had the authority that he could just close the bar if anyone that was getting a bit noisy or a pain in the arse and there were people who you think

34:00 'Who's this wanker? We didn't invite him in.' You know because people heard about us far and wide and they would come and see the Aussies. It was quite a thing to get an invite to the Aussies' bar but occasionally Phil would just and he's a big bugger. He's just say, "Mate, closing the bar. Time to leave." And away they go so yeah, he had to kick a few people out. But we always made like the Special Forces very welcome because they always made us very welcome in their

34:30 bars at their camps. We also had entertainers come through. Whenever there was an Australian group in town our chief always had his ear to the grapevine and when there were Aussies in town he made a point of chasing them down and inviting them in for a meal and a few beers. They used to get on your nerves every now and again too. We had to kick a few of those out.

How so?

Just you know some of them are bloody louts you know and

35:00 they take advantage of you. I almost got in a blue with a couple. They annoyed the hell out of me. I mean the Americans would come into your bar and they would happily drink your grog all night and you didn't mind because you knew they would pay you back somehow in their mess or they would throw \$20 in the kitty when they left but the thing that sticks in my mind about the Aussie entertainers that came through they would expect you to and Nara was a good cook and Nara would cook up.

35:30 He would rabbit from the Yanks and cook up turkeys and God knows what and he would cook up a beautiful big meal for them and they would just sit there all night and eat your food and drink your grog and never offered to pay a cent. And that sort of after a while you don't like bludgers. So a couple of times I got a bit angry with them.

Were there any entertainers of note that came through?

Probably were but

36:00 I don't recall the names. They may have been big names in Australia but we were a bit out of touch. Yeah I mean we never saw fellows like Johnny O'Keefe or anything but a lot of Australian entertainers volunteered to go with the US Organisation. What did they call it? The United Servicemen's Organisation tours. They were American tours so they would hook up with them but every now and again a full Australian troop would come to

36:30 Da Nang and entertain the Americans, not us. We were never invited to any of the shows.

Was that a sore point?

No. Not at all. Never even gave it a thought. Wouldn't go anyway. Just not interested.

Do you recall what some of the movies were that you were getting to see?

One we saw three or four times we kept for a few days was, 'Paint Your Wagon.' We thought that was great and that's probably

37:00 the one that sticks in my mind the most. In fact I can't think of any others really but we had good movies. They were the latest whatever they were in 1970. But I was the movie operator, chief movie operator. I was the only one that could work out how to use the 16 mm projector so I got stuck with it.

And were there mascots at the hooch?

Yes, we had a monkey.

37:30 Our monkey was a little Asian Rhesus monkey. Only a little fellow, male, female sorry and we called her Fred. Her name was Fred and we had a dog and his name was Dog. A bit of a Vietnamese mongrel but he looked very much like a blue heeler. He had that sort of grey sort of mane. Absolutely beautiful dog. Very warm to us. Hated Vietnamese for some reason. He must have been beaten as a young pup or something or treated badly but he hated Vietnamese

38:00 and he could smell them and you could see and no Vietnamese, Mammasan was okay but no Vietnamese could come within fifty metres of our hooch. Dog wouldn't let them in unless we said, "Okay Dog." and he let them come in but there was a lot of animosity between Dog and Fred. Fred's favourite game she would sneak up behind Dog and being a male she would come from behind and grab his jewels and give them a real good tug and then

38:30 she would run like hell and Dog would be yelping and carrying on and trying to kill her and she was straight up the nearest banana tree and sit up there giggling. But Fred was a bit of worry. Eat anything. Wouldn't let her in the bar but she had the run of the place and the number of times I saw her jump on

blokes' shoulders and he'd be smoking a cigarette but she was waiting. She would snatch the cigarette out of his mouth, flick the ash off and eat the cigarette.

- 39:00 How could you eat a cigarette, but she ate cigarettes. She got loose in the garage once and we had a couple of boxes of detonators and Digger heard this commotion in the garage. And our diving cylinders as well. You can imagine explosives mixed in with pressure cylinders. Anyway Digger stuck his head in the garage door and there's Fred up on the shelf and she's got boxes of detonators and she throwing these detonators and Digger thought, "Oh hell!" He just closed the door and said, "I'm out of here. If she kills herself, she kills herself.
- 39:30 and when she calms down I'll go and get her and pick up the detonators." And she loved her beer. Out the back of our bar we had a big chute that went out the back of the wall and a latch on it so to keep the bar tidy you would just open the latch and flick your can out and there was a great big bin outside and of course Fred could reach the bin and you'd go out after a heavy night and Fred's flaked out her back
- 40:00 and all around is empty cans. I wish I had got a photograph of her but she could hold a beer can and for her it was like holding it like that and she would hold the bottom of the can with one foot and she would shake it and she would get every last dreg out of that can and by the time she got through 40 or 50 cans she'd fling them out in the yard and she'd be totally shitfaced. I felt quite sorry for her thinking, "Poor old Fred, drinking hot dregs all the time"
- 40:30 and I was having a cold beer and I said, "I'm going to go and have a beer with Fred." so I got a nice cold beer and I popped the top and I went and sat down with Fred and I gave Fred her can and opened my can and Fred sat there and actually behaved herself for a while. She sat there and never spilled a drop. She sipped at that can but by the time she finished the whole can she was on her back again. She was ga ga.

Tape 8

- 00:31 **Where did Fred come from?**

I don't know how far back Fred went back in the teams but the team we relieved actually brought him up from Vung Tau and it wasn't uncommon for units to have pet monkeys. It was very common. And Dog I know he also came up with the previous team but I know my brother's team which was 3 teams prior to mine they didn't have Fred or Dog so it was obviously the last one or two teams

- 01:00 had found them somewhere or stolen them. Probably stolen them.

And was did you know if Dog's feeling towards the Vietnamese had anything to do with the canine being on the menu?

No, I don't think so because the Vietnamese don't eat all dogs. They only bred a special breed of dog which is bred to eat and it's a Vietnamese dog. He was too much of a mongrel. They wouldn't eat him. I suspect as a pup perhaps he was beaten because the Vietnamese don't treat

- 01:30 canines with much respect at all. He just hated them, hated the sight of them.

Speaking of that did you ever taste dog or have any?

Not while I was there. When I went back later I tried it.

And?

No. I didn't like it at all. Terrible stuff.

When Mammasan used to cook up a Vietnamese feed for you what would that be?

Mainly fried rice type of dish. She never got too extravagant because most of our fellows weren't really up to the

- 02:00 exotic flavours. The Vietnamese were very big on fish sauce called nuoc mam which is a fermented fish sauce and it stinks like hell. I love the stuff actually but it's just a putrid smell. Rotten fish, so as soon Mammasan would get out the nuoc mam the blokes would say, "I'm not eating that Mammasan." So yeah she just stuck to fried rice. We mainly cooked for ourselves. We were all pretty good cooks.

What sort of level was your

- 02:30 **language skills, your Vietnamese language skills?**

Very basic, very basic and what they taught us you wouldn't want repeated anyway. Yeah most of it was how to tell them to get the hell out of it or come here or stand up. Very basic.

Was there any sort of desire among the team members to find out more about the culture?

We didn't really have the time or the opportunity. I would have liked to have

03:00 found out more and I since have. I've been very interested but because we were basically, our living conditions, our only exposure to Vietnamese in our living conditions were Mammasan and Mammasan spoke very little English and out in the field you were with South Vietnamese. They might have had an interpreter with them but you weren't there to talk about the niceties and cultures because shit was happening too

03:30 fast to have time of that sort of thing.

Because were you guys shown almost the charter that the Australian servicemen were given when they Vietnam about what was expected of them?

The 9 rules? I think it was the 9 rules. Yeah. What to do and what not to do. Not to brag, not to big note yourself. Not to show off your possessions and basically be reserved and quiet that was the Australian Army's attitude. Live and let live and it's their country.

04:00 We followed that I think as Australians. You do but I did find that I met a lot of Americans which were typical American behaviour that we are here, everything belongs to us. We're the best you know.

Apart from yourself who else from Australia was in 1 Corps area?

The Australian Army Training Team [Vietnam - the AATTV]. They had an office or a camp in Da Nang.

04:30 They called it Australia House. I can't remember how many warrant officers they had out in the field in 1 Corps but there were several I know. There might have been a dozen I don't know but they were all over 1 Corps and in fact I went bush with one of the army advisers for a week or so out to a place called Di Lot and that was quite interesting.

Other than that you didn't have much to do with them?

05:00 Nothing. They were all warrant officers and the Training Team wouldn't like to hear this but they felt that there were a bit too good to mix with us. They were warrant officers. Most of them were only very young warrant officers, only been promoted to go to Vietnam and most of us were only able seaman so they didn't want to talk to us but we did invite them over for New Year's Eve or

05:30 Christmas at our place because we had a big party on New Year's Eve and Christmas Eve but other than I think the boss might have gone across to Australia House to see the major or the colonel or whatever he was a few times but other than that we never saw them. As I say I ran into the warrant officer and he was a good fellow and he was from South Australia and he asked me if I wanted to go out to Australia with him once out to his neck of the woods and I said, "I'd love to." and the boss said, "Yeah go." so I spent a week

06:00 with him, out with him with I think the 51st Armoured Regiment he worked for.

And what was your impression of the ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] blokes?

In general they didn't want to fight this war at all. They would rather be at home and what surprised me was the Vietnamese, the number of people who deserted the system. A constant flow of desertions, non-stop. Apparently there were some crack troops

06:30 but I must admit I never saw them. A lot of my experiences were they didn't want to go out on patrol. They didn't want to do anything. Most of the time I saw them lying around sleeping. Basically no military training at all. They were scared and they were sloppy and slack and they were dangerous. In fact Jake was coming back from Kwa Dek[?] once and he was driving which was quite unusual and they passed this outfit in their compound and he had a trailer load of explosives

07:00 and they opened fire on him. So I mean he was in an American jeep and they opened fired on him. Crazy so fortunately we didn't have a lot to do with them. Generally if we wanted security for an operation we would manage to get army rangers, Special Forces of some sort to come out with us. People we could trust.

Sorry I sort of hijacked your tale Tony?

That's all right.

07:30 If we go back to when we first arrived in Saigon there was one that I thought was pretty funny at the time. The Americans as I said had taken us up to their hooch in Cholon which is an old French villa and 2 storeys and had a rooftop bar. This is a war zone. Fantastic place and anyway our first night they said, "Oh well

08:00 you fellows are new in country and we've got to have an EOD initiation ceremony." and we didn't know what this was going to be. They had stacks of beer, Budweiser, spirits and everything and anyway they brought out a glass boot. It had Budweiser on it but it was a glass boot and they just kept pouring cans into it and the first thing you had to do was scull this whole boot of beer. So we all managed to do that except the chief and we think he didn't do it because he was still stressed out from nearly losing Jake in Singapore but then

- 08:30 it was, it was brilliant. Old Phil Naramore the petty officer of the team. As I said he's sort of a big strapping sort of fellow. And one of the Yanks came over and said, "You're a big sort of fellow. I bet you're pretty strong." And the chief said, "Yeah, I'm pretty strong." And the Yank said, "Would you like to, we'll do a test here. The two man lift. Would you like to, would you like to be in this?" And Nara said, "Yeah I'll be in anything." So the Yank briefed him and said,
- 09:00 'What you do is you lay on the ground on your back and we get another couple of big fellows to lie on each arm so you are actually cradling them and they lay their legs over your legs and then we'll get one of our blokes and we'll see how strong he is. He's going to get you by the belt and he's going to lift you off the ground and also support these
- 09:30 two fellows." So you know who's going to lift these three fellows but we're full of grog. So he's said, "We'll see how strong you are if you can lift these two blokes." So Nara fell for this hook line and sinker so he laid down and all the talk was about five minutes about you have to do this right. It's very difficult, it's got to be spot on and you've got to hang on this and hang on there and Nara is just spinning on this and at the last minute they said, "Are you ready?" and this bloke bent over Nara and he'd got his belt and he's
- 10:00 standing there and he's getting ready and he's taking deep breaths and he said, "Are you right?" and immediately these two blokes immediately locked their arms so he couldn't move and they were big blokes and locked his legs and this bloke immediately undid his belt and undid his trousers and there was a bloke standing there with a bucket of ice water and they pulled his trousers down and they emptied this whole bucket of ice cubes onto Nara and in fact he at that point he lifted those two blokes off the
- 10:30 ground. Gee it was funny. That was the two man lift. So that was a good start. In fact that first week in Saigon was an eye opener for old Larry Digney. He had never been overseas before and it was his first trip and we had to lay over because of the typhoon in Da Nang and they closed the airport so the Yanks took us out and hit the bars in downtown Saigon
- 11:00 and a very famous Saigon tea and everyone who's been to Vietnam knows about the 'uc da loi' [Vietnamese slang term for Australian soldiers] and his Saigon Tea and Cheap Charlie and Digger being a young fellow he just thought all the bar girls were coming up to him and they were all over you and, "Can you buy me a drink?" and the rest of us are all old enough to have been to the Far East before and we knew their tricks. Get a drink and they get a percentage.
- 11:30 Digger didn't have any idea and we didn't clue him in and he was thinking these friendly girls. They just love me and aren't they wonderful. I'll buy you a drink. He bought, every place we went to he bought a girl a drink. He must have spent hundreds of dollars on drinks but he had a great time and I often joke that when we had to lie over the next couple of days. We often went back to the same bars and I often joked to him I said, "He caught up with all the girls that he missed and he bought
- 12:00 their cousins and sisters and mothers-in-law a drink as well." But by hell he spent some money.

Just about every bloke we speak to speaks of the prostitution that was there. What was your experience with that?

It was there, there's no doubt about it. Every bar was a prostitute and there was no shortage of them that's for sure especially in Saigon because Saigon was open for the US troops on leave. You walk down Tudo Street which is the main street of bars it was just

- 12:30 wall to wall camouflage gear of soldiers. So yeah it was rife. Da Nang it was there but not as obvious because of the curfew in Da Nang. You would never see an American out at night but yeah, they were there. There was one particular place known as Red Beach. In fact it was Red Beach because that's where the Marines landed in Da Nang and they named it like they named their beach in the Second World War. You know Omaha and Blue Beach and Red Beach.
- 13:00 But Red Beach stuck and it became actually, you know it was just rows of brothels. We went over there a couple of times but we were more into just having a good time and drinking. I remember we arrived at one place, curfew of course. The only people that might be in there perhaps were Vietnamese soldiers and we found this little bar. A dirt floor and a real humpy but they sold cold beer and that was the first question we asked, "Cold
- 13:30 beer Mammasan?" There was 4 or 5 of the team including the chief sitting in this hooch by candlelight drinking cold beer and talking to the girls and Mammasan. Jeeps parked out the back and we had the standard, the old 2.75 rockets with heads on them in the back of the Jeep and we put them in on purpose because of this curfew and next thing the place is surrounded and in walks MPs
- 14:00 and this young officer, American US MP officer and he sees us in camouflage, we are American soldiers you know. Weapons out, "You are under arrest." and Gilchrist, he was pretty quick old Gilchrist and he had his Australian collar ranks on which the Americans had never seen and couldn't recognise. We had 45s on our hips and Gilchrist just stood up and said, "Who the hell are you?" He just turned the tables straight back on this young officer. , "Who the hell are you?" and of course the
- 14:30 accent threw the officer totally and the collar devices threw him. He didn't know whether to salute or what and he started to stammer and Gilchrist knew he had him straight away and he said, "What the

hell do you think you are doing in this area? Weren't you told? There are booby traps in this area. We are EOD." And we all wore the American EOD badge and he told this officer, "Get your men the hell out of this area. This place is laced with booby traps.

15:00 We have a couple in the back of the jeep. This is very dangerous. EOD is in charge of this area." And this bloke, "Yes Sir. Right men get the hell out of here." And we just piddled ourselves laughing. We realised that he was going to do some checks. Military Police and 5 or 10 minutes we had for him to get back so we got in the Jeep and got the hell

15:30 out of there. Yeah a few weeks later Digger went over to the same place with a Yank. 19 year old Digney, drunk or got drunk over there and same thing and Digney thought he would try the same thing. But you can imagine a 19 year old who is drunk doing the same trick. MPs just locked him up. So we got a phone call later that night, "Do you have an Australian sailor by the name of Digney? You'd better come and get him he's locked up.'

What about the White Mice [civilian police]

16:00 **over there?**

Horrible little buggers. They were the civilian police. They wore white shirts, dark blue trousers if I remember, peaked caps and they carried a big, I think it was a 38 revolver on their hip and they were Gestapo basically. The population lived in total fear of them. Everyone hated them and they were a law unto themselves.

16:30 We had very little to do with them. We saw them around town often enough. We had one experience with them. Once again curfew but the curfew didn't apply to Vietnamese. We went down to this one pub/hotel in town and that night they had a bit of a dance. Local dance with Vietnamese and we thought, "Oh beauty a dance." Three or four, four of us yeah

17:00 in cammies, armed, walked into this place you know. The Vietnamese didn't care. Time came to leave and walked out to the carpark where we had the Jeep and we saw this group of White Mice and they had a young girl. We knew their reputation. They would arrest a young girl off the street, take them back to the station and gang rape them and throw them out or even shoot them in some cases. They were up to that but we knew

17:30 of their reputation and we were Australians so what do you do. You see a young girl being hassled so you go to her rescue, we'll sort this out from these mongrels so we wandered over to the White Mice and they outnumbered us. We used what Vietnamese we knew and, "What's going on?" and obviously the senior bloke gave us the word to get the hell out of it or he would arrest us and we were outnumbered so we thought we will back off.

