

Australians at War Film Archive

Marsat Ketchell (Jimmy K) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:41 **...a little bit about your life, so a summary of your life.**

Oh, born in 19-blah, la, la, la, la? Yeah I was born in the Torres Strait on Thursday Island in '54 and went to school up there until I was about fifteen.

01:00 And then I joined the navy, went to Year 10 up there at school, and because there's no Year 12 you had to go look for a job somewhere else. And Vietnam was on, not that I really knew about Vietnam then but there was a lot of ships going through the strait as the main passage north, a lot of warships. And there was a few Torres Strait Islanders have already been in the navy and joined

01:30 the navy and the army, not so much the air force because we were mainly salt water and land people. But yeah, me brother was on submarines, Philip, and I suppose I just followed on, and about four of us joined from there, from my class. And that was in April '70, and yeah went to Vietnam about '71

02:00 and '72, yeah '71 and '72. And then just stayed in the navy since. And for the next twenty-six years, wow, mainly because of the camaraderie and the lifestyle, and the nomadic lifestyle. Got married in '78 and I got out in '96, oh '93 for a wee bit, and then '96 I got out and called it

02:30 quits after Cambodia. Yeah, then I basically been in the mental health branch since then till this year and I joined the, and in a training role with the far north indigenous consortium for social emotional health. Yeah, that's basically it, yeah.

And Ketch...

Short CV [curriculum vitae], resume.

And children?

Got five kids,

03:00 four boys and a girl, just two weeks ago, at the age of fifty. Yeah, the first three have been pretty resilient with Mum and, you know, like supporting me and sticking me staying in the defence force, yeah. And yeah, just recently had a split with the wife and with a new partner now, two new kids, five and

03:30 two weeks. And that's about me, yeah.

So in that, after Vietnam would, could you give me a summary of your navy career? I mean did you move around or where were you based, and just a little summary of that twenty-six years?

There's a bit of shifting around first off with the, while 'Nam [Vietnam] was on and various postings and stuff because there was a lot of shuffling around of all the crews and stuff, giving them a break from the line

04:00 and logistical support. And then mostly I been on patrol boats and small, minor war vessels, but I sort of like took on, specially after 'Nam I suppose, I just wanted to stay sort of active, so I stayed on patrol boats. That's when the Taiwanese clam boats started coming over

04:30 and then after that the Indonesian fishing vessels and the Russian fishing vessels. So I think for me to stay active, like after being over there, I couldn't really go back to general service. So I, mainly because of, not so much mundane, but it was just to stay in the role I think, because we were armed

05:00 all the time, for the next God knows how many years, every boarding. Yeah, so it was mainly patrol boats and mine warfare after that. Just doing some clearance diving work with, in Papua New Guinea and south-east, south-western Pacific, and then back to patrol work. A few, couple of stints on Yarra, Parramatta and Perth

05:30 and then came back to patrol boats, and that's why I finished off with patrol boats with counter piracy and training and the boardings and apprehensions of fishing vessels up north. Yeah, so.

And you did a stint in Cambodia?

That was mainly with the maritime assistance project, I was still pretty apprehensive sort of thing. We were the first war vessel there since

06:00 year dot, since the Second World War, so. But we were made pretty welcome and it's pretty well, the escorts were pretty well on track sort of thing, so we were pretty well looked after. But it was mainly just training, training for the Cambodian Navy – what navy they had: just a little, about three ship, three vessel fleet I think. And

06:30 they're all land people, we were just getting 'em over their sea sickness and getting in to damage control and trying to take charge and focus on the job ahead. Yeah, mainly just assistance projects, we were just doing 'em, with them about three, two or three weeks, four weeks. And yeah, then come back to Australia and working with the Filipino Navy and the Indonesian Navy with counter piracy.

That's great.

07:00 **I want to take you back to your childhood now, if possible. And...**

Ooh.

...can you tell me a little bit about some of your first memories of growing up in Torres Strait?

Pretty islanderish, yeah very much islanderish. Still under the colonial rule of, we came under the Queensland Department of Native Affairs, that's the first one, first government organisation I can remember was Department of Native Affairs. It was pretty much

07:30 you walk on that side of the street and we walk on that side of the street. The schooling was islander kids, including myself, we were in one primary school, oh, was state school then. And then the European and caste kids, half-caste and quarter-caste, and they were with another school, just a state school. Catholics were

08:00 in their own little school. Yeah, I think about '67 I think, '67 when they formed a unified sort of high school where everybody could attend. I was about the third lot to go into high school. Yeah, but the lifestyle itself was, yeah, after school fishing,

08:30 weekends on the water again fishing and camping and family outings and stuff. There's no motors then so we had to row everywhere and sail everywhere. Yeah, basically just a lot of sport on weekends and during school. Nah, it was good years at school, much better than... And then my mother and all them and all the predecessors, but

09:00 I was just at that time when the government was changing I think, so.