18:00 So we sat in the back of the jeep and watched and one of the White Mice put her on the back of a motorbike and took off and we thought, "Yeah, obviously he is taking her back to the police station." The rest of them were waiting there so they were obviously going to get a few more girls as they came out of the pub so the chief was driving and he flashed up the Jeep and left the lights on and followed this White Mice on his bike through the back streets of Da Nang

18:30 and at the right moment when there was no one around the chief just drove, accelerated the Jeep up and we cut this bike off and pushed him into the gutter and he nearly lost it. He fell off his bike and he was absolutely furious and he started abusing us and he couldn't really see us because we were inside the Jeep. Canvas sides and open top and he couldn't see us very clearly and we pulled up

19:00 and we had all drawn our 45s and made sure there was one up the spout and he was gibbering at us. Absolutely furious and obviously threatening us in every foul word in Vietnamese and he decided that he was going to sort this out and he put his hand down to pull out his 38 and he got his 38 about here I reckon and next thing when he looked up all he could see was four 45 barrels in the light or what light there was

19:30 pointing out of the Jeep at him. Four of them pointing at his face and he just shit himself and he dropped his weapon and his mouth fell open and we were ready to shoot him. I wouldn't hesitate to shoot the bugger. Wouldn't hesitate a second if he had made a move and so we just said in the strongest terms, "Didi mau." which means, "You get the hell out of here really quickly." And we said to the girl, "Get in the Jeep.'

20:00 So she jumped in the Jeep and he was a total wreck and we just drove off and we were only a couple of streets away from the army EOD team so we thought, "We've saved her. We'll go around and have a beer." So we went around to the army and they, "Who's she? What the hell is going on?" and so we told them the story and they sort of shook their heads and said, "Fucking Aussies. Mad." They had their suspicions

20:30 I suppose so we said to the army, "She's yours. The police are probably looking for her. Look after her." and we are thinking she's some young schoolgirl. Anyway next time we saw the army EOD blokes we said, "What happened?" and she was a hooker and they said, "She tried to charge us all." And we laughed and said, "What she didn't even give you a discount?" They said, "No." So we saved a hooker but we didn't, what the hell, we did what

21:00 we thought was the right thing and we did do the right thing. That night we saved her a fair bit of discomfort.

Did you see any other nationality services over there?

We saw the Koreans. We didn't see any of the Filipinos or the other troops that were there but the Koreans stick in my mind. They were called ROKs,

21:30 which stand for Republic of Korea. The most immaculate troops I have ever seen. Always spit polished boots. Brassware even in a war zone, they were immaculate but very, very strict discipline. I've heard stories of sergeants inspecting troops with a club and a baseball bat you know and you were laid into with a baseball bat. Incredible discipline. They were very efficient troops but they had a hatred for the Vietnamese. They just despised the Vietnamese

22:00 as a very inferior race to them. They look on them like you look on a dog you know. I've got a couple of recollections of the Koreans. When the Koreans went home like they had full PX [Post Exchange - American canteen] privileges with the Americans which to them was worth a fortune and the Koreans that were fighting there, every Korean that was going home he could take one ton of gear home. So the

22:30 year from the Korean was spent buying stuff from the PX, trading, stealing whatever he could get to take home back to Korea. It might have been a ton of spirits. I don't know what they knocked of but that was the deal so they were pretty well looked after but I can remember seeing a truckload or a convoy heading down towards the deep water piers for them to go home and the speed limit in Da Nang was 25kms. You weren't allowed to do over 25 because I mean you would run over people and this convoy

23:00 was going up the road and the first few trucks in the convoy hand on the horn holding the horn down and 50 miles an hour. They didn't care less and they were straight down the road. No idea how many people they knocked over and killed but they didn't care. Just get out of our way we are coming. Another experience with them was Air America [CIA airline] used to bring our mail in from Saigon. Very nice of them and twice a week so one of us would jump in one of the Jeeps

23:30 and drive out to the airport to pick our mail up and I was going out this day. I was driving past what was a South Vietnamese Veterans Compound and they were all severely disabled. Legs gone, arms gone, whatever, they were invalids. They were buggered and very lousy pensions anyway these fellows had had enough. They were starving; they had no money and were mistreated so they decided effectively to go on strike if you can call it a strike.

24:00 So all these fellows hobbled out on their crutches and wheelchairs and parked there and stopped the traffic until some Vietnamese official came and dealt with them and gave them a better deal. I arrived early in the traffic jam so I was only a hundred metres or so back from the jam and there were Vietnamese MPs and American MPs and they were arguing and they were threatening them, "Get off the road, get off the road."

24:30 But no. These fellows just refused. They weren't scared of the Vietnamese and they weren't scared of the American MPs so I was sitting there watching this and you know we couldn't get around them and next thing well I suppose 10 minutes had lapsed. Next thing I saw these fellows getting their wheelchairs and crutches and they just disappeared at flat out speed back into their compound.

25:00 And I couldn't work this out. I thought, "This is a bit odd." I drove up a bit further and I stopped one of the American MPs and said, "What the hell happened there?" and he said, "We couldn't do anything with them. They refused to move so we called the Koreans." And as soon as the fellows heard the Koreans were coming they went like the devil was after them. They just scattered because they knew the Koreans would just come in and kick them and rifle butt them and shoot

25:30 them if they had them but they would move them. That's the sort of reputation the Koreans had. Ruthless. Totally ruthless but good troops.

Did you also have a traffic story as far as a tank is concerned?

We do. We were doing a job up on a stretch of beach called Tan My and it was an overturned ammunition barge and we were trying to recover the bodies once again and retrieve the rounds.

26:00 We had been on the beach for quite a while. Terrible, right on the end of a typhoon. The conditions were terrible. Big surf, rain, cold, cold for Vietnam and we had just been resupplied. We had run out of drinking water and rations so we got on the radio and said, "Hey we need something to drink we are thirsty." Next thing a chopper came up from Da Nang offloading cases of beer. I said to the crew chief, "We wanted some water. We're on a job here.

26:30 We need some drinking water." "We were told you blokes wanted something to drink." So they just loaded up the helicopter with beer and brought up a helicopter load of beer for us. Anyway that was sorted out. We had a few beers that was okay and we were sleeping in a hole in the sand in our ponchos. Wet as a shaggy dog anyway we had a fair bit of support. We had two or three tanks surrounding us because the village that was near us was considered to be hostile and they would fire at night sometimes from the village

- 27:00 and this particular tank crew were due for a changeover and one of these whopping big tanks. Huge thing and the tank crew because we had some American army divers helping us and so he said, "I can take two or three of you back if you like. We can go back to the base and you can have a hot shower and a hot meal." "Oh beauty!" so we tossed a coin and myself and Larry Digney and I think one other Yank
- 27:30 won the toss and we are going back. Terrific. He said, "You have to climb on the back of the tank." So we got our weapons and we didn't know what the hell was going to happen. Anyway off we went and this tank driver took off through the village and into the bush and away we go and he's following this track and he said, "I know a shortcut. We won't go up the beach we'll go the shortcut." So we are barrelling through the bush about 40 miles an hour in this 50 ton tank and flames are coming out the exhaust this long. That's how fast
- 28:00 he was going. Fast as the thing could go anyway the track wasn't very wide and the tracks all lead to a village eventually and I see this village coming up. I'm sitting up on the turret and hanging on for dear life because this bloke reckons he's a bit of a rally driver and as we came into the village, I had a clear view because I was on top of the tank. The driver sits with his head out the side and looks out of the hole and as he went down the main
- 28:30 track of the village he was making sure his side of the tank missed the huts and the chicken coops and he was missing them but he wasn't giving a damn what was happening on the other side and of course, the tanks they are huge things. And half the tank was extending into the houses on the other side so we barrellled through this village and I looked back and there is half the village splayed and I thought, "Oh Christ we are in trouble here!" But we were going pretty fast so I thought we'd be right.
- 29:00 I recall saying to Digger, screamed at him on top of the tank, "If we ever come back through here we are in deep shit!" So anyway we barrellled on and we went through a couple more villages and the track was getting narrower and the bush was getting thicker and eventually he stopped the tank and we said, "What the hell's going on here?" We were out in the middle of Charlie country, nowhere you know. Didn't know where we were and getting a bit worried and he said, "I'm lost." There was no more track. "I'll have to go back to the beach."
- 29:30 The only way was back on the same track so he turned around and this bloody idiot went back through those villages and even though he had flattened these huts here, he didn't drive over the same huts. He avoided running over them again. By avoiding running over them again he wiped out the other huts on the other side of the road and he was going full bore thankfully and Digger and I we were hiding in front of the turret because we thought we are going to take fire from these blokes as we came
- 30:00 back through because they could hear the roar of the tank. It was just crazy and we got back to the beach and this tank driver, he didn't think. He just thought it was good fun. He was having a good day. He said, "I know another shortcut. Up the beach a bit is another shortcut. We'll get the food by tonight no worries." And we jumped off the tank and said, "No mate. You find the shortcut on your bloody own. We'll sit back here and freeze and eat cold sea rations thank you very much."
- 30:30 **Does that in a way encapsulate for you the way the Americans approached things and the way they treated the Vietnamese?**
- I think so. On the whole the Americans had absolutely no respect for the Vietnamese. As I say I don't think it was necessarily their fault. It was the system. They were sent as fresh conscripts, stuck on a plane, flown to Vietnam and, "You are in the army son." Didn't have a clue.
- 31:00 All their education of Vietnam was from the older soldiers in the unit who say, "They are all noggies. You shoot them all." So they treated them as sub-human and they never tried in any shape or form to get on with them. Having anything to do with them. No respect and I think in some respects if you look at the big picture their lack of willingness to understand the Vietnamese
- 31:30 in the end probably was the reason for their defeat because they didn't understand the Vietnamese. They never made any attempt to understand the Vietnamese.
- Do you think the Americans were ever learning stuff from you guys and the way you guys handled things?**
- The people that worked with us yes. I mean we had commendations coming out of our ears from the Americans. Every time we did a job the Americans tried to give a star or
- 32:00 write us up for something or give us a commendation but I think they were surprised at the level of our experience and training. It was beyond anything that they had to compare with. As I say we were jack of all trades but they were very, very specialised. They didn't know what their mates did. They had no idea. They didn't know how to do it but we learnt everything we possibly could. We learned a lot from the Americans.
- 32:30 It turned out that we had the whole of 1 Corps, we were responsible for the entire 1 Corps which in Vietnam was split into 4 quarters. From DMZ to south and so on and primarily we were EOD divers but most of our jobs in the end apart from ships, on ships we would get us a call and they would want us way out the back in some province out in the middle of nowhere for unexploded ordnance
- 33:00 or downed chopper or whatever it may be, "Call the Aussies, call the Aussies!" It was always throughout

1 Corps, get the Aussies out on the job you know. That's just the way it ended up. I think they were pretty sorry to see us go because when we were pulled out of Vietnam we weren't replaced. The Americans didn't replace us with their teams. Effectively the EOD capability and especially the underwater EOD capability in

33:30 1 Corps for a quarter of Vietnam came to a standstill. I know, we found out later there was a South Vietnamese Navy EOD team which was pretty basic and they were supposed to take over from us but they didn't. When the time came to leave not one of them showed up because they all deserted but there was one fellow that we knew South Vietnamese first class petty officer who out of all of them he was a good bloke and he was keen, he was pretty good.

34:00 2 weeks before we left he blew himself up on a birdcage in the Kwa Dek River. So that was probably the end of the EOD capability in 1971 it was all over.

All the diving that CDT3 did, did you find booby traps?

Oh yeah well as I said before my brother's team in fact found a Limpet, a very, very advanced Limpet mine on a ship in Vung Tau

34:30 that was made by the Russians, latest Russian manufacture and nobody in the military system, American system had ever seen or heard of this particular device. That was a very valuable contribution to the Yanks and us to be aware of the latest devices from the Russians. But yeah, most of the ship, the problems with ships we had because we weren't far from what they called the deep water piers in Da Nang

35:00 and these were huge warships. Bringing the ships directly from the Yanks loaded with high explosives and ordnance and to be unloaded in Da Nang and be distributed and of course, it was a target for the VC swimmers and they would always attack about 3.00 in the morning. That was the time they would hit and the sentries were tired and so consequently there was a lot of nights where the radio would start crackling

35:30 at 3.00 in the morning and, "CDT, EOD 35 we need you down at the deep water piers asap." So into the Jeep, red light on, siren and away we go. And they were experiences I won't forget. I remember one, we arrived and they'd actually they were very late in calling us and I think about 30 minutes had elapsed by the time we got there and that's the danger period.

36:00 Any saboteur knows that you set up a charge to go so that when you place it you leave enough time to get a safe distance. That's your time frame. If the EOD teams come in you don't want to give them time to disarm it firstly and if you time it right you can wipe out the EOD team as well, which is one of your objectives. So we got there about 30 minutes after. Well what happened

36:30 was one of the armed sentries on one of the ships had spotted a swimmer, a Vietnamese on board the ship and when he challenged him, he was wet and he jumped over the side and they boogied off and of course, he shot at them and didn't get them and they disappeared into the night. This ship contained 9,000 tons of ordnance. Loaded to the gunnels it was and they called us, suspected saboteur on board can you get down there, as I say by the time someone said, "You had better get the

37:00 diving team down." We got there and it was half an hour and it was right in that really, really dangerous period when the ship could go off and we didn't have time. It was an all night search job but we had no choice. What do you do? There are other ships around. They didn't have time to move the other ships. You've got to get on board and see if you can find anything quickly and you start with where this fellow went over the side. The whole ship had been, they ripped everybody off that ship and the other ships. All the guards were withdrawn

37:30 you know hundreds of metres away and there is about three of us and we've got this whole ship to ourselves, the whole area of the wharf. It's dark, the lights were off and all walking around with torches on this ship and I think that was probably one time in Vietnam where I thought, I was thinking, "Well any second it's all over but at least I won't know about it." because when 9,000 ton blows there'd be nothing left of you. So my memory of that was, that was about the loneliest

38:00 I'd ever been in my life. But at least I had a couple of mates with me I suppose. That helped.

What's your heart rate doing?

At that time. I don't even notice but I would think about 10 to the dozen I would think. Circumstance, situations like that I think the adrenalin comes up to such a degree that you don't notice things like that but after it's over,

38:30 when you walk away from a job like that where you think, "By hell that was close." It's after you walk away and it's behind you you suddenly look down and you are shaking and you look at your mate and see that's he a bit pale in the face you know. But you don't say anything of course but it takes time to settle down. You can't help it. It's just a natural reaction. So you head back to the bar and have a few beers.

39:00 **Because we, when we spoke to soldiers after a contact the same thing. They get the shakes and usually after a contact the first thing they can do is light up a durry [cigarette]. You guys**

aren't allowed so is there any other way of dealing with that sort of.

Well no. The only thing we could do was get to the bar and have a beer. That was the only thing we could do and actually because of that probably a lot of people aren't aware

39:30 of it every troop in Vietnam spent 12 months. American and Australia and EOD was 6 months and when people found out, "How come you only spent 6 months in Vietnam?" but it was an American policy and the Australians adopted that policy. In fact I asked the Americans about it, "Why?" and they said the reason was the stress and anxiety levels of dealing with the unknown.

40:00 I mean at least a contact is a contact. They are shooting from that direction. There are bullets firing at you but when you are dealing with something that can go bang in your face at any second and it's totally unknown and you have to go into that situation. You can't walk away from it. You have to go in and address it they just say after 6 months if they left you any longer than 6 months you would be an absolute gibbering wreck so the EOD didn't do any longer than 6 months but everyone else they let them stay for 12 so we did the same thing. 2 week handover

40:30 at either end so we did a 6 month tour but in hindsight it was enough I think. I often think that I would like to have been there longer but I don't know at that stage whether you are really up to it you know. I must admit that sometimes towards the end when you were dreading hearing that radio call. You were getting to the point where, "Shit is this it?" you know. The nerves were starting to get a bit frayed.

Tape 9

00:30 **When you are doing the deepwater pier clearance can you talk me through the actual process of what gets done?**

You really have to take each job as it comes. You've got to assess the situation in what you do. In that instance we would expect that swimmers would come in and attach something to the hull.

01:00 That would be the normal means of attack but this fellow had actually been spotted on board and jumped overboard when he was challenged. He was wet so he obviously came out of the water and it looked like he came out of the hold so immediately that first option or first priority goes out of the window. The fact that he had been on board with explosives you know his intention was to place a charge of some explosives and set the ship off that way rather than through the hull.

01:30 So normally ships are bottom searched but that was ruled out immediately so we had to prioritise and obviously where was he seen and have a look at that area and check that area out. Where there wet marks from his feet? Where had he come from? Which hold was he in? So you focus down to the most likely because as I say to search a ship of that size would effectively take days and we are talking about

02:00 minutes here so the priority was to get to the place he was last seen and try and follow his trail and where he may have placed the sabotage device. So once you've done that and not found anything your stomach sort of falls through to the floor that you haven't found anything and it's still there so then you just start to expand from that direction and as I say,

02:30 it's a methodical routine that you decide on, on the spot. What do we do next? What do we do next? And we didn't even search the hull on that ship. We expanded our search out from that particular area and we didn't find anything luckily so we suspect he was disturbed before he did anything but there's a point where you've got to say, "It's been an hour and a half. If it hasn't gone now it's not there. He probably didn't

03:00 get anything on board." Yeah we called the search off after about an hour or so or a couple of hours but we just went out from that point checking every piece of ordnance and every possible spot where he most likely to place a charge and he's not likely to put it on the door. We looked at where it is most effective to place a charge and that's where you look. We know where to look but you reach a point where, "Okay there's no point searching any further. Isolate

03:30 the ship and don't allow the crew to come back on board. Perhaps tow it out and anchor it for a day or two but it's all yours again now, see you later. We walk off the ship and go home.

When it's, when that term of deep water pier clearance is used how deep is deep?

Well that's just the name of the wharf. They call it deep water pier because it was deep enough for large vessels to come in with the ordnance but no, I mean diving.

04:00 We wouldn't bother searching the seabed so no, there's not deep diving involved. We would search hulls. To give you an example of the sort of searches we used to carry out and this is a bit of a story. Bluey Furner and I were on standby and we thought, "Oh bugger this. We are going to town to see the army EOD fellows." so we went into town and we ended up staying there longer than we should of. Had a few more drinks

- 04:30 than we should and in the middle of the monsoon season. Raining like hell and miserable and cold so Blue and I went back to the hooch just in case and we had what was called a Dodge Power wagon. A big Dodge ute and I was driving and went out and jumped in, opened the door and got in and I thought, "Hang on it's just as wet in here as it is inside." No windscreen. Some Vietnamese had come along and knocked the windscreen off.
- 05:00 In fact he had one of those little bottle openers and he left us the bottle opener and I said Blue, "It's not all lost. We've got a bottle opener out of this." So no windscreen so we drove back in this storm back to our place probably about 15 miles away about 10 miles an hour with rain pouring in the windscreen and as luck would have it Jake was outside in the rain very, very pissed off. Digger and Blue were in diving gear
- 05:30 and just unloading cylinders from the trucks and the pressure was running. It was 2.00 am in the morning and we thought, "Hello, we are in strife. The shit's hit the fan." And it turned out they spotted swimmers because that's when the VC loved to attack. The worst possible night. Raining, wind howling. That's when the sentries used to hide in the shelter and go to sleep and they knew that so that's when they used to hit. Get the most calls and most attacks in the harbour so this night
- 06:00 it as obvious it was going to happen and we were too stupid to realise that. Anyway Jake was furious, "Where the hell have you been? Where's the windscreen?" Anyway, not that he was worried about that. He didn't know that we had had a few beers. He said, "These blokes have been diving and are just about worn out. You've got it." We were in no condition to do it but we had to do it so Blue and I went down there and we continued searching. There was an anchorage
- 06:30 where they had spotted boats and swimmers in there so we had to search every bloody boat in the harbour and I think Blue, Blue and I searched 32 from memory. 32 hulls and we were still going at sun up. Hung over, still half drunk in the water. Black, pitch black. Anchor cables down the hull. What a night. It was a bummer of a night and that's, I'm trying to explain the types of searches we did. They varied.
- 07:00 Nothing was the same. No job was ever the same. It was a matter of what have we got here? What is the situation? What do we do? How do we handle it? What's the best way? What is the fastest way? And of course you've got to prioritise the risk and you obviously search the high risk areas first.

How do you search a hull? Are you literally just combing it?

With the numbers we had most of the boats we searched weren't that large. You would do your best. For example,

- 07:30 you wouldn't go the whole hull. It was impossible for one bloke because we didn't have the diving team, the luxury of the diving team that we would have a home to do what they called a necklace or half necklace search so once again you prioritise it. The first thing we would do was check the anchor cable. Search around the bow. You go straight down the stern and search the stern area because the easiest places to attach a good sized charge are either on the anchor cable or
- 08:00 around the stern screws, the propeller shafts, main brackets. That's the most logical place and you physically don't have the time or the resources so that's what a hull search basically was for us. Just a quick fore and aft search and on to the next one and you just hope that you didn't miss anything and if you did it's not the end of the world. If they lose a ship here or a ship there it's not the end of the world.

If a swimmer is spotted

- 08:30 **near one ship is it only that ship that get searched or do you do the others?**

Generally yes. We didn't have the ability to search them all. No, if a ship, if a sentry reports a swimmer immediately down and search that ship. If it's tied up to another vessel sure you would search that ship as well but if it was sitting at anchor you wouldn't bother with the rest. It was amazing the American sentries. They would always have a shot at them but they would never hit one.

- 09:00 I lie. There was one. They did get one fellow and they found him in the harbour the next day but they didn't dare touch his body. They thought he was booby trapped. The Americans were petrified of booby traps. They suspected everything so yeah, we had to go down and get him out of the water and check out his body for booby traps. We even had calls from officers saying, "I think the phone might be booby trapped. I don't want to use my phone." We'd have to go down and check out this turkey's
- 09:30 phone and vehicles. They would park, someone would park his ute somewhere and forget about it and if he wasn't comfortable they'd call you. Nine times out of ten you would tell them to go to buggery but you'd have to go down there and search the damn vehicle for them and make sure there was no booby traps. But that wasn't complicated.

Were there many circumstances in either ones like that or during ship searches that you did find?

I don't recall

- 10:00 finding any big charges or anything that I would consider was high risk to us. You occasionally find

small charges that hadn't been attached properly or wouldn't have functioned. They were home made or not made very well. They weren't a high risk but we were always a bit concerned because we knew the Russian were providing equipment, the Chinese Communists were providing equipment to the North Vietnamese. We were sort of thinking any day this

10:30 high tech Russian stuff is going to show up and then we are in big trouble but we never saw any of that in Da Nang so that episode in Vung Tau was the only time that that particular mine was every found luckily. It was a very dangerous piece of equipment. It had time pencils on it, anti-removal. In fact one of our petty officers got it off the hull at a hell of a risk but normally you would try and drag it off but

11:00 you put a line on it and try and drag it off or you sandbag the inside of the ship and just blow a hole in the hull but they wanted to get it off and find out how it works so this bloke got it off. He took a hell of a risk but he knew his job and he got it off luckily and our fellows were able to dismantle it.

When you were saying earlier that Jake had the ability to say no to a request could you if you were sent out on a job

11:30 **choose not to do it?**

I don't know. None of us have ever tested it. None of us have ever thought not to do it. It was our job. We were able seamen. You don't say no. Not within the team. No, no that would never have crossed our minds. In fact I've never been asked that question or thought about it before. But

12:00 no, Jake had the option if he thought it was a risk to the team beyond what we were there for or it was not associated directly with our function then he would say no. It was not very often. He did put the kibosh on a couple of operations that we were asked to go out on. Purely search and destroy and ambushes and he said, "No we are not going to do too much of that." Whereas previous teams had

12:30 because they liked a bit of fun. I mean we did jobs that Jake didn't know about as well. We did exchanges sometimes with other EOD teams in country and I went down to Cam-ranh Bay once with the American EOD team there and their function was to look after the harbour but because they were all so highly qualified in weapons and sneaky.

13:00 I mean the SEAL teams were there and they were trained hand in hand and had similar sort of styles so they just naturally progressed to the role of patrolling the harbour at night because total curfew on the harbour looking for anyone smuggling. You know running food, weapons and so on so they used to go out and patrol the harbour and really that was nothing to do with our role but I was with the American EOD team and I was going to do whatever they did so

13:30 I used to go out with them at night on patrol and Jake never, I mean I never told Jake for quite a while. I don't know how he would have reacted but the risk was pretty high I think and we just sneak across way across the other side of the harbour, lights out, small boats and starlight scopes and there was always blokes and you just sit in the boat all night and listen and next thing, 'putt putt putt putt'

14:00 and get the starlight scope and here's a boat sneaking along the edge. It's curfew so free fire zone and we just sit there and wait until they came within range or we would flash up and put over towards them and all hell would break loose and you know that wasn't really strictly our role but you did things. You were there. You know.

So what would happen when all hell would break loose? What would actually happen?

14:30 We had M60s, M16s and 79 grenade launchers. Every bloke in the boat would open up and 9 times out of 10 you would just sink the boat with the amount of fire and the grenades. If you didn't when it all quietened down and there's no return fire from the boat then you just wander over to the boat and have a look and usually no one left there.

15:00 They are all buggered off and you would search the boat for weapons and whatever else you could recover you would take off the boat and sink the boat. Then we would go back and have breakfast like it's ... It's funny what a war does to a young fellow and how callous you can become. I have very clear memories of after those night patrols where you might have ambushed a couple of boats and God knows how many people you killed

15:30 there was a favourite little restaurant they had, restaurant cum bar on the edge of the harbour. It was built on the edge of the water and overlooked this Cam-ranh Bay which is one of the most beautiful harbours in the world. Crystal white sands and crystal blue water. Beautiful and we would go back and it was a standard thing for breakfast and Mammasan would have cooked up a big breakfast and cold beer and you know, here are young fellows just been out on an ambush and

16:00 you are sitting out on the harbour as if you had been out on the town all night dancing and having a party and laughing and breakfast and beer and go back and get your head down. It was totally unreal and I often think about that. Things you regret you did but yeah, you think perhaps you shouldn't have done that but it was happening anyway.

Was there ever times that you were aware it affected you

16:30 **seeing dead VC?**

No I don't think so unless it was a child. A woman. No I think you became, you just closed down, totally closed down to that. You didn't allow emotions to come into it. You couldn't. You are exposed to this all the time so no. I don't think I was ever repulsed by seeing a

- 17:00 VC. They are mongrels you know. That hits you later. That comes back years later and bites you. Not at the time. You couldn't care less really. You become hardened. You become hard.

How was it different if you saw a woman or a child?

Just my upbringing you know. The woman would probably shoot you as quickly as the bloke but

- 17:30 you know mutilated by rifle fire or grenades it's still rocked the hell out of you. It did to me anyway. There's a lifeless body, there's a woman. You know you think of woman and you think of your mother and girlfriends and of course, a child. It doesn't matter. A child's a child so that disturbs you a bit.

- 18:00 **Most of the Vietnam vets we've spoken to say that one of the most difficult things over there was not knowing who the enemy were that they could be women or children. Did you ever, what sort of experience did you have encountering VC that were women and children?**

No, oh generally speaking only males. There was one instance when Nara and I were coming back from a job

- 18:30 and the chopper was diverted. There was a firefight and they called the nearest chopper for Medivac and they grabbed our chopper and said, "We are going in." so they took our chopper in and they were waiting on the ground and shit was still flying everywhere but they threw on board a couple of bodies. I think they were Yanks but it was too late for them and they also threw on an

- 19:00 elderly woman. She had black pyjamas on but I reckon she was a grandmother and a South Vietnamese jumped on board with her and we got the hell out of there and landed at the nearest base and this poor old girl looked harmless. She looked just like your grandmother except she was Vietnamese and she was the only woman I ever saw other than the Cam-ranh Bay episode but I was shocked.

- 19:30 As soon as we landed the South Vietnamese kicked her off the plane and there was two South Vietnamese waiting and they just grabbed her by the feet and here was a hill and the headquarters were up on the hill and one either side and they just grabbed her by the ankles and dragged her up the hill and I thought the poor old girl she's finished. They will interrogate her but to me she was just like someone's grandmother. But other than that I don't recall

- 20:00 really seeing or knowing they were VC. Of course you don't know who is out there other than Cam-ranh Bay on these boat trips. There were families on board the boat but what the fellows have told you is right. You didn't have a clue but you suspected everybody. You had to. A couple of incidents I recall. Actually one of them

- 20:30 I don't recall a mate told me about it and I can't remember it for the life of me. He tells me we were out somewhere and some Vietnamese kids came out and were talking and we were in the vehicle and they could speak English. They were quite friendly and one of them had a baseball, like a baseball jacket on and Digger was sort of standing back and I was talking to these kids and I didn't even notice. Digger said he spotted the kid very suspiciously put his hand in his pocket and Digger

- 21:00 thought, "Hang on he's got a weapon in his pocket." So Digger just ducked out behind the vehicle and out his 45 and pointed it at this kid and I thought, "What's going on here?" because I didn't see him do it. They just bolted and we let them go. But you don't know. There was another instance. When I was out with this warrant officer from the Australian Army Training Team.

- 21:30 Just outside of this town at Dai Loc where he was based he took me out and showed me and I think it had only been several days beforehand there was an American advisor attached to that particular group as well. He had a South Vietnamese counterpart and they were driving just out of the town, broad daylight and a couple of hundred metres out of town or village and some kids waved them down which is

- 22:00 quite normal. Only little buggers. Typical Vietnamese kids and, "You give me cigarettes. You give me candy." And the Yanks being what they are they are pretty generous and don't suspect anything. Anyway apparently they stopped the jeep and the Yank out with his pack and giving his cigarettes and his candy to these kids and meanwhile, one of these kids has got a grenade and he just drops it in the jeep above the fuel

- 22:30 tank and all of a sudden these kids just scattered and boom. I saw the jeep. They took me out and showed me and there's the jeep 20 ft off the road and exploded. The whole thing went up. They didn't find much of them left but that gives you an indication. You just don't know and these were kids. These were young children.

What does that do to your nerves knowing that children were put up to that?

- 23:00 I don't think you dwell on it. I think that's sort of at the time you think they are all potential VC. In some respects in hindsight I sort of in a way I admire the VC in their strength of belief in what they

23:30 were doing. They were prepared, their women and children were prepared to die for their liberation as they saw it effectively from a foreign invader. We weren't the first you know. The French and the Chinese had invaded so all of a sudden we are foreigners in their country again telling them what to do so I could understand so yeah, I mean if Australia was invaded I would like to think that our women and kids would be doing things like that as well.

24:00 So I don't hold any bad feeling towards them about it. At the time you think little bastards. They all said if someone points a weapon at you and it doesn't matter what sex they are or how old they are you pull the trigger. That's the way it was.

Did the ARVN have an EOD team?

Yeah very inefficient. Very poorly trained. At one stage

24:30 we had a navy South Vietnamese EOD team spend some time with us and in the time they were with us Nara lost all his money. His wallet got knocked off, Digger's 45 was stolen and that came back to us. This fellow knocked off Diggers' 45, went into town, got drunk, got into a bar fight, pulled out Digger's 45 and shot the other bloke in the argument. Got arrested

25:00 and traced the serial number and traced back to us, Digger's 45. So he got his 45 back but initially when we got there we tried to work with the South Vietnamese EOD people. You know we thought we had something to provide to them like training and experience. Not so much experience. Not so much as them perhaps but maybe some skill levels but we gave up in the end because 9 times out of 10

25:30 they wouldn't show up. It was quite common for them to decide to desert. They might not desert for ever but they would desert for a week. They just up and go and you know, you'd asked the petty officer, "Where's the team?" "Oh they go home for a week, month, who know. Maybe come back." So they were totally unreliable and very quickly once Phil lost his money and Jake lost his 45 Jake told them not to come near us.

26:00 Stay away from us so this one fellow was okay but we couldn't just allow him so from that point on we become very, very self sufficient. We didn't even deal with American EOD. If we were doing the job Jake made it clear that this is our job and we will run it our way and our fellows are going to be in charge and do it and consequently all of our work was in pairs or threes or fours and we never, ever

26:30 went out on one EOD job, joint job with the Americans or the South Vietnamese because we realised how dangerous that was.

Could you refer to the ARVN and the EOD?

If a job was, yeah perhaps if we were too busy and perhaps it was a mundane sort of job or it was too large for us. It would take up too much time then we could just tell the American Command that we couldn't do it but

27:00 we just say pass this on to someone else and they did that. An example of when we did that. Well there was a couple of examples. One was when an ammunition dump blew and there was stuff everywhere. Well it was too big a job for us to do. That's a mundane pick up and destroy so we didn't do that. Another one was we had a call some little village out the middle of nowhere. This farmer, rice farmer,

27:30 he was digging up his paddock for rice planting and ploughing it and he found a US 500 pound bomb that hadn't gone off. With B52s God knows how long it had been there. They probably knew it was there but anyway he dug it up and he said, "I want this out of my yard, off my patch." So jumped in a chopper and away we went and we had a look at the bomb and it was fused and the fuse was damaged and you're not going to move the

28:00 damn thing. 20 yards to the edge of the village. Close enough to do a lot of damage so we had a look at it, made a decision that we either just blew the buggery up and let it go and who cares or the other option is low order it. We use a small explosive to try and open the case but small enough not to set off the main charge or the fuse.

28:30 Once you expose the main charge you can burn it out and then all you've got is an empty bomb case. You can pick up and carry it away. Like scrap iron. Both carried a risk to the village and we explained to them that if we high order it you are going to lose part of your village. If we attempt to low order it and we fail you still lose part of your village. If we succeed okay everything's fine but we said it's a risk. There's always a risk in a low order that it will detonate.