What did you know of their experiences?

Much worse than us. Like, yeah, even when I was growing up, just to go to see rellies [relatives] on say, Badu Island, cause I grew up predominantly on Thursday, the inner islands, on Thursday Island, just to go see rellies we still had to get a government pass, you know, to see our own relatives. And then catch

09:30 the government boat over to Badu and even Hammond, cause Hammond was a Catholic mission sort of island. so we used to get passes to go over there. I sort of snuck in, cause I sort of looked more Filipino until... Then I actually started prep school there until they found out that I was Anglican, cause mainly then was

10:00 the Catholics, there were like the Dorantes and the Sabatinos, they were more Filipino looking, until the intermarriages came in. So I sorta fitted in there sort of thing till they found out, so. But that was good. I was living with my own granddad over there, sort of thing. But you know, you're so young, sorta everything's an adventure. Yeah, so yeah, every weekend was an adventure and every day was an adventure sort of thing.

10:30 And I done the usual thing, shirk school and yeah, but I think my time was predominantly taken up with sport and...

What sort of sport did you play?

Rugby and basketball, rugby league and basketball, school rugby league. Then weekend rugby league came in for juniors and there was no senior rugby league. But the teachers were good. They were sort of like introducing us

11:00 to new sports sort of thing. Basketball was sort of like the national anthem for the Torres Straits so we were predominantly basketball. Danny Morse, who's an Australian rep [representative], he's an example, a role model for basketball. And old fella, Ah Mat, he's another one from over that way. So basketball was the, the... But I was always too short. I played guard but.

11:30 But then I got interested in the rugby league side of things because we were all sort of like into warrior

type sports, sort of thing, cause that's how we were raised, yeah, so rugby league was in. Then after that, after I joined the navy I got more interested in rugby union and Australian Rules [football] so I played the three oval ball codes and played first grade in all three codes. But yeah...

12:00 **Was there an inter-school rugby league competition that you were part of, or how did the games get organised?**

There was inter houses, inter houses first and then it became inter school. And then like, but then because I think the islander kids were bigger, much bigger in, besides me, much bigger in physical status than

12:30 say the Catholic kids, it changed over to houses, inter-house competitions. Yeah, then the weekend rugby league was just knock-up teams. We had teams from like the Catholic church, from the Anglican church and from Malay Town as we used to call it. I played for Saints

13:00 from Malay town. Yeah that was in the junior years, lovely introduction to rugby league, plus basketball was still going. Yeah, there was a million teams for a little island. Yeah, everybody had a team in, like the whole of Wednesday night was shut down, was just everybody was on the basketball court, playing till ten o'clock at night, from about five in the afternoon or four in the afternoon, yeah.

And what team did you play for in basketball?

Ah

13:30 Valiants, yeah.

Good team?

Yeah, we had a good run, we went three or four years undefeated, and yeah we got beaten by the Avengers. The names came out of comic books, cause that's basically what we had to name ourselves under. Or like there weren't no, they were all English names, they weren't islander names until later, like when we started getting a bit more autonomy and a bit more autonomous in,

14:00 in life in general then we started injecting islander names in the...

Were there white kids playing in the teams as well or predominantly...?

Yeah, but it was predominantly, the seniors were, there was the administrators and the bank johnnies and stuff all playing. In the junior league there was predominantly islander kids, yeah, a few white kids.

And what did you like about the game?

Um,

14:30 the challenge I suppose, the camaraderie, the friendship. There was no bitter feelings. After the games we were back to school mates again and fishing mates or whatever, but on the field it was always the competitive nature of the game I suppose. Cause we're all basically the same size and same age group so, yeah, it was like islander against islander basically, and we were very protective over the white kids who were playing

15:00 for us. But they were white kids but they were sort of born and bred up there so we classed them as islanders as well and they classed themselves as islanders. And like we've had a super model who came out of there, was a doctor's daughter, and she was born up there and she identifies as an islander and she's probably whiter than you, after living in Europe. But yeah, anybody born and bred on the island we class as, identify as islanders,

15:30 yeah.

So if you were a little bit shorter than the others, were you good at the three points or the lay ups, or where did you place yourself in the game?

Mainly scramble player I think and then defensive player, and stealing balls. So yeah, the short man syndrome, get a bit aggro [aggressive] on the field.

It's good though, cause you can get under the tall players in that situation.