29:00 We said, "Are you happy to accept that risk?" and they said, "No. If you high order and it wrecks the village then you pay us." So no. No way. So we just kicked a bit of dirt back on it and walked away. We said, "We are not going to do that. How the hell are we going to say we will pay for half your village if the bomb goes off?" So we walked away. We got back and Jake just got on the phone and said, "There's a 500 pound bomb out in the village and why don't you call the local ARVN

29:30 or EOD to go out and look after it. We're not touching it." So there were times when we just walked away.

Were you involved in doing any river patrols at all?

Yeah. Quite often the PDRs the navy patrol boats patrol the river with a fibreglass boat. They used to operate at the Cua Viec River which is right up on the DMZ and our fellows, we used to go to the Cua Viec on

30:00 a regular basis on rotation.

Can I just get you to explain what the DMZ is?

Oh demilitarised zone between North Vietnam and South Vietnam. Obviously you don't cross that border and there's a no man's land as well and Cua Viec was just on the south side of the DMZ and there was the Dong Nai River, Cua Viec River? I forget. That virtually ran along to the south of the

30:30 DMZ east to west and yeah, we had to patrol that river along the Cua Viec looking for what they called the bird cage mines. They were a bad bit of gear. A lot of American vessels were blown up on that river constantly and ambushed and so on but the PBRs [Patrol Boat, River] they operated in most of the river systems. They were run by the US Navy. They were called the Brown River Navy and yeah, I mean there was often, regularly. Well I won't say regularly but

31:00 we used to get calls where the VC had barricaded a river. You know just to block and they would load it with explosives or they would put in panji stakes and bury them into the seabed or the river bed and things that would just block the river or even spear the PBR because they were only a fibreglass hull. Or even perhaps the river silted up somewhere and the boats couldn't patrol as far up as they wanted

31:30 they would send us down. We would get them to load up with all big crate charges and hose charges and we would go up and block the barricade or deepen the river for them. But yeah we used to operate with the PBRs reasonably often. That was good fun cruising up and down the river.

What is a birdcage mine?

The birdcage is actually the detonating mechanism of a mine

32:00 The reason they call it a birdcage they were totally homemade by the VC. Absolutely ingenious device and they were like a football bladder. Inflated football bladder that looks like a birdcage and it sits on a base which has the actuating mechanism and so on and that is attached to whatever sized charge they put on the bomb. It might be a 500 pound bomb it might be a 1000 bomb. They put on it on the riverbed and you can't see the bird

32:30 cage device. It's usually sitting on the bottom of the seabed with the mine and it's actually activated by the bow wave the pressure wave from the boat. As the boat comes along the pulse comes out from the bow of the boat and this pressure affects the bladder flexes and inflates and deflates to a certain extent and that change in pressure actually fires the device and there's a delay. The way they set it up

33:00 is very, very intelligent. Genius. Normally when the pressure wave hits the birdcage the boat is too far away so and that pressure wave there is a fallen pressure and when that fallen pressure is picked up by that bladder the boat is virtually over the mine and boomda. You often pick up pieces of fibreglass hull and bits and pieces in the river.

Did you find many of the mines?

33:30 Yeah there were. Normally it wasn't something that you would see on the surface but if they suspected that a birdcage or a device was in the area you would go and have a look for it. One operation it was just after we arrived. There was and I wasn't on it but there was a mission in the Cua Viec River with the Yanks and they found 5 birdcage mines

34:00 and actually killed 22 swimmers, NVA [North Vietnamese Army] swimmers because the North Vietnamese operated in our territory. Down south it was more VC but the North Vietnamese were in force so their SAFA swimmers were quiet highly trained. They were frogmen so yeah, they knew what they were doing but it was pretty easy for them to cross the DMZ and get into the river systems in the north.

34:30 In those river patrols were you doing any diving there in the river?

Only when it came time to go and set the explosive charge. You know whatever it may be but that was the only time but while you were in the water you would have 2 or 3 PBRs around you and the PBRs were armed to the teeth. They had twin 50mm machine gun mounted on the bows and this is only a little fibreglass boat. Well reasonably small.

35:00 Mid ship they had M16 machine gun poking out either side. Down aft they had another single mounted machine gun. They had 60mm mortar round mount and they generally at a hand cranked grenade launcher so I mean they carried a lot of firepower, a lot of firepower and they weren't afraid to use it.

Was it difficult conditions diving in the river?

Yeah I mean apart from Cam-ranh Bay I don't

35:30 remember ever seeing my hand in front of my face. Just filthy dirty water. Shocking conditions but that's

what we were, we were relatively accustomed to that sort of diving so that didn't bother you. Your biggest concern was always if you are diving in tangled wreckage or something. My biggest concern was always that I would get tangled up. With no visibility it is impossible to untangle yourself

- 36:00 and even if there was another diver on the surface he would have a hell of a time. He would probably tangle himself up trying to get you out so that was always in the back of your mind more so than the explosives. If I get tangled up I've only got so much air and it might be a bit hard to get out of this.

Were there ever any times were there that you felt you had a near miss?

While you were in the water or just generally?

Just while you were in Vietnam.

Oh yeah, I had a few.

- 36:30 I think the closest I came you know if I think about the reality of it where I know, there were a lot of near misses where you think, "Hell that was close." but obviously that barge was the one where Lady Luck or whatever you want to call it. If I hadn't got lost going to that wharf we would have lost 3 of the new 6 in the first couple of days.
- 37:00 There's no way, no way because we were on our way out we could say that delay where we were at the wharf when we would have been at the barge when it blew. There is no doubt in my mind about that. So I look back on that as being very, very lucky. Someone was watching over me. I say that was the difference between one of the other teams saying, "Yeah I'll come with you." and, "No bugger you."
- 37:30 So I'm glad they said, "Bugger you." And there is too many really to try and think about as far as dealing with explosive ordnance and so on where luck of the draw you know where any of them had cooked off you were gone but you don't think about that. You don't think about that. That's your job and if you have a job to do and if start to stop and think, "Hell this is dangerous."
- 38:00 they would probably send you back on the first plane to the nuthouse you know. So yeah, you block that out emotions. You block out emotions when you see dead people. You have to. You block out the emotions associated with risk. You must do it. You have to. That's why these 18 year olds came home as 30 year olds. They had to block it out somehow and of course that's a lot of the
- 38:30 problems with the Vietnam vets. They buried a lot of the stuff for so long and you can't bury emotions. Eventually they come out of the closet and they bite you. Always good to talk about.

One of the strongest themes that keeps coming up in all of our interviews is the mateship that exists in all of the Australian services. How in really trying circumstances they are the ones that get you through. In such a small team how, what sort of experiences

- 39:00 **of that did you have?**

Well it is absolutely total. The team operates as one. That is automatic. You don't even think about it but you wouldn't go anywhere without your mates you know. One of them at least and you always felt that if one of those blokes was next to you or behind you or whatever you felt 10 times safer because he was covering your back and you were covering his back. Like that incident

- 39:30 I told you he might have, he mightn't have. He might have been playing pocket billiards [fondling his genitals] I don't know, but he might have also pulled out a grenade or a weapon but that's what your mates are for. They cover your back and see things that you don't see but I think in the team the clearance diving branch within all the teams is probably the closest relationship experience in life. I've never seen this sort of bond and obviously it does exist with other units and other branches
- 40:00 but I have never seen it so strong and of course, in Vietnam it was even stronger. It became, as I say you really operated and thought as one. We relied on each other and trusted each other and you come back from it and you never forget. You never forget those blokes. Those blokes for the rest of your life are very, very special people.

Do you all still stay in touch?

Oh yeah, yeah we are still in touch. I spoke to Phil Naramore yesterday.

- 40:30 I spoke to Larry Digney probably 2 or 3 weeks away. I spoke to Jake Linton 2 or 3 weeks ago and I'm seeing them all on Anzac Day.

Tape 10

- 00:30 **We've been through some river patrolling that you've done and pier clearance, what about salvage ops apart from the one we talked about in the helicopter?**

Probably the major salvage operation we did was I did mention it before was with the barge. It was heading north from Da Nang loaded with white they called white phosphorus rounds. Resupply a base

called Phu

- 01:00 Bei and a big typhoon went through Da Nang and next thing they hadn't heard from this boat. It had disappeared so they sent choppers up and they discovered it upturned in the surf on the beach or in the surf line near a village called Tan Lai. The naval commander for the area the first thing he thinks of is he hasn't got the capability to do anything here so he called the Aussies and he said, "Jake can you launch a
- 01:30 salvage operation. What do you need?" So Jake took command of, it was a fair sort of operation actually. It was a large salvage job in that we had, we had the use of as many helicopters as we required. They offered us the use of army divers who were a bit like the ship's divers of ours, just shallow water divers, air divers but they were pretty good fellows. They brought in a tug, a big ocean going tug.
- 02:00 A salvage ship laying off shore. We had Chinooks [helicopter] to bring in our gear and they brought in several tanks and troops and surrounded the beach area because as I say the village was considered to be hostile, potentially hostile and they were set up on the beach and proceeded to work out a plan to try and salvage this damn thing because no bodies had been washed up at that stage and the Yanks thought they were in the upturned hull and
- 02:30 the American's priority is to recover bodies. They wanted us to recover bodies, try and salvage and get upright the vessel and make sure the ordnance was safe because white phosphorus is very, very nasty stuff. So yeah, that was the biggest job we did and we spent several days on the beach and initially working in typhoon conditions.
- 03:00 I remember the sea breaking over the stern of this damn thing and we were trying to attach lines to the propeller and I could see, I could just see myself being picked up and dumped on one of these razor sharp propeller blades so we were trying to stay clear of that but we, it was too rough and by the time the sea had abated the storm had built up so much sand around the wreck it almost became a sand
- 03:30 bar to it. We tried to, we also tried to do what was called par buckle and roll it using the big ocean going tug but that didn't work so in the end when the weather abated a bit we actually went out and cut into the bottom of the hull and went in to try and recover bodies and eventually get the white phosphorus out. We didn't find a body. They had all gone. All washed overboard and
- 04:00 and disappeared and I think several days later they found one of the crewman quite a way south. I forget how far but it was like 20 or 30 miles south of the wreck. It's interesting just recently an American who was in that squadron contacted me through the internet and they didn't know the fate of the vessel and the reason as to why what happened to the crew. They weren't told. It was all, the Americans didn't
- 04:30 hand out information. Everything was sort of hush, hush and tell, so these fellows for 30 odd years had wondered what happened to their shipmates, what happened to the wreck. They had no idea. I sent him 30 photos or something of the operation and the whole story and they were just amazed. He's put it on the internet on his site and told all his mates and they were ecstatic that they found out what happened. It's amazing. The power of the net.

In both the circumstance and the one

- 05:00 **you talked about earlier with the helicopter where you thought you were going to recover bodies there also and there weren't any, were there any circumstances where you did have to recover bodies?**

A couple of my team mates recovered several bodies which included Americans as far as I recall but no, my only experience was Vietnamese bodies. I never had to recover an American.

Is that a harder thing to do than other parts of the job?

It's very unpleasant

- 05:30 in that it's a body and any time in the water the bodies become putrid. They balloon. They look like a blow up doll I mean they are enormous. Yeah just like a balloon but putrid. That's the worst part. They just stink to high hell and you can't scrub the smell off for days so it's not a pleasant job. Not a particularly pleasant job.

- 06:00 **Are there do's and don'ts with recovering a body?**

Well yeah the first thing we, the VC had a good habit of booby trapping bodies. Anybody. It didn't matter if it was their own they would booby trap the body. So first thing you had to do was be very careful for booby traps.

How do you do that?

It's a matter of feel. Checking the entire area out and make sure they are not linked to any trip wires or anything and then work your way to the body

- 06:30 and you can pretty well see except for beneath the body if it's on land. Obviously the body could be sitting on a mine with a pressure release device so yeah, it's just a matter of feeling your way and

eliminating all the possibilities of how they might have booby trapped that body so you've just got to have your wits about you. What they could have done? What could they do in this situation? What would I do? And that's where it comes into training

07:00 our training was valuable because we hoped we had some sort of insight into the Vietnamese mind and you know, you always try and think what would a VC do. What sort of gear do they have access to? How would they do it? They are the greatest improvisers in the world. We learned a lot from them.

Apart from looking for booby traps what are some of the other dos and don'ts when you are recovering?

It depends on the state of the body. You have to be careful they don't start to fall apart on you

07:30 you know, it's not very pleasant when a hand comes off or a leg comes off in your hand. They decompose so quickly so yeah, that's you know once you are sure there's no booby traps involved it's a matter of getting the thing in the bag as quick as you can and get the hell out of there. Really our job finished once we were certain there were no booby traps. We'd get the hell out of there as quick as we could and let some other bugger do the disposal trick. Yeah, we had done our bit.

08:00 **When you were talking about that smell which is really hard to get rid of, is there a smell that you've ever smelt since that reminds you of that?**

Yeah I suppose it's hard to describe but I suppose the closest thing. The water's the worst I think being in the water but yeah, if you found a dead fish that had been sitting in a puddle for a week or two and it just sort of

08:30 fermenting in its own juice and not a really nice thing to think about but it's just a putrid smell. It's the sort of, body smell is like a blanket. It sort of seems to grab a hold of you and cling to you you know. It's not the sort of thing, it stays with you but whether it stays in your skin I don't know but if you handle a body you've got it on your hands you don't want to touch anything with your fingers for weeks. It's just

09:00 a clinging, horrible.

Aussie adaptability and ingenuity keeps coming up for us in interviews. Was there any thing that you came up with to try and get rid of that smell?

I don't know. I suppose washing your hands in methylated spirits or strong turps or whatever you could get your hands on just to change the smell. Camouflage it really. I'm not sure

09:30 I mean it just goes of its natural accord I think but yeah, you just try and camouflage it. Not a very pleasant subject.

One of the things that is interesting when we talk to World War II guys is when they were talking about doing operations anywhere near Americans it keeps coming up that they weren't given or they didn't feel they weren't give the proper kudos that the Americans sort of wanted to play down the role that the Australians

10:00 **played. Did you experience that being part of?**

No. If anything probably the opposite but that's easily explained. There was 6 of us in the whole of 1 Corps and that the Americans came to rely on us so much that anything out of the ordinary or a bit difficult the easiest thing was to pass it to the EOD divers. That was the attitude of the Yanks.

10:30 'Hell we don't have the men to deal with this or we don't know what to do with that. Call the Aussie divers they'll come up with a solution.' So no, we weren't a challenge I suppose only 6 of us. But no the Americans were very, very good. They tried to nominate us, I think the whole team was nominated for a Bronze Star which is the third highest bravery award but our government wouldn't. It's a bit of a sore point but they refused to accept foreign

11:00 awards unless they were British. The Queen had to approve them so any award that was presented to us was ignored. We weren't allowed to wear it and we even had commendations that we found out years later, the US Military and the US Navy actually sent these awards to our fleet commanders saying, "We present, can you go and present this award to CDT3 such and such a team." and I found out

11:30 from a British senior warrant officer that one admiral, senior in our system. He was fleet commander at one stage when he retired they went through his desk and files and he just filed them. They never got past him. He didn't care. He couldn't care less if the divers got them. So yeah, the Americans were very, very appreciative and I mean to this day you will meet Americans and they will talk about the Aussie

12:00 divers in Vietnam. The blokes remember us. They had a hell of a lot respect for us and we are very proud of that but they tried to pile awards on us and our system just rejected them out of hand.

Did that seem odd to you when our government seem happy for you to go and operate under their command?

I think it's ridiculous. Well whether under their command or not we were in the war with the Americans and if the Americans or the South Vietnamese try and give you an award for something that you did for them

- 12:30 what the hell. I mean it's just pure bureaucracy. It's like the Long Tan blokes you know. After the battle they weren't allowed to accept the South Vietnamese Presidential Award. They were given dolls, Vietnamese dolls instead because the army commander, Australian commander said, "No." to the President of South Vietnam. He said, "You can't give them that medal." So the President didn't know what to do. He ran around in circles and his staff went down the local shop and brought a stack
- 13:00 of dolls and here's the President of Vietnam having to present each survivor of Long Tan with a doll. That's fair dinkum. That's how ridiculous the system was but at the same time they wanted to award some very high medal who sat in Taskforce Headquarters and never left the place. That was an Australian award. That's fine but the poor old diggers out there didn't get too many awards but no, they refused to allow
- 13:30 the Americans to give you an award. I got one through once. I had to ask special permission. It was years later and I was given a Secretary, US Secretary citation which included a ribbon and a medal and they sent it to me after Vietnam and I put in a special request to accept this award but I don't know if they changed their mind or backed off or they thought it wasn't
- 14:00 too important but they said, "Oh yeah, you can have that. You can wear that." But it's silly really. We worked for the Americans. An example of the DSM [Distinguished Service Medal] because we were so removed from the Australians that they didn't know what the hell we did and they didn't care much so no, no we might get one but you're not having anymore and we have the Americans trying to heap awards on us and we weren't allowed to accept anything.

That you know of did you have any interaction with CIA [Central Intelligence Agency]?

- 14:30 We flew in their aircraft all the time. You know Air America. Whenever we went south we always had a ride with Air America but other than that not that I am aware of. Purely a social and transportation thing. We didn't want to travel on the old Hercs [C-130 Hercules transport aircraft] with web seats. We wanted to
- 15:00 travel on those old DC3s with nice bucket seats and probably full of drugs down the back but that was really our only CIA that we are aware of.

So if you are flying on their planes are there Americans on there and did you discuss with them?

No. A lot of them were in civilian clothes and they were very secretive. They were very unfriendly. Yeah, they didn't, you wouldn't

- 15:30 strike up a conversation with them. Not that we tried but you could just sense they are there to do a job and you do your job. There's no point getting to know them. So no, quite often travelled alongside, sat next to CIA blokes but no, you didn't discuss anything. They wouldn't tell you anyway. Not that we were that interested anyway.

A few guys have told us about going on chopper joy rides.

- 16:00 **Did you get to do any of those?**

Oh yeah, yeah. The downed chopper job that I did it was one of their cavalry units, air cavalry units and after the job was completed we went back to their base and they just treated us like royalty and put on ribs and lobster tails down the bush. Plenty of beer and the

- 16:30 this particular air cav [cavalry] units had 6 Loaches, [a Hughes OH-6A Cayuse (named from its original designation of LOH, light observation helicopter)] which are a small little bubble type observation helicopter. Command helicopter and they had 6 Iroquois and 6 what they called Snakes. Cobra gun ships, fair dinkum gunships so 18 choppers in this unit and their job, their major job was to conduct what they call first and last life missions. They used to fly out
- 17:00 and would use to the loaches as bait trying to draw fire in Charlie country and the old Cobra would be hovering up above and loaded with rockets and you know, mini gun and grenade launchers and so on and this poor little guy in his loach is trying to attract fire and when they opened fire he would throw a smoke grenade out the window and bolt and the Cobra would roll in and they would come down and just flatten the area. But that's
- 17:30 by the by but when we were staying with these fellows we stayed for a couple of nights and I'll never forget. They were only young. I couldn't believe it. I was only 22 and I felt an old man amongst these 19 year old kids, only kids and most of them didn't have a driving licence but they were flying helicopters in Vietnam. Anyway this particular night it was just before sundown and we weren't far from the coast and they said, "Let's go for a ride."
- 18:00 And we quite often go and play fox and hounds so here's 3 or 4 Loaches, no doors you know and you are sitting there next to the pilot and Phil's in the other chopper and these blokes are just like kids on their skateboards and they are flying over these big sand dunes and they are skimming them by a foot with these choppers going flat out and they are chasing each other. The guy in front is trying to get away and is flying down all these gullies and over sand dunes and over the top and down and

- 18:30 the other 2 choppers were coming and trying to catch him. Just playing, just like kids, big kids and that was fantastic. I've always loved flying and this was the ultimate you know. An 18 year old kid sitting next to you as a pilot and you feel totally safe and you are just skimming the sand dunes at 80 knots. It was fantastic. Phil Naramore while we were there actually went out on a first and last life mission. The boss would have had a heart attack if he knew.
- 19:00 But they went out in the Ashui[?] Valley which is a pretty famous area and Nara was in the front of the Snake, the Cobra and the pilot is in the back and the bloke in the front has control of the turrets and the nose which has a mini gun and a rocket launcher. The pilot has control of the rocket pods and they came in, rolled in and Nara he was just let her go,
- 19:30 let her go and they dumped everything. Nara came back and he couldn't believe it. He was on such a high. He was senior and he pulled rank and went for the ride but one of the young fellows said, "Come on I'll take you for a ride in a Cobra." and it was, I'll never forget. It was fantastic. He let me fly it. What an incredible machine.

The pilots in the Loaches to some degree sound like they were a bit of a sitting duck flying out to draw fire. Some people

- 20:00 **might say that you guys in your operations might have had a similar sort of role in terms of danger level. Did you find there was a similar mentality between you?**

Perhaps to a similar extent except that we were older and so perhaps we had slowed down a bit or a bit quieter because they were wild buggers. They were kids but yes, it has been said where our job a lot of people walked into potential danger and they had to protect themselves from that danger well it's been commented that

- 20:30 we were the few that went to seek that danger. It's there and we know it exists and no one else wants to go near it but we actually go aggressively and walk into that danger. So I suppose yeah there's a similarity.
- 21:00 Those Loach pilots every time they went out they didn't know if they would come back. I remember clearly one Loach pilot saying to me. They did 6 months on the Loaches on this first, in this squadron and then they went to normal flying, to the slicks, transport helicopters for the next 6 months and he said to me, "I've nearly finished my 6 months home. I reckon I might get home now. I've got this far I'm right. That first 6 months I was pretty worried. I
- 21:30 didn't think I'll get home but I've got this far I might get home." That was their attitude and in fact the skipper of that unit was a major and the last night there in the mess Phil Naramore took off his boots and presented his boots to the major because the major had admired his boots. On the army, on some of the army GPs they had the words, 'Seal' impregnated, stamped on the soul. Raised rubber seal but the Yanks loved that you know,
- 22:00 seal boots so this bloke said he loved Nara's boots and Nara as we were leaving took off his boots and said, "Mate, you can have my boots." 2 days later one of the pilots was in Da Nang and he came and saw us and he said, "Oh shit happens but the major copped it. 24 hours after you left he got blown out of the sky and he was wearing your boots." That makes you sort of the fellow
- 22:30 and he's got Phil Naramore's boots on and he took a direct hit through the nose of the chopper with a rocket propelled grenade and wiped him out. I had a lot of respect for those guys those helicopter pilots. Those jokers took tremendous risks and they were great pilots, great pilots.

Some air force guys that we've spoken to more so from World War II have told us stories about

- 23:00 **like say with the bomb aimer the pilot would give them their uniforms to wear so they could go into other like into the officer's mess so they could have a meal and a drink. Did any of that go on with you guys?**

We used to like most divers used to there is a navy saying, 'you rabbit things' and rabbiting things is considered to be quite acceptable.

- 23:30 Basically it's knocking stuff off and you knock off anything that comes in handy. When I say that it was equipment, clothing or badges you knock it off. You know you knock off someone's jeep. We had one of our jeeps stolen, the Americans you know and you would acquisition it or whatever they say but yeah, we had a collection of badges. We used to knock off badges at every opportunity. We liked to have a collection of
- 24:00 American badges and we had everything from privates and through all ranks in all 3 branches of the service right through to almost admiral. So around Da Nang there were on some of the bases, well most bases had clubs that were the NCOs club, sergeant's club etc so sometimes we were a bit bored, things were a bit quite and the ABs were the only ones that would do it. And we would say, "What are we going to be tonight? Well we'll be'
- 24:30 because everyone wore cammies. They all wore the same. "Shall we be army majors or shall we be air force captains?" and we'd stick on the badges and we'd head into their compound and be saluted at the gate. No check of ID or nothing and you'd drive up to the officers' mess and we were only 19 to 23 so a

bit young for majors so we would walk in, generally we kept to captain or below and we would walk in the mess and in the officers' mess and get stuck into it.

- 25:00 Most of the time we would get away with it and if anyone picked up on the accent and we'd say, "Yeah we are up here on a...." Bullshit some story and the Yank, "God damn fantastic. Stay as long as you like." and so we did that regularly. The boss never found out about that. That was something we kept from him. One night we got caught. We actually admitted it and one of the Yanks
- 25:30 said, "Oh well. We'll forgive you." They weren't as strict as the Australian military officers' mess. I mean shock horror to see an enlisted man in their mess. They would have a heart attack and throw you out and arrest you but the Yanks were pretty laid back and this I think he might have been the president of the mess or in charge of the mess he said, "Oh well you are Aussies. That's fair enough. You can stay all you've got to do is sing us Waltzing Matilda." So he called
- 26:00 for a hush in the bar and the 3 of us got up on a table and started to sign Waltzing Matilda and we were half cut by then. So we got through the first verse and we looked at each other and couldn't remember what the second verse of Waltzing Matilda was so we just started the first verse again and that was it. They all cheered and clapped and yahoos and said, "We don't care what rank you are. You are welcome any time you like." But the Yanks were great like that.

How did you acquire the collar badges? Would you just

- 26:30 **rabbit them or did you ever just ask?**

No, you rabbit them. We rabbit everything. Anything you can get your hands on we knocked off. Aussies always are. You knock anything off. We used to leave our mark everywhere. We had a stencil of a Kangaroo and carried that in the vehicles with a can of red spray paint and didn't matter where you were you see a Yankee vehicle you would walk over and spray paint a Kangaroo stencil and in the end in Da Nang just about every vehicle had a kangaroo on it. The Yanks thought that was magic.

- 27:00 They loved that because they all knew we were there. The only time I remember where anyone asked for a badge we had an American admiral come and visit us and a bit hard to knock his badge off so Digger and he was the main rabbit and he actually fronted him. A young 19 year old able seaman and he fronted this navy admiral and he said, "Sir I collect badges. Can I have one of your badges?" and the admiral said, "That's not a problem." and popped his collar device and gave him an admiral's badge.

- 27:30 Yeah I just imagine our admirals doing that.

Did your jaw drop when you saw Digger asking for it?

No, no. Not at all. That was normal, normal for Digger.

What happened to all of them? Did you bring them home or?

Yeah Digger brought them all home and he looked after them and when he got back to Australia he actually made up a big board and he attached every single one of those

- 28:00 badges to that board and left it at the diving school and I think in recent years and he was looking for it and it had disappeared. So I hope, I would like to think that it wasn't knocked off, someone else rabbit it because that's a bit of history in that. It should have been kept and it had even, sometimes officers' bars were shot in a war zone and some of them were painted and painted them different colours and the air force generally were shiny.

- 28:30 We had the lot, the whole bloody lot.

That would have to almost be karma if someone rabbit it don't you think?

Probably but you would think what sort of scum could do that? That's knocking off. What we did was rabbiting. Whoever did that was knocking off. They were stealing. That's different.

What from your memory, what would be the strangest request that your team had to go and do a job?

- 29:00 I think probably the telephone where some idiot said he suspected his phone was booby trapped in his office. We thought that was mad but I suppose in retrospect a lot of American officers were petrified that their own troops would booby trap them because that went on and he must, someone must have disliked him and he suspected that had happened and it did happen. Where we lived across the road what was called the
- 29:30 correction custody which was within that little base and was the US Navy lockup, the prison and one day someone who had been in that prison, an American sailor went past and hurled a grenade in the door. You know they are crazy so that's why a lot of officers lived in fear of their life. If they are unpopular they lived in fear of their life because some of the troops
- 30:00 a lot of the troops are on drugs. Very, very common with American soldiers. I can remember seeing soldiers in uniform or part uniform because they didn't care wandering around their bases in Da Nang sometimes out of curfews like American Negroes with Afro haircuts. They weren't even told to get

haircuts and coloured beads around their necks and they had some bit of weird uniform that wasn't part of the dress

30:30 uniform but who's going to correct them or discipline them? These blokes are conscripts, they hate the system, they hate Vietnam, they hate the army and as I say most of the time high on drugs. It's nothing for them to throw a grenade in someone's tent or whatever. So yeah, that was something I'd never experienced before and I'd never experienced seeing military people on drugs. That blew my mind. I couldn't accept that.

31:00 I was out on a job once and I stopped over at an American compound out in the scrub. Pretty big compound and someone said to me, "They just made an arrest. They discovered the entire dental staff in the hospital and the entire hospital staff all high on marijuana." At it smoking dope and they had to arrest every doctor, medico and dentist in the whole system.

31:30 All high as a kite. That just blows your mind. I never heard of one Australian serviceman who took drugs or even smoked dope but the Yanks were into everything. There was very high grade what the hell do they have? You know the white powder. I can't remember what they call the damn stuff but that was the highest grade in the world and the VC they

32:00 reckon used to bring it in. Highest grade possible and get the Yanks on it and get them hooked.

Opium would that be it?

Opium that's it. There were a lot of Americans that were totally off their trees all the time. If they weren't hooked onto that stuff they were smoking marijuana. They were smoking marijuana in the field. Blokes, Americans out on patrol smoking marijuana. You just can't comprehend it. Crazy. That's why you stay away from them. That's why our blokes used to you know avoid them at all cost.

32:30 **When you mentioned a moment ago about the incident at the hospital was there a job that you called out or got a request for from a hospital that someone had swallowed explosive?**

Oh yeah, yeah. That was a carry on from the drug addiction with the Americans. They would hear that something would give them a high and some idiot said that C4 plastic explosive would give you a high and it probably would

33:00 I wouldn't be at all surprised and all the Yanks carried C4 because they had a demolition troop in each patrol or whatever they ran, teams or whatever. They would spread the explosives out amongst the troops but these blokes used to use C4 to boil their billy and once it starts to burn it's a very, very intense heat and it would boil a billy in about 30 seconds but it's very

33:30 dangerous. It become very unstable with heat and a lot of blokes blew their foot off because they put it out and save it for next time. Stamp on it and bang, the C4 detonates and they are minus a foot. In this case these 2 idiots who were high as kites anyway thought, "Oh well, someone said you can get high on C4." and they actually ate C4 and from memory we were told that they were in comas

34:00 for a bout 3 months and all their bodily functions. How they saved them they said it was a miracle that they survived, all their bodily functions just shut down for about 3 months and it took 3 months for them to slowly bring them back. Idiots. Absolute lunatics.

Do you know what they were expecting you guys to do?

Well they had no knowledge of or experience, well not too many people had eaten C4 I think but with explosives. They thought we might

34:30 have some answers for them of what it, what was actually in the C4 compound and perhaps we could help them with a bit of advice on how to treat it. I mean we didn't have a clue. Our blokes never knew anything. Amazing isn't it?

A lot of the army guys, army guys all knew that they were going for a 365 day tour, did you know you were there for 7 months?

35:00 Yes very clear. We knew exactly. We didn't know the exact day because it was flexible and that the old team when they wanted to come home. When they thought you were ready so after 1 or 2 weeks so it didn't fluctuate too much but yeah, we knew. We did the same things as everybody else. We were getting short and all had the countdown.

Did you have any of the countdown posters?

No, no we weren't that far into it.

35:30 We were all coming home together it didn't matter much. At the end, towards the end everyone that walks in your bar or everyone you meet you can't help say, "Oh yeah I'm 10 and wokie'. You can't help sort of rubbing it in. You take the piss out of people.

So at what point did you know you were coming home?

We knew the day that we were due to be pulled out. That was known ahead of time or rough date

- 36:00 but what really surprised us was that we weren't being replaced and we were all very, very disappointed about that because we knew the job wasn't done and we knew that when we left. We felt in a way that we were running away, that we were deserting the Vietnamese. We all felt that and we still talk about that today that we walked away and left them and we didn't think that was right. Some political decision. The politicians had put us there
- 36:30 and all of a sudden the politicians were chopping our legs from underneath us and pulling us out when the job wasn't done. We felt very, very bad about that. The Americans as a bit of a pat on the back asked that we return via Hawaii for what they call a hail and farewell just out of gratitude for what all the CD teams had done. They wanted us to be the representative
- 37:00 team and they were going to make a big deal about it. Coming out of Vietnam, fly us to Hawaii at American expense, American aircraft. They would put us up and not one cent of cost to the government and the bureaucrats in Canberra said, "No, no not going to get a trip like that." So they put the kibosh on us and wouldn't let us do it and had we gone I'm sure the Americans would have tried to give us a bag load of medals or citations or whatever else they wanted to give us but
- 37:30 they said, "No way." And then walked out of Vietnam effectively. Left if with nothing as far as anyone with our expertise. It was finished, over.

Not being able to come home via Hawaii like that did that add to the disappointment of coming home?

It was disappointing but I don't think, I mean once we found out we couldn't go we couldn't go so you just put it out of your mind.

- 38:00 That's done, over, finished. But I do remember I was in two minds when I left Da Nang. I wanted to get home, I wanted to see my fiancée and get the hell out of this war but at the same time I was regretting it. I was very sorry to leave. I was sad to leave because I felt that we were doing our job and
- 38:30 I felt that we were making a contribution and I really didn't want to see that come to an end and I think I realised I was on one hell of a high. I never, ever experience this again. This was the real thing and I've been proven right by that.

So you told us earlier about leaving Mammasan behind what about Fred?

Fred died.

- 39:00 Fred was on a long lead on our yard on a rope so she couldn't clear off but she had, she could roam the whole yard and make sure she could reach the beer cans. We were fenced in because we were EOD and the ordnance and detonators and explosives there and we had quite a high fence around it and just on the other side of one of the fences was a big clump of banana trees and apparently,
- 39:30 we found out later that someone had put rat poison because rats were a real problem. Someone had put rat poison on the banana palms because rats like bananas and anyway we decided that we would give Fred a bit more freedom and we gave her a bit more rope and enough rope to get over the fence and came out one morning and there was the rope hanging over the fence and she was a dead as a doornail. She had eaten the rat poison and the earlier team never forgave us to this day. They haven't forgiven us that we killed Fred they said.
- 40:00 **Did you have a burial for her?**
- I actually made up a sign and we dug a grave in the backyard and we gave her a funeral and we put on civilian shirts and ties and had a burial service for Fred and said some nice things and built a nice little grave and stones and I put, I painted like a headstone
- 40:30 and it said, "Here lies Fred, the meanest monkey in the valley." and then we someone had a set of fake bananas like the plastic bananas that people use to decorate with and we hung these fake bananas over the edge of the headstone. It was still there when we left. But we thought that was very fitting for Fred because she was a very angry little monkey at times. So yeah the meanest monkey in the valley. That was a bit of
- 41:00 an American expression. "Yea though I walk through the valley of death" and so on.