Yeah, but yeah, I was always in the first starting five, starting five all the time and in,

16:00 after that with league I was always in the starting thirty and starting fifteen.

Had you heard much about American basketballers, was that information...?

No, no there was nothing. There was no TV [television]. There was, even on the newsreels cause we used to have an open air cinema and the news used to come every Friday, just newsreels and stuff. No, Vietnam dominated my school years, yeah, and that was the only news, plus a bit of

16:30 news from the government and whatever. But there was no sort of like news-news, as news is today. Yeah it was only the war and, but we didn't even know where Vietnam was on the map, cause our geography was mainly Australia, yeah.

Did you get, did the teams ever get off to Cairns of any of the other locations for

17:00 **games?**

Select few who we thought would make, who were good athletes. Phil Bowie, who was also ex-navy, and a few of the other boys and girls who came down with representative teams to compete in Brisbane and Cairns, Townsville, yeah.

And did you travel with any of the sports yourself?

No, only to Daru for basketball, yeah. That was in Papua New Guinea. There was,

17:30 we used to have a sort of like a inter-school pact with 'em that we travel up there and play and they travel down to us. And their senior basketball team used to travel down too, to Torres Strait.

And can you describe that Wednesday night and how it would be organised and what the courts were like? Were they indoor or outdoor courts and where did the people sit, just a little...?

Just one court, one court at old Maloney's courts. He'd built a

18:00 basketball court. It was concrete, open air, few seating around it. Yeah, it was a big family affair, big outing for everyone. Yeah, there was just a family thing. It was just everybody used to go. Now it's more basketball, ah, more rugby league for the family outing sort of thing on Saturday afternoons, Saturday, the whole of Saturday.

18:30 And but in the early days, in the '60s it was, the family outing was either the pictures on Friday nights and Saturday nights or basketball, yeah. That was before videos, before videos came into it.

And what about rugby league teams? Had you heard of anything about the other teams down south?

No, we never heard about Australian rugby league, it was mainly the, knocked off by

19:00 the old soldiers, that's when the interest in rugby league came in and bit of the basketball. Cause in the army, with the Torres Strait Light Infantry, they played a lot of rugby league inter platoon sort of thing, inter company. And yeah, mainly the Europeans from, who went up there based on Horn Island.

19:30 And Thursday Island, with the infantry they sort of like injected rugby league into it and it grew from there. And yeah, it's pretty strong rugby league following up there now and not so much Aussie Rules, the AFL [Australian Football League], although there's the kick, the, for the juniors, for the primary school, it's Auskick, I

20:00 think yeah, Auskick, yeah. So they're training up the younger ones to have an interested in AFL. There's a good promotion in that with the schools, all throughout the cape and north Queensland, yeah. But yeah, the rugby league started with, and the rugby union, but was more rugby league started off with Torres Strait Light Infantry.

What did you know of the Torres Strait Light Infantry and was any of your family involved in that or...?

20:30 Nearly all my grandfathers and a few uncles. But my recollection, my years of knowing about 'em was very few, just a few old songs and stuff. And what they'd done, a few of the men from the Torres Strait did go away with the regulars to the desert

21:00 and New Guinea, Papua New Guinea conflicts. But yeah, the light infantry was mainly home based and mainly stories from my mum and stuff, and the bombings and stuff of Horn Island and the harbour, Torres, the Thursday Island harbour.

What do you remember her telling you about that?

Oh hiding up in the hills. For some reason,

21:30 I still recollect my mum saying that they had to brush their teeth with charcoal and ashes - maybe because that's probably why they got beautiful teeth. Yeah, and just living on garden produce and fish whenever they can get down towards the daylight hours. And yeah, basically going into hiding. Just the,

22:00 wasn't so much the terror, they didn't so, didn't talk so much about the terror of the bombing, but mainly of the hiding and what they had to do, sort of thing. And for when the war started, all the evacuation of the... Because the trochus industry and the pearling industry was in full swing then, we had to evacuate all the people off Thursday

22:30 Island. And the removal of the Japanese, which a few of my rellies... But the removal of any Indo-Chinese origin people down to Brisbane and placed in camps, yeah.

And what were the stories about? What happened with those relatives?

They mainly speak about

- 23:00 the good times, being as a clique and writing songs and playing in jazz bands because they're all musically inclined in the Torres Strait, except for me, I'm the only black fella who can't dance or sing or play an instrument. But yeah, there's mainly the good times they had in... and the rough times. But they never seemed to speak about the hardships.
- 23:30 They're very resilient people I think, that's why we're so... Maybe because they're satellite, the communities are satellite in Torres Strait and clicking together with the intermarriages and stuff like that, to Japanese and Okinawans and Malays and Macassans, which I'm part of. I'm part Macassan and from Timor. But yeah, it's just a big,
- 24:00 became a big clique sort of thing as they went down south. They're mainly of the good times. They speak of the good times, and speak of their resilience I suppose, and their little coping skills. But they, I remember that, them all talking about the jazz bands they used to play with. And a few went into boxing and a few of the men went into boxing too, earned a few shillings in the camps.