Tape 11

00:30 Speaking of movies have there been any films that you can associate with?

In regard to Vietnam? I've seen most of the Vietnam films that have been put out since. A few have been absolute garbage but I do, there are some parts of movies that are very good. 'Apocalypse Now'. There were certain parts of that which I thought

- 01:00 were so American and real and the one I remember in particular which is so typically real America is

when those choppers were coming in and hitting that village and the commanding officer and he said, "I love the smell of napalm in the morning." And he's playing loud music out the helicopter's speakers and I thought, "Yeah, the Americans do that. Only in America."

- 01:30 I recently went and saw, 'We were Soldiers Once and Young.' That affected me quite deeply that movie because I thought it was very well done. It was very graphic and there were times when you felt you were right in there amongst it. The sounds of the choppers and all those things bringing, you could almost smell it you know so that was very realistic
- 02:00 and I've since read the book and I read a few histories of that battle and it was the biggest battle the Americans, well the biggest battle in Vietnam. And it was absolutely terrible, a bloody disaster really. So yeah, there were a couple of movies like that that have affected me but I wouldn't miss them. Some people vets won't go and see it but I wouldn't miss them. I think that's part of it. You've got to confront those things and it does you good.
- 02:30 I enjoy it actually.

So leaving Vietnam the actual day that you left what was that like?

Well we were lucky that they couldn't get us on a flight for 2 weeks after we were due to wrap up and leave Da Nang so the Australian Army actually sent up a Caribou, Wallaby Airlines to pick us up and all our personal gear and flew us to Saigon. We stopped at Pleiku in the mountains

- 03:00 highlands for fuel and got into Saigon, an American EOD picked us up and we had the run of their villa in Cholon for 2 weeks and for that 2 weeks we just took that as R&C [rest and care] in country and we just hit the bars in downtown Saigon. Enjoyed the hell out of it. It gave us a chance to wind down. The American team never asked them to help them or participate in any jobs at all. It was just our
- 03:30 time to relax and I think that was pretty healthy to be able to do that before we jumped on a plane and came home. Although you never escaped the war. We had one favourite bar in Saigon that we started to go there regularly and one night, one evening Phil Naramore and Bluey Furner jumped in a cab, a little Peugeot and Renaults they had and said, "We are going down to such and such a bar." and we said, "Righto we'll meet you down there."
- 04:00 and they arrived and the place was in flames, just a wreck. Everyone in the bar was dead. Had they arrived in that bar 2 minutes earlier because 2 blokes came down on a motorcycle with a satchel charge and they just heaved it in the door and kept going. And this is just in a bar in Saigon. You don't necessarily expect that but it happened but other than that we thoroughly enjoyed it.
- 04:30 Met a couple of nice girls down there and the Yanks looked after us and the next thing we are back in our polys for the first time in 6 months, 7 months on the Qantas Freedom Bird. City of Broken Hill it was and that was a pretty exciting flight. Or the moment of departure was. I can remember as the aircraft left you could feel the wheels come off the tarmac and just this huge cheer
- 05:00 erupted through the aircraft and then the Qantas stewards started handing the beer out. They just kept it going for half the trip home until we got to Sydney. About halfway through the captain came on and said, "I have to turn the beer off the toilets are full." But whether that was true or not. I think he just wanted to get us home sober and we came in once again in the dead of night. The airport was closed. We felt like thieves in the night. We knew this was going on
- 05:30 but you land at Sydney airport and there's no one there except the customs blokes and yeah, it wasn't a pleasant feeling.

At what stage did you start to hear about the reaction of the public at home?

Well we used to occasionally, we would get newspapers sent up during the course of our tour everyone took R & R and the blokes that came back to Australia would bring back newspapers and they would tell you what was happening so we had a little bit of feedback. We knew

- 06:00 it was getting pretty bad at home but it wasn't until you were home that you realised what was happening. When the government even brought you back in late at night like they were sneaking you in. That's what we felt like. We were sneaking in at night so no one can see you. It was clear they were embarrassed by us. That wasn't a very pleasant feeling. We were confronted by one of the customs officers. We were the very last through and our 6 were the last people through because our bags came off the plane last
- 06:30 and this mongrel said to me, "Oh mate haven't got any cigarettes have you?" He knew that I had a couple of cartons duty free, whatever the allowance was. "It's too late to buy any cigarettes and I'm dying for a cigarette. You haven't got any cigarettes have you?" and I thought you mongrel but he was customs. What do I do? He could give me a hard time so I pulled out a carton and said, "Here you go." That's all he was after. No I just need a packet or anything he took the lot.
- 07:00 I thought, "Oh bugger you." I didn't care I was home. My family was outside waiting for us and all of a sudden I was back in reality and that took a bit to acclimatise. You wake up in the morning and you shake your head a bit and think, "Where am I?" Life goes on around you. You have never been to Vietnam. Nothing's different. Nothing's changed but in your head you are still in Vietnam so pretty

weird feeling.

07:30 I think every bloke has it.

And what did you do that first night home?

No idea. No idea.

When we spoke earlier off tape about coming home so quickly. What are your thoughts on that?

Well I don't think they should ever do that. I think a sea voyage to and from gives you those few weeks to adjust and you need to adjust

08:00 going into the war zone and you definitely need to adjust coming out. As I mentioned we were on the grog in Sydney airport and the next thing within a day or two these blokes are walking into ambushes and barges are blowing up and it's just too sudden really. We are fortunate in that it saved some of our lives perhaps in that those shocks very early in the piece made us stop

08:30 and take stock and hell we have to get our shit together here but coming home. That voyage on the Sydney they were on the upper deck sunbaking and watching the ocean go past and having a good feed and a good sleep and beer issues and everyday we were getting closer to home. Vietnam is getting further and further away. There is a time to adapt. The fellows on the planes didn't have that at all. Bang

09:00 you are home and it's not real and of course, you feel the animosity around you. You pick up a newspaper or switch on the TV. We were bad people. Nobody wanted to know you. In fact I know blokes that denied when they were confronted, "You been to Vietnam?" "No, no, no." It was too much hassle. There was too much flak so they would say, "No, no I didn't serve in Vietnam.'

Do you have any of your own

09:30 **personal encounters with people saying things or asking you things like that?**

No really. You could feel, you could just feel it but no, I didn't because I was straight back in. I went home on leave and of course, they are glad to see you but it wasn't something you talked about. I mean you didn't volunteer the information that you had been to Vietnam to anybody. You sort of closed the door. I'm home

10:00 shut that door and even back in the diving section you would bullshit a bit and tell some of the funny sides to the blokes that had been there but they were the only blokes that you could talk to are the blokes that had been there and that applies to day. The only blokes you can really sit down and talk to are blokes that have been there.

And more so than anybody else seeing your brother and having had him been there and done the same job as you was that more significant

10:30 **than anything else?**

You mean my relationship with my brother. Yeah I think so. Yeah we have so much in common and that especially. We are both clearance divers and having both served in CDT3 in Vietnam does give us that extra special bond and I can talk to my brother about anything and vice versa because yeah, we are sort of mirror images in a sense.

11:00 **Did your fiancée ask you anything about your experiences?**

No, no. She didn't really want to know about and I really didn't want to talk about it. I probably on occasions amongst other divers perhaps at a party with a few beers you might with the right company you might tell jokes about things that happened

11:30 or funny stories. You remember all the good things, the funny things. They stay in your mind and in fact they come to the surface. I mean you start to forget all the bad things. They start to get pushed to the back of your mind and she obviously heard me mention on the odd occasion talk about Vietnam but it might out on the harbour in the boat and we would water ski off the back of the boat or we got drunk here or we raided the officer's mess. She would hear that side of it but I never felt inclined

12:00 to, I couldn't, you don't bring it up and it wasn't until I suppose 4 or 5 years ago that I ever mentioned it to her and I forget how it came up. But I, I don't know I think I was feeling pretty depressed at the time but whatever led to it I just broke down in front of them and I said, "I'm living with something that I never told anybody about

12:30 and I just don't." I found it very hard and then she started to dig and try and get it out of me and I told her about the episode in Cam-ranh Bay where I was right in the thick of it and there were women and children involved and I've lived with that and buried that for years and I said it just gets to me you know. Anyway I talked about it and she was very understanding

13:00 and helped me through it and it did me the world of good and I say I don't mind so much. It's not so bad

now. I talk about most things from Vietnam but you have to take that first step. As I say it was 30 years after the event.

When you initially got back did you have any sort of problems that you immediately recognised?

In retrospect you can see them but at the time you just thought it was normal.

- 13:30 A lot of anger. Very angry. Drop of a hat you would fight. Fight anyone. Always in blues. Drinking more heavily than you should and I think the start of anti-social behaviour in that I didn't like to meet people especially. I didn't like going to parties. I didn't like people. I tried to avoid people. I actually felt when people
- 14:00 would come to our house I felt that they were invading our space and I felt I didn't like people coming to my place so yeah, I definitely started an anti-social behaviour pattern but I didn't know what it was. It was there and my wife recognised it obviously and she just put it down to I was an anti-social bugger and became more anti-social as time went on.
- 14:30 But there comes a time when I wouldn't say it's fear it's a dread of people coming into your space. It's weird. Even people have talked about but it's true that for years even today if you go into a restaurant to sit down you tend to you don't even think about it but you wouldn't sit near the front door and you wouldn't sit with your back to the door. You will head for the corner of that restaurant or whatever
- 15:00 and you will sit with your back to the wall. Now how do you explain that I don't know but it happens. An unconscious thing that you do that and you are being anti-social. You have a paranoia. You are afraid of people. You think someone is going to. I don't know. I don't know what it is.

When was the first time you heard about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder?

Maybe

- 15:30 10 years ago. Maybe less, less. My brother in fact sort of alerted me to it because he was having problems. His wife left him. He was having problems with his relationships with his kids. Very angry bugger and he went and saw a psychiatrist and the psychiatrist said, "You've got PTSD mate."
- 16:00 So when my brother started to see a psychiatrist he learned from the psychiatrist what this business was all about so my brother said to me one day, "You've got to go and see a doctor mate. You've got to go and see a psychiatrist." And the same thing, "What the hell is PTSD?" I'd never heard of it and I'm not going to talk to a complete stranger about how I feel. What sort of a man does that? No way in the world. So I refused to do it. I've since
- 16:30 done it and it was very good. It did me a lot of good. In fact I went and did it what they call a PTSD course and it was fantastic because I sat down with other veterans and we just sat there and listened and talked and the doctors and psychiatrists say, "Well how do you feel about this?" and then they would try and explain perhaps why you feel that way or what contributed to it and once I started to discover
- 17:00 what the so called symptoms are and causes it made me stop and look at my father and all my life I thought my father was just my father and that was the way it was but now I can see what he went through in World War II he's probably got the worst case of PTSD that I've ever seen. The most anti-social in some respects man I've ever met but there's a lot of them about.

17:30 In the meantime you spent another 15 years in the navy is that right?

Yeah. I spent 20 years in the navy but I felt protected in the navy. I didn't think about that at the time but you are in a cocoon. You are in a safety helmet and in the system and you are surrounded by military people. You are surrounded by people who you think are competent and especially the diving section. And yeah I wasn't going to leave that. There was no way I was going to go out with all those dickheads so I stayed

- 18:00 in the navy and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I become chief petty officer and spent many years in Team 1 which is the major team. I spent 3 years on exchange with the US Navy. I did every job that the navy had to offer in the diving branch and after 20 years I had been through it all and at the point where I thought there's no point going around a second time so I'll probably call it quits.

Did you get to instruct?

- 18:30 Yeah, oh yeah. I didn't do a lot of diving instruction because I probably spent more time in the teams than anybody else. I just stayed in the teams than anybody else. I just wanted to stay in the teams and rotate through the teams and team 1 I spent year after year after year in team 1 and I was the operational chief in team 1 for many years. Whether the diving school knew my feelings or whatever or perhaps they knew my inclinations or leanings towards
- 19:00 explosive exposure so I did do time as a senior demolition instructor. Yeah some blokes spent years and years instructing. I was very lucky in that I spent 12 months instructing and the rest of the time in the teams which I enjoyed. That was the hands on at the front end of stuff.

And those couple of years where you were doing that sort of work but not in a deployment role, as far as being deployed overseas like the 3 years you spent

19:30 **with the Americans, what jobs stand out for you during that time?**

Well Team 1 was the operational team and their responsibility was to be able to travel anywhere in the world on immediate notice. There were teams that looked after Australia and more domestic stuff. Team 1 was involved in that but most of that was for example, there were still hundreds of World War II mines floating around and embedded on the Barrier Reef

20:00 the reef and every now and again quite regularly some diver finds a World War II mine on the reef so that's Team 1 immediately on a RAAF 130 and up there and I can't remember how many we did of those. That was a regular, regular thing. A lot of exercising. We did have certain responsibilities to the fleet within team 1. We used to do all

20:30 the special warfare exercises. Operating with other navies of course, the Green Berets and Special Forces. Whenever those special warfare exercises came up Team 1 was the team that would go. I went on a couple of those. Yeah what else?

In what ways maybe did you see CDTs evolve over time?

Well

21:00 the biggest change in direction occurred after Vietnam. The diving branch came of age really in Vietnam. Up to that point they were based very much on the Royal Navy clearance diver. The role was to find mines and ordnance on the sea bed and blow it up that type of thing but Vietnam saw exposure to the American philosophy on special forces and

21:30 we were exposed very much to the SEALs for example. We started to exercise with the SEALs when we came back. This sort of the opening was kept open and we took every opportunity to work with the Americans and the Americans took every opportunity to work with us so we began to work very closely with their special forces and that slowly grew to a point where the navy decided perhaps they will gradually go down this path like the SEALs.

22:00 The Australian military hierarchy tried to block it as long as they could. Admirals they are navy and they didn't want to let the CDs get away. Kept the CDs where they are. A lot of jealousy there I think and of course the army fought it as well. Believe it or not the army have a very protective attitude towards their SAS and they do like to think that the SAS is the only special force

22:30 unit within Australia so they didn't like to see this evolving in the CD branch. The CDs started to, well actually I was the first CD to become para qualified and then from there it started to grow and what really triggered the diving branch into really specialised I'll use the SEAL role and

23:00 I believe this to be correct. The Prime Minister was at Swanbourne watching the SAS do a terrorist like operation. Get into the aircraft and get the passengers and the Prime Minister sat there and thought this is fantastic. "You've done a wonderful job. We've got the people to do the job however, what would happen if the terrorists tried to hit the oil rigs in Bass Strait. Are the SAS qualified to do it?"

23:30 And apparently the CO [Commanding Officer] of the SAS Squadron didn't know what to say. "Um, um no Sir we don't have that ability." So the Prime Minister came back to Canberra and said, "Right I want to be able to defend our oil rigs. Who can do it?" "The clearance divers." So within a very, very short period of time they selected a team of clearance divers and they were sent to the west and they went through the full SAS cadre course and came out at the end as full SAS troopers. The SAS didn't like it.

24:00 Someone was infringing on their territory but the divers were the only ones qualified to do it so from that evolved regular clearance divers, you know a steady flow of clearance divers going through the SAS training cadre. So clearance divers were both navy clearance divers and they were SAS troops as well and they formed up these anti-terrorist teams. They taught the SAS

24:30 how to defend an oil rig and so on. How to dive on oxygen. So they went hand in hand for quite a while and then they operated jointly as terrorist teams, tag teams and I'm not really up to speed at the moment but I think the navy has started to. There's still anti-terrorist training but the navy has become more specialised role and perhaps based more on the SEAL

25:00 role although they still work a lot with the SAS. They have branched off and the day will come when clearance divers are nothing more than SEALs I would think.

Did it surprise you when you saw the type of coverage that the CD teams got in the Gulf recently?

Not really. I was surprised to see faces whereas they hide the SAS religiously.

25:30 But no it didn't surprise me. The government is obviously in a position where they want to get mileage out of the troops. They are doing a great job and of course, the clearance divers were on the ground and they were being recognised by the Poms and the Yanks so yeah, great coverage and great footage for the government. I think that was probably the reason for the coverage not for the clearance divers.

26:00 I wasn't surprised with what they were doing though. I wasn't surprised at all. They did very well. Not at all.

Did you think perhaps it was the work that you had done with Americans in Vietnam that might have seen that those guys were the ones given the job?

I have no doubt at all. I think the entire diving section accepts that Vietnam was the big turning point and the teams that went to Vietnam were the forerunner.

26:30 They set the ground rules for what the CD branch would become because we came back from Vietnam. We didn't want to. I mean we were moving through the ranks. We didn't want to go back to you know a diver that jumps over a side to find a mine or repair a ship. Basic diving skills. We had acquired all these new skills and we didn't want to let them go. In fact we had a taste of this other stuff

27:00 and we were reaching out for it. We will do this and we will do that and with a bit of support from our officers we overcame this bit of antagonism from Canberra and finely got permission to start to participate in these joint exercises with special forces and it just sort of goes on from there.

As the role of clearance divers in the Australian navy changed

27:30 **did the role of ship's divers have to change?**

No, no, no. The ship's diving role is a very closed shop in that they still use air. They still have a depth limitation. Their main objective is to be able to search the seabed or pick something up from the seabed or do basic maintenance. So no the ship's diver role is still exactly the same

28:00 but the role of the clearance diver has changed in the terms that I've spoken about but they have still retained the ability to do what they have always done. You will find that there is a tremendous broad range of skills to cover but I understand now there are teams that will go off and they specialise in one role for a period and this group will specialise in this particular role and then it's

28:30 rotated. There are clearance divers now that have been in the anti-terrorist role for a couple of years and are probably due to come back. There are other fellows that will specialise in the original clearance diving role in mine disposal and bomb disposal and EOD role so it's pretty diversified now but when I left the navy the biggest team was my team, team 1. 34 man team. When I first joined the navy

29:00 team 1 was a 12 man team. I understand now team 1 is about 85 men so they have had to expand dramatically to fulfil the role.

Besides Vietnam what was the other highlight in your naval career?

While I was a demolition instructor I was a petty officer and we had just started an exchange program with the American Navy and it was based in Hawaii. The very first bloke to go actually did an exchange

29:30 with the salvage divers in Hawaii so we decided, well the branch decided that we would get more value with the EOD, the navy EOD. We knew them in Vietnam so well. The second fellow went to EOD. He was the first one and then I was selected as the third and my wife and I went over in January 1977 for 2 ½ years.

30:00 Lived in Honolulu for 2 ½ years but I got to the stage where I was due to come home and the US Navy actually requested that I stay for a further 6 months because they had a big job in Guam. A big clearance operation and they didn't have the experience. Believe it or not they didn't have the people experienced enough to do it and they said, "Can chief." I was a chief petty officer by then. And they sent a special request to Canberra if my

30:30 tour could be extended to 3 years so I could look after this job in Guam for them. I loved it. It was a tremendous experience to be with the US Navy and live in their country so it was a major, major highlight of our lives.

Did you notice on that job the changes that they had gone through since Vietnam?

Yes I think so. I still felt the Americans lacked in some areas

31:00 and that you can only put down to the sheer size of their system. You can't devote the attention I don't think that we do in training. However, having said that in some areas the Americans leave us for dead in that they are so focussed that their particular speciality they are good at. Our people tend to be a jack of all trades and we can do them all well. Consequently

31:30 the Americans can do this job but they can't do anything outside of that area and I think, when I was with the Americans in Hawaii we would go on jobs and one job for example. The boss called me up and they had found a 1000 pound bomb in a lagoon at Midway, Midway Island and he said, and they were a 85 or 100 man strong unit and he said, "Chief

32:00 we've got no one here that's done an actual job underwater. , "Have you?" I said, "I've done a couple. Literally hundreds of the damn things." And he said, "I need someone experienced there to show them what to do." I was amazed. I couldn't believe it. But that's just part of their system. The way they

operate. But no one had actually done a fair dinkum, real EOD job like that underwater.

32:30 That was amazing. It surprised me but I enjoyed the hell out of working with them. It's a good navy and they are good people. I enjoyed it.

The decision to get out how did that come about?

I think my wife had had enough of me travelling. I think I had too. For example, when my son was born we were just in the process of buying a house

33:00 and next thing I was off to the Solomon Islands for 3 months and my wife had to move in with a new born baby and about 80 boxes of gear into a house by herself and she wasn't impressed and I felt bad about it. That's when it started to think. I started to think about. But 20 years was enough. I thought, "Well time to move over for the young fellows and time to find another life." I was sorry to go. In some ways I didn't have a

33:30 problem.

How was that last day?

Once again it was like going to Vietnam. You only think about what's happening because I had actually arranged to go to the States and the day after I left the navy I was on the plane to the States. I had a job over there so you are looking ahead, planning ahead so I didn't have time to dwell on it really. I was gone. Bang. Head first into the next one.

In what way did your navy experience affect the post navy experience

34:00 **life for you?**

Well I always think, I'm a firm believer that military training is good for anybody. It turns boys into men. It gives you common sense, makes you reliable and a better person all around I think. But I discovered after I left the navy that I always look back. I couldn't help but compare the people

34:30 I was working with navy fellows, clearance divers and I must admit I was always disappointed, disappointed. I ended up in the explosives business. I worked with mining engineers and you know university graduates with degrees up their arm and sometimes I just shake my head and think, "These guys have been to university and I wouldn't give them a job." Not all of them but I think 20 years in the military is something

35:00 I would never turn down. I would never turn the clock back and not do it. If I was a young fellow I would do it again. My son leaves for the navy in 2 weeks and good on him. I wish I was in his shoes because I would do it again too.

In what way then did the Vietnam experience affect the rest of your service in the navy?

It definitely did affect me.

35:30 It's a bit hard to explain really but it affected the way I did things and the way I approached things. You can afford to do in the diving branch. You couldn't do it anywhere else in the navy but my role as a chief and you know the operational chief of the team. I effectively ran the team and the operations. Navy regulations to me were a guide

36:00 whereas to the rest of the regular navy there were the gospel. I think Vietnam having to get the job done developed in me an approach where my philosophy was to do the job and get the job done. It doesn't matter how you do it get the job done and if you break a few rules along the way or step on a few toes address that after the job is finished. First and foremost do the job.

36:30 Obviously you're not going to do it to the point where you risk lives or be stupid but sometimes you have to short circuit regulations to get a job done or you'll never get a job done. In my team particularly in team 1 that the team always came in on time and always did the job right and we never did anything wrong and I think we never lost anybody and I put a lot of that down to that basic training in Vietnam. Education.

37:00 **What are your thoughts on Anzac Day?**

It's the best day of the year. It's an important day for us and Australia and I just hope it never ever dies. I think it's growing and I think that's fantastic. I love Anzac Day. I didn't go for a while, quite a while after Vietnam but now the old fellows are coming out of the woodwork and I just think it's fantastic to go back and see these fellows and on Anzac Day

37:30 you feel like you are 20 again. As I say you only remember the good things. Nobody talks about war. Nobody talks about bad things. You are all there to have a good time and be with your mates and tell lies and just generally have a good time and I don't think there is a digger out there that wouldn't say that Anzac Day is the highlight of his year. It's a wonderful institution and it's unique in Australia.

And your thoughts in Vietnam in retrospect?

- 38:00 Yeah it was a mistake. Huge mistake. I've taken quite an interest in Vietnam in a lot of ways. I went back there for several years in the 90s. I've been back 24 times I think but I've also read a lot about the history of Vietnam and what happened in Ho Chi Minh's early days
- 38:30 during the Second World War and I believe the Americans made one colossal mistake in the track they took with Vietnam and alienated Ho Chi Minh forever and created. I think the Americans created the event you know 20 years, 15 to 20 years before the war started. They created it. It was their baby and at the end of the day it was a tragedy.
- 39:00 They walked out of there having achieved nothing. They lost 55,000 men, we lost 500 and I often think what the hell for? And having been back Vietnam is no different to any other country. Vietnamese aren't horrible. There are some lovely, lovely people and it's a beautiful country. There are a lot of things that I really love about it. To me I wouldn't, I don't wish I hadn't gone because I'm glad I went and at the time
- 39:30 you were doing a job you believed in but what we were told was not necessarily correct. The Domino Theory and the fear of communists was a lot of political garbage I think and in hindsight we had no right I think to go into someone's country and dictate to them what their political system is going to be and how they are going to run it and you know
- 40:00 even when we were there it was not hard to see that South Vietnam was politically corrupt and the Americans were supporting this corrupt system and I'm defending the communists by any shot but the Vietnamese would have been better off left to sort it out themselves and there are 50 odd thousand young men that never got to have grey hair and see their kids grow up.
- 40:30 And that's pretty damn sad.

In a nutshell how should people reflect on serving in Vietnam?

I think they should be very proud. The Australian soldier, sailor, airmen is I think one of the finest troops in the world because of his training but also because of his attitude as an Australian. Australians have got some pretty good attributes. This can do attribute is so very much Australian. Make do, put up with whatever you have to and

- 41:00 grin and bear it and get on with the job and they do it very well. The facts are there, the evidence is there that the Americans or whoever it may be hold the Australian servicemen in very high esteem and that was very evident in Vietnam. The old Aussie was admired in the military forces of the world and I am very proud that I went and I think Australians should certainly be proud of their servicemen
- 41:30 wherever they served.

INTERVIEW ENDS

NB. This transcript is of an interview filmed for the television series, Australians at War in 1999-2000. It was incorporated into the Archive in 2008.

Tape 12

- 19:38 Well, to the best of my recollection, when Australia made a commitment to Vietnam, partly at the request of the Americans, partly at the request of the South Vietnamese Government, they decided that the navy would participate in that they would supply a helicopter squadron and they would provide the ship, the [HMAS] Sydney to transport the troops.
- 20:00 There was also a request that divers be involved because the Americans had a shortage of EOD people which is explosive ordnance disposal, particularly diving type, water-orientated type divers or EOD people. Also I think Australia was concerned partly about the safety of the Sydney so they wanted their own clearance divers on station in Vung Tau. So that's how it came about and
- 20:30 a six man team was formed, totally new concept. Clearance divers had never been involved in a combat situation before and they were sent to Vietnam and based in Vung Tau and initially their major role was in harbour defence, to protect shipping against underwater attack from VC, Viet Cong sapper swimmers.
- 21:00 I was actually in the eighth team to go to Vietnam and that happened to be the last team. The seven teams prior to my team were based in Vung Tau but by the time I got there the Americans had requested a shift in our operations from Vung Tau to Da Nang Harbour which is up to the north towards the demilitarised zone, the border with North Vietnam.
- 21:30 **Start talking about your duties and why they were different, and also the safety of the Sydney?**
- 22:00 Well we arrived in Da Nang based with the Americans. It was the first time we'd ever had any experience working with the Americans and to us it was quite a massive change. The previous teams to us had been based in Vung Tau and they'd worked for the Australians, answered to Australians whereas we answered to the Americans. We came under the direct control of an American Navy captain. We

lived in an American naval base. When

- 22:30 we arrived we were issued with American camouflage uniforms, American weapons. We had American vehicles, American boats. We ate American food and our responsibilities in Da Nang were primarily to look after what they called the deep water ammunition piers and this is where all the ammunition used to come in from the United States to supply the entire northern region of South Vietnam. And that was a favourite target for the Vietnamese, North Vietnamese Army as well as the Viet Cong sapper
- 23:00 swimmers. So it was a regular event to have them attacking the ships that were loaded with ammunition. And an experience I will never forget as long as I live, is within three days of arriving in Da Nang, the old team is still there giving us a hand over and we had a call on the radio that an ammunition barge was on fire in Da Nang Harbour. It had previously broken adrift in a typhoon, gone aground on a sand bar and the old
- 23:30 team said to us, "We're going home, this is your job so away you go." I was driving the vehicle and two other fellows from the new team with me, away we went. I got lost. I couldn't find the wharf. We eventually got there. There was an American what they call harbour security boat waiting for us, a fast boat. We jumped on board this boat. We could see the ammunition barge out in the middle of the bay burning, well there's a
- 24:00 small fire on board, at that stage a very fierce fire, intense fire which is typical of explosives burning. We no sooner jumped in the boat, started the engine, moved away from the wharf and the whole ammunition barge detonated and I've never seen anything like it in my entire life. It was three hundred and forty tons of high explosives onboard the vessel and it just corked off into a massive fireball and it was the closest thing I've ever seen to an atomic explosion. It mushroomed.
- 24:30 Massive fireball. It shook the whole of Da Nang. We found out later that everybody in the entire city right out to the perimeters felt the blast and to this day I still remember seeing a body going upwards so the vessel obviously had been sabotaged, but what sticks in my mind is that had I not got lost on my way to the wharf those few minutes would have allowed us to be on the barge when it detonated.
- 25:00 So that was quite an eye opening experience and that point we realised that we were in a war zone and it was pretty serious stuff.
- Another time we were called out about three o'clock...
- I remember
- 25:30 another experience that brought home to us exactly where we were ...
- I remember an experience where we were called out about three o'clock one morning, which is the normal time the VC tended to attack shipping, between about midnight and three o'clock in the morning was their favourite period depending on the tides, but this particular
- 26:00 occasion we had a call about three and we raced down to the deep water ammunition piers to find that the wharf was deserted except for a couple of sentries. They had cleared the entire area and there was quite a large vessel secured alongside and we were quickly told that it contained nine thousand tons of high explosives and the sentry had spotted a VC or, whether he was VC, NVA [North Vietnamese Army] who knows, but he was on board. When challenged he jumped over the side and there was a waiting boat
- 26:30 and they quickly departed. Shots were fired but it was the middle of the night so no effect there. But we were very concerned because my brother was on a previous team, the fifth team and they actually had discovered a Russian, state-of -the-art limpet mine which had never been seen in the West before and at that time that was absolute state-of-the-art and they were very lucky to remove the mine and fortunately they found out how it functioned, but we
- 27:00 were very aware of that when we arrived at this ship because having state-of-the-art Russian weapons we knew they were quite advanced and it was a concern. We probably arrived twenty minutes after the initial call and generally in sabotage it's accepted that twenty to twenty five minutes delay prior to functioning is about the normal from the time the device is placed. So
- 27:30 we had arrived at the ship right in that danger period. We didn't have much choice. Nine thousand tons of explosives sitting alongside the wharf with other vessels nearby. We had no choice but to go on and try and find out if there were any devices either on the hull or placed in the vessel because this potential saboteur had been found on board. Middle of the night, no lights, everything had been shut down and there were four of us searching this vessel and the
- 28:00 things that are going through your mind at that time knowing that you're sitting on a nine thousand ton powder keg that could go up at any second and it's pretty frightening experience. What goes through your mind is just a lot of it is blank really. I mean you don't remember a lot of those emotions but when you come away from a job like that and you sit down and think what happened, you survived, you start to shake and you can't hold a cup of
- 28:30 coffee and it takes a little while to sort of get back to normal. One of the things that goes through, the

things that went through my mind probably in those sort of experiences were that I felt very fortunate that I had other Australian clearance divers with me. We operated independently and on our own. We very rarely worked with Americans or South Vietnamese and we preferred it that way because the fellows with us obviously

- 29:00 went through the same training program as us. We knew them well and we had an extreme level of confidence in each other. So that's probably what got us through most of the jobs but it was a non stop event. After we arrived the Americans realised that we had probably a greater capability than the American-trained, bomb disposal types. We were more 'jack of all trades' really. So they started to use us throughout the length and breadth of what they called I Corps which is Military
- 29:30 Region 1 in the north and we ended up doing more surface work probably than underwater work. We remained based in Da Nang so we were on call constantly for the ships. As I say that generally happened between midnight and three am and during the day we were on call. We had a helicopter pad within about two hundred metres from where we lived and we could get a helicopter on request immediately.
- 30:00 Being bomb disposal we had probably the highest travel priority of anyone in Vietnam so if we had a job to go to they would divert a chopper, off load people onboard no matter what their requirement was and take us to our job.

Tape 13

- 00:37 We had a call out one morning at three o'clock to the deep water ammunition piers which are a very important part of Da Nang to the Americans. They brought in all their ammunition through the deepwater piers. The largest vessels came in there and they were loaded from, loaded to the gunnels with high explosives. All sorts of bombs, rockets, mortars you name it
- 01:00 and deck cargo as well. Totally loaded. Anyway this particular night we had a call to say that the sentries had seen a suspected saboteur on board. He was actually on board the vessel. They challenged him and he jumped over the side. They fired shots at him and they had a fast sampan waiting for him, disappeared into the night. So we raced down there, red lights flashing on our jeep, sirens going. We arrived to find that
- 01:30 the wharf was deserted. There were several other ships there loaded with ammunition as well and we thought, 'Hell, what are we going to do here?' The sentry told us that, he gave us the time frame and it was about twenty minutes I think, twenty five minutes from the time they'd spotted this character and we were always taught that in sabotage operations you allow about a twenty minute gap to allow you to get away from the target and ideally you wipe out the team that's coming in to dispose
- 02:00 of the thing, so it's a double barrelled victory. So we knew that we were in that very tight time zone and this particular ship contained nine thousand tons of high explosives ready to go and we knew that because the saboteur had been seen on board that he was pretty serious. He didn't want to just put a hole in the hull and sink the ship. He was on board to actually place a charge on some of the ordnance which would sympathetically detonate and the whole ship would
- 02:30 go up. There would be just a powder, just a fireball. So we were very concerned at this stage. How do we get involved in this? How do we end up here at this point in time but we had no choice. We had to search the ship. Had the ship gone up it would have probably cooked off other vessels nearby. When I say cooked off, detonated their cargoes as well so the whole of the deepwater piers would have ended up in just one raging inferno. So we knew we were in a pretty tight
- 03:00 situation and we sort of puffed our chests out and said, "Let's get on with it." So away we went. The sentries wouldn't go near the ship. We were left to go on our own. The vessel had been shut down. There was no power on board. Another concern that we had was not only the time restraint but, or constraint sorry, was that we didn't know when the VC would have light sensitive type devices. I mean they were available at that time. We knew that the Russians were supplying state-of-the-art
- 03:30 limpets and so on. So just shining a torch on a light sensitive device will set it off. So we had all sorts of concerns. Do you use light? Do you use your hands? On board the vessel it's not so bad but when we get underwater and search the hull, the visibility is zero, the water is dirty, it's the middle of the night, a torch isn't going to do you much good anyway. So you have no choice but to use
- 04:00 the ten eyes and the end of each finger and that's the way we were taught. You just feel. So you progressively search the ship the best way you can and at that point in time you are just sort of, you're expecting any second that that will be your last. You just don't know so you just grin and bear it. You knuckle down and you just keep looking and you try and put that aside. You're comforted in the fact that you've got
- 04:30 your mates with you and I mean that from the point of view you have a lot of faith in them and you'd rather be with them than anyone else at that point in time. Fortunately in that case we found nothing so we suspect that the saboteur was caught prior to actually laying a charge but that sort of situation in,

on a smaller scale happened regularly and we had calls probably two to three nights a week, the same

05:00 sort of situation. They weren't necessarily large ships. Sometimes they were ammunition barges. Sometimes someone had just left an explosive charge somewhere, something had been booby-trapped. But that's what we did. We were just on call twenty four hours a day. There were only six of us in the team and we used to cycle through two men on duty, two on stand by and two on stand down so you at least had a rest period. But it was pretty constant and then quite often jobs would come up where they needed the whole team, the six of us

05:30 would have to go.