- 24:30 But they all come back after that and took up life again and gone back to their industry. And family kept on going, yeah.

What about your mum and dad and brothers and sisters? What was the make up of your family?

My dad was part Macassan, part Aboriginal from the Wotathi tribe from down in western, eastern Cape York. And my mum was

- 25:00 from Badu and she was a mixture of western Torres Strait and eastern Torres Strait from Murray and Badu. That's where Eddie Koiki Mabo [land rights pioneer] came from, from Murray Island. Yeah, so, my grandmother was from there. And yeah, so (Wotathi... UNCLEAR), we were Christian. Well I grew up as a Christian. And Dad was a Muslim.
- 25:30 So between the two grandmothers, used to eat bacon here and eat bacon, and not eat bacon there, and eat pork here and not eat pork there. And...

And was your father involved in the war at all?

Yeah, he was in Malaysia and Borneo and just at the start of Vietnam I think he was, but he was mainly in Cambodia. And then he came back and they split up after that, and he was,

- 26:00 he ended up as wounded and I think he ended up in the SAS [Special Air Service] in WA [Western Australia] as a chef, so he came out of frontline infantry and, because of his eye... Yeah he was, but he never spoke about the war much. He went pretty much into silence mode.

What sort of man was he?

He was a boxer.

- 26:30 He boxed in Queensland, took out a few titles there, don't even know exactly what, and boxed for British forces and Australian forces in Malaysia, yeah. That's about all he used to talk about was boxing, boxing, boxing, boxing. So, yeah so, he shut out, I think he shut out the war too. I just met one of his mates. We were doing the Veteran Affairs [Department of Veterans' Affairs] men's health peer support presentation
- 27:00 group, and I met one of his mates and he just walked up to me and he said, "Are you Tony Assan's son?" I said, "Oh no, not another one." Yeah, so...

What did he say about your dad?

Yeah, just good mates and running around Penang and around Malaysia and Singapore. Mainly concentrating on boxing again, but just,

- 27:30 he never used to talk about him. And Dad and Uncle Bully, sailor, was another Torres Strait Islander. Nah, never used to talk about Malaysia much and Borneo.

So your dad was in the army, not navy?

Yeah, he was in the army. No, all the family was in the army except for myself and my brother, the breakaways, we went navy. He

- 28:00 kicked it off and he had a pretty rough time I suppose. This is probably why he went submarines. But he was in the collision with Frank E Evans on the HMAS Melbourne and then he decided to go underwater, so he joined submarines for, away from general service. Then he was in the prang with, I think it was Oxley or Onslow, off Hawaii - they got hit by a torpedo while
- 28:30 under the US forces, just in training in RIMPAC [Rim of the Pacific Exercise]. And...

He survived both of those?

Yeah, he got out. What time he got out? '60, '78, '73 or something. He got out, '76, yeah. But...

What was your mum like?

Islander woman,

29:00 mainly working in domestics with... She was a chef. But yeah, just basically grew up knowing Mum was a chef and she moved around a bit. I grew up with grandma, mainly cause Mum was working around the place and working down south then coming back up again when transport started to get a bit more mobile with Australian

29:30 National Airways I think was running then, ANA. Yeah, they were just kicking off then with old DC-3s, so there was more travelling. She came down to work down here with the sugar cane and banana industry as a chef and yeah, we basically grew up with grandma. And...

30:00 **So was that on Thursday Island?**

Yeah on Thursday Island, yeah the little place, Tamwoy, around the back. There was, when the island started getting, all the outer islands started getting like over populated and industry was growing in the, just maritime industries like trochus and pearls and beche de mer [trepang], they started. And people were getting jobs

30:30 as carpenters and plumbers and stuff. They were starting to get a bit more educated in their work and ticketed with trades. They started moving 'em into Thursday Island and then they started little Department of Native Affairs, or they called 'em suburbs but they were villages. I grew up on Tamwoy, yeah, then there was Rose Hill and Aplin, but Aplin was like

31:00 a nursing home then. It's now a little suburb sort of thing of Thursday Island, little community. Yeah, so that's, so it was multicultural all the way. Yeah, so working with, living between Malay Town and China Town and multicultural Tamwoy with all the different cultures from the different island groups and stuff, yeah, so.