Talk to me about what it was like, nothing was found but you don't know, you may well have just been unsuccessful in finding it. There may have been somewhere that you could not cover in that time. So take me through just how you must have felt at you were searching at that time, searching particularly underwater and you've mentioned you can't use light and all that sort of stuff

06:00 **so just, what I want to know how Tony felt about this and thinking well, we haven't found it. It could be somewhere else about to go up. So it's nice in the comfort of hindsight to know that that is the situation, but at the time you weren't able to find it, you still thought well maybe we haven't found it and what are the consequences? Particularly as obviously you keep looking? Paint a picture, take us back again?**

06:30 While you're looking for a suspected device you just, you're on the edge constantly. You just don't know. You don't know, every second you know you're counting that it may be the last. You just don't know but you have to put that aside and particularly when you're searching the hull because it's so black and

07:00 your visibility is zero. It's more claustrophobic. If you're searching on the upper deck or in the holds it's not quite as bad but when you're in the water it's you and you're on your own. Your mates are topside unless there may be a couple of you looking but you're virtually on your own. You're isolated. You can't see anybody. You're in the water and you're below this ship and you're thinking that above you is thousands of tons of high explosives that may detonate at any second.

07:30 So and all I can remember really is that you, your training actually helps you a tremendous amount. You put aside what I'd say is that basic instinct of fear, although it's there and you're petrified but you manage to put that aside because you know that you have to do this and there's no-one else will do it or can do it. So you just have to get on with the job and as time ticks away and you can't

08:00 help but watch your clock because in your own mind you know that had you placed the sabotage device you would have placed it with about a twenty to twenty five minute delay to give you time to get away. And in the EOD or bomb disposal community when it comes to sabotage you always like to set a device so that you get the opposition's bomb disposal people because they're very valuable in small

08:30 numbers on the ground. So to be in the water is probably the most unsettling experience even though you know, we were divers and that was our life, but it's different to being in murky dark waters when it's safe to being in murky dark waters when there's nine thousand tons of explosives above your head that may detonate at any time. So

09:00 you just keep searching and in that particular case we didn't find anything but it doesn't mean to say that there wasn't something on the hull for example and it misfired because the VC, the Viet Cong regularly had misfires because everything was, most of the stuff was home made. They occasionally got hold of Russian or Chinese Communist equipment but we just kept searching. But once you get beyond sort of

09:30 say thirty five, forty five, fifty five minutes you start to breathe a sigh of relief because you start to hope that maybe they didn't place it in time or didn't have the opportunity to place it or it has malfunctioned. So as that time progresses you start to feel the sense of relief that you're going to be around to see the sun come up the next day.

We had a call one day

10:00 just after a typhoon, a very bad typhoon had gone through Da Nang and we were told by the US Navy that one of their landing craft which was heading north had capsized in the typhoon, had a crew of fourteen US sailors on board and had been washed up, the hull had washed up onto a beach called Tan Mi which was just north of Da Nang. The typhoon was still raging and we were called out because there were fourteen bodies on board and we didn't know if anyone was trapped in the hull still alive.

10:30 Also it contained a couple of hundred tons of white phosphorus rounds and white phosphorus is a particularly nasty weapon. So we raced up there by helicopter, dumped on the beach and attempted to get out the best way we could in this massive surf that was breaking over the YFU, YFU it was called, landing craft. We, initially we had to attach a line to the propeller guards so we could

11:00 pull ourselves out to the hull with reasonable safety. I actually went out with my petty officer. And that was quite an experience that I won't forget as well, because we were, the only place we could attach the line was very near the propellers and they were nice big bronze sharp propellers and this massive surf was breaking over the top of us and I was expecting to be sort of cut to pieces if I wasn't very careful.

But we managed to get the line on

- 11:30 board and we progressively over the next day or so, as the typhoon abated, we managed to get into the hull and have a look and unfortunately the crew were all drowned or lost overboard. So then the job became ours to salvage the vessel and remove the couple of hundred tons of white phosphorus. We would never leave a vessel like that loaded with any form of explosives because if
- 12:00 we turned our back, the Viet Cong would be in overnight and they would take it and then use it against our troops. So it was always a very high priority to do that. Similarly we were called up to, the US Air Cavalry had lost a helicopter coming back from a mission and it had gone down, it was on the edge of a rice paddy. It was quite deep. It was like a creek but there was a helicopter blade just protruding
- 12:30 from the water and it was in a hot area controlled by the VC so we were taken in with a US Army ranger protection and our job, there were only two of us on that job, was to recover the bodies and the ordnance from the aircraft. So once again the water was just virtually light mud. You couldn't see your hand in front of your face so everything was done by feel
- 13:00 and the chopper is obviously quite damaged from the impact and you have to recover the bodies and the ordnance and their weapons of course. So you can't leave anything left for the VC to come and recover. And what makes jobs like that worse is when you're diving in the creeks and paddies in Vietnam they're full of leeches and it's too hot to wear a wetsuit so you're just wearing overalls as a form of protection from cuts and so on and you don't notice it when you're working because
- 13:30 you're so focused on what you're doing but you come out of the water and just discover that you've got leeches just hanging off your entire body. So there was a lot of, we used to laugh about things like that, a little bit of humour always lifted everyone's morale a bit and you laughed about whatever you could in those days.

We were called out constantly by the Americans whenever someone suspected

- 14:00 a booby trap and that could be anything from, they'd find a body in the water, they'd find a body on a road and the Viet Cong were very good at booby trapping everything so everything was suspect and the American troops would not touch anything that they thought may be booby-trapped and they thought everything was booby-trapped so we were constantly being called out on land based operations to check for booby traps. We even had one instance where a panicking naval officer had found,
- 14:30 had a telephone in his office that he suspected had been tampered with so we had to check out his telephone to see if that had been booby-trapped. But bodies were probably the most common, regularly booby-trapped. Another operation that really put a scare into us I think was, and once again this happened within days of us arriving, the old team were to take two of our new team members out on a, what they called a routine operation where they supported the jungle surveillance
- 15:00 group. They used to go out into the jungle and lay sensors to detect the movement of enemy troops and this was a milk run operation [a routine and safe one], they'd done it so many times before and it was to introduce us to their procedures. And two of our fellows went out and unfortunately they came across a cache of weapons and they suspected had been booby-trapped. They asked, they had some South Vietnamese
- 15:30 troops with them and a couple of American advisers to the surveillance group. Our fellows said for everybody to freeze, go into a defensive position and our fellows were then to proceed through and check the cache for booby traps before blowing it up. Anyway one of the other Americans, or one of the Americans was, he was going home in a week and he wanted some souvenirs so he wandered off on his own through this cache area, trod on a hundred and five millimetre howitzer round that had been booby-trapped and it took off
- 16:00 both his legs. At this point the Viet Cong had actually laid an ambush on the other side of the cache so the ambush was initiated on that explosion early so fortunately our people were outside what was intended to be the kill zone. So a fire fight ensued and it took about four hours for the Americans to come in with gunships to suppress the VC and get them out of the area and the medivac choppers came in and
- 16:30 unfortunately the American died of his wounds. That's the sort of operation that we were involved in reasonably often and that was on, that followed another hair raising experience with the ammunition barge that blew up and all this was in our first week of arrival. So we were starting to wonder what we were doing there. In fact the chief of my team made the comment that he might just stay in bed for the rest of the tour, he'd
- 17:00 had enough, jokingly.
- About the only news we received being based in Da Nang was through the American press. We were so cut off from the Australian, the rest of the Australian forces that we got very little information as to what was happening at home although we knew there were demonstrations at that time. They were
- 17:30 happening before we left but it didn't affect us greatly. We felt that we were there to do a job and we got on with the job. So that aspect didn't affect us until we came home. However ...

I'll get you to start again...

- 18:00 Being based in Da Nang which was about five hundred miles north of the Australian task force we were quite isolated from Australian news so we mainly read American newspapers and we obviously knew about the protests that were happening in the US. We knew the protests that were going on prior to our leaving for Vietnam but we didn't think about that while we were but when we came home
- 18:30 it was quite a shock to the system. I personally, I came home on a Qantas flight from Saigon direct to Sydney and Sydney had a curfew at that time, aircraft weren't allowed in after ten. I think it's still the same today but they brought us in at about ten thirty, and at that time I was only twenty three and it went through my mind, 'Why are coming in after the airport is closed, when there is no-one else to be seen? Is it to keep us out of
- 19:00 sight, unseen?' and that thought has stayed with me throughout my life. I felt that we were sort of being brought in through the back door like criminals, as if the government was embarrassed about us even coming home or having been to Vietnam. So we came in through Sydney Airport. There was no-one there except the customs and immigration people. Family and friends to welcome us, you're whisked away as if nothing has ever happened and the next day you're on leave. It's a very weird
- 19:30 feeling to come from a war zone, to be back in Australia and nobody cares. I know from the Second World War my father, they came home as heroes and they were made welcome everywhere they went. They were bought beers in the pub but we, we came home and we didn't talk about Vietnam. You were very, you knew that the atmosphere was sort of electric and that people felt very badly about the Vietnam experience, Australia's experience in Vietnam. So
- 20:00 you didn't admit to anybody that you'd been to Vietnam. You sort of tucked yourself away and in your mind you withdrew into yourself and you tried to put that behind you. You tried to forget about it as if it never even happened and that's a very difficult thing to do and I know a lot, a lot of fellows, a lot of veterans I know, they had a lot of problems as a result of that because they've tried to tuck all those feelings and emotions away in the back of their mind and bury it forever. But it doesn't stay buried. It lives with you and to this day
- 20:30 there's not a day goes by that I don't think about Vietnam. It is so much a part of you that you can never ever, ever shake it and I think the main reason for that is the way we were treated when we came home. We were second class citizens and we thought we had done a great job. We were very proud of what we did. We did our best and we came home to a pretty bad reception. The American experience was probably worse than ours I think
- 21:00 but yeah it's something that stays with you for life.
- I actually wanted to go to Vietnam. I was a regular sailor. I'd been a navy diver for about six years when my posting came through and at that point of time we were, we weren't thinking about the politics of the war. We didn't really understand the politics of the war. I don't think anybody did at that stage. But we wanted to go because this was our
- 21:30 opportunity to put into practice what we had been taught and nobody before going to a war zone really understands what they're getting into. You go there with all sorts of preconceived ideas. There's a little bit of glamour and a little bit of excitement and so on but it's quite different obviously the reality. So we went to Vietnam full of confidence and very keen to be there not thinking about whether we should be there or whether we were right or
- 22:00 the North Vietnamese were right or the Americans were right. Since coming home and I've been back to Vietnam a number of times, in fact I've had a total of twenty three trips to Vietnam including war service, I have come to a totally different view towards the whole politics of the war from what I had as a younger man and what the media was expounding. I personally
- 22:30 believe now that the Vietnamese, the North Vietnamese were a very patriotic, a very nationalist group of people or race of people. Ho Chi Minh, I believe, was a nationalist first and a Communist second. I think he was a Communist by convenience but I believe now that the Vietnamese had no aspirations to roll over Asia. There was no 'domino effect'. That was
- 23:00 just a play on words by [US President] Truman I think or [US President] Eisenhower but it was rubbish. The Vietnamese had been at war for a thousand years with the Chinese, the colonial powers, the French. They wanted to reunify Vietnam. They wanted the French out. And for anybody to fight like they did for so long against the biggest military power in the world and prior to the Americans the French were a massive
- 23:30 military power, to take them on there had to be more than just Communist beliefs. There had to be something, and I believe that was patriotism and they wanted everybody out, they wanted Vietnam back to themselves and I haven't changed that view. Every time I go back to Vietnam that view is reinforced. The Vietnamese are a lovely people. They are a lovely people, particularly the northerners, very nice people
- 24:00 and they don't give a damn about Communism. They don't care about their neighbours. In fact I've probably never seen a race of people who are more patriotic. The Americans think they are the most

patriotic race on the planet but I think the Vietnamese are very more patriotic. Mother Vietnam they call it and all they care about is to be left alone and to be Vietnam.

Working with the Americans was a

- 24:30 quite a new experience for us and in hindsight I would have preferred to be around more Australians. The Americans they've got a, everything is a global scale, it's huge. They don't think on a sort of smaller unit team unit scale like we do. We were only six people. However it was, the only word I can think of is awesome
- 25:00 to see the way the Americans operate, the sheer firepower and the quantity of equipment is massive. I know in the early days of the Australian Taskforce they had tents that were rotten. They couldn't get enough weapons. They didn't have enough shovels, whereas the Americans just nothing was too much trouble. They ate steaks in Vietnam, fresh steaks flown from the States. They had prawns. They had oysters.
- 25:30 Nothing but the best for the Americans. And a massive amount of fire power. In Da Nang they, just so many aircraft there and you think of the Australian ... I think nine helicopters or something, very limited number supporting their troops. The Americans had thousands of helicopters. We wanted to travel anywhere in Vietnam all we had to do was have what they called a set of orders and that just meant that our
- 26:00 boss wrote a letter and signed it, you'd produce that at any airfield in Vietnam and they'd put you on a C130 or whatever was going and you could travel the length and breadth of Vietnam and there were aircraft going one after the other. It was just, Da Nang and Saigon particularly, Tan Son Nhut Airport, the aircraft were just lined up behind, one behind the other. You'd seen ten or fifteen, twenty aircraft lined up taxiing twenty four hours a day. We also had the opportunity to fly with Air America, the CIA's airline
- 26:30 because of our high travel priority. So we could go out to the airfield and if there's an Air America aircraft there we could say we want a ride to Saigon or wherever, no problems, jump onboard away we go. But working with the Americans was to me, it's probably a bit tough to say it was, I was worried about working for the Americans but I'm glad I was born an Australian and not an
- 27:00 American or served in the Australian forces rather than the American forces because I think that we have a much greater concern for the individual soldier. The Americans look on you know, to lose, to lose men in a war is not a big problem whereas every man lost in the Australian system is...
- 27:30 **One thing I'd like to pick up...**
- Clearance diving teams were sent to Vietnam initially to protect the Sydney when she brought in the Australian troops. The teams went up there; they were actually requested by the Americans as well because there was a shortage of diving explosive ordnance disposal personnel in the American system. They only had two man teams and they were spread quite widely
- 28:00 throughout Vietnam. So I think our primary role was a comfort zone for the Australian Government that they had the clearance divers on tap in Vung Tau every time the Sydney came in and they would do a hull sweep of the Sydney. They were there if anything was discovered, to hopefully remove it without damaging the Sydney but as time went on the Americans realised that we had perhaps more expertise in certain areas
- 28:30 than their people so it branched away from that primary responsibility of looking after the Sydney and the Americans started to use our people or request our people for more land orientated jobs and more diverse underwater jobs dealing with booby traps, sabotage. Some of our early teams even went out on ambushes and involved in sealed type operations but by the time my team arrived and I was the eighth and last team,
- 29:00 the Australian Army really is responsible for pacifying Phuoc Tuy Province. It was pacified if not more so than any other part of Vietnam so things started to quieten down in Vung Tau and there, I think at that point the Australian Government may have been considering withdrawing the diving team, however the Americans having seen perhaps our capabilities requested the team be relocated to Da Nang in the north of South
- 29:30 Vietnam. So the shift then was away from protecting the Sydney. The Sydney did continue to come to Vietnam after the team was moved but I think they believed that she was relatively safe at that time. They had sufficient swimmer protection procedures in place on board the vessel to protect her from the, probably the lower threat level. So we moved to Da Nang we ended up in a position where we
- 30:00 answered directly to the Americans. The Americans had total control of our day to day activities so my team basically became an Americanised team and operated in quite a different environment and role to what the earlier teams had because rather than the Sydney we had a much broader brush responsibility which covered the entire northern region of Vietnam, South Vietnam.

INTERVIEW ENDS