And that, Tamwoy was where your grandmother was?

31:30 Yeah.

Can you describe the township there and what you'd see walking down the street? What the atmosphere was like?

Those days was old fibro houses, not by James Hardie [building products company], by someone else. Too early for him then, those days. But was all fibro houses, little one-bedroom places I think, and with our overcrowding cause just sleep, just make beds, like it was comfortable,

32:00 it was comfortable sorta thing. They were all neat. There's, just growing up there I remember I had to rake up the yard and do the... because I was in the middle of the family, I was the middle boy. Phil was too old, Alan and company were too young, so I was in the middle. So do the washing up, iron our clothes because we were still under the colonial rule sorta thing and we had to iron our clobber before we go to school.

32:30 Neat and tidy, bare feet and regimented Sunday school. But...

So there were rules for your, you had to iron your clothes?

Oh no, it was just the assimilation process I think, yeah. But the yard itself, the actual growing up in the yard itself was, that was island tradition to keep the, your little patch clean. And like there was

33:00 beach almonds and mangoes, leaves and stuff to rake up so. And you have to do a present... Like there was like, it was like a presentation to the neighbours and stuff and they'd present to you their yard. And it was fenced in, like each yard had a fence, and we had chicken in the back, all island bush tucker growing in the yard, so. And yeah, it was pretty comfortable.

33:30 **...some of the ceremonies that you used to observe, the cultural ceremonies?**

In Tamwoy, mandatory, island dancing on Tuesdays, Tuesday evenings. So had to be homework all done before about six o'clock and then, and already had supper and everything then we'd be,

34:00 just practice, just dancing practice. Yeah, all through the school years and they used to have the old island police used to come round knock on doors if somebody was missing and stuff for the kids. It was mainly for us kids, like keeping the culture and the traditions going. And that was one part of it. And then there was like other ceremonies, like your first shave, where the uncles'd shave

34:30 the young fella. And little ceremonies, like little traditional and then cultural ceremonies like a kid catching his first, his or her first fish, the grandma's gotta eat it and she's gotta present it to the grandma. And you could be as young as three with your first fish. I remember my little sister, oh, my adopted sister, catching a stone fish,

35:00 and grandma to tell her to go back to catch another fish, yeah, so we rigged that one - we got her to

catch a garfish. But yeah, first shave, first fish, then there's other ones with like your first turtle or your first dugong, that's just for growing up into manhood and then womanhood. And then after that I think you get injected into more of the cultural ceremonies like

35:30 the funerals and the grief and loss process and the tombstone openings, which is the headstone, putting on the new headstone which is more mainstream because of the religious background. When religion first came in, sort of thing, we had to... and government policies where we had to bury 'em and put headstones on it and blah, blah, blah. But it's still the traditional way of doing it, with an inception

36:00 of policies and procedures for actual burials and stuff, like coffins and headstones and burial patches and, yeah.

What did you think of your own culture growing up? Did you feel connected to it or...?

Yeah we get injected into it pretty young. I mean you grow up with the culture so it becomes the norm - it becomes learned behaviour and learned response.

36:30 It's all, we are all, if you can say automatic. If something happens or someone passes away or there needs to be, something has to be done, everybody's got a place and a duty and responsibility to each ceremony, and it's pretty much automated, yeah. And that's taught from a very young age, even viewing the body. My, one of my sons viewed

37:00 his first dead body at the viewing when he was about four and a half and, just to get him used to it and because he was one of my rellies he had to go and view the body, cause he was my eldest son, but yeah.

And do you remember viewing your first body?

No, I can't really sorta like remember it because there's been so many. And, but...

37:30 **Is it something you got used to or did you find it...?**

Yeah.

Yeah.

And like even for the kids growing up down south, I've been part of training them to accept the death and then view the body and dress the body. Like in our culture we actual, actually do the dressing of the body, of the corpse.

The family

38:00 **does?**

Yeah, the family does it. Yeah, the girls do the female and we, the males do the males, yeah. And you could be invited as being part of that family as a major player or a good mate or something so. And then you could be European, you could be white, invited to dress the body and view the body, yeah. It's just what role you played in that person's life. So,

38:30 yeah it's pretty much automatic. It's, in our culture too, it's the, in time of death or grief and loss process, it's the in-laws who do all the logistics. So they become the good guys, they're not the outlaws any more, so we call them the spirit hands the Mari Geth. So, and they take charge of everything and all the logistics of

39:00 the death and leave the immediate family to grieve and mourn. And a few of the extended family to mourn and grieve with the immediate family. All the logistics is done by the outlaws, the in-laws, the Mari Geth, yeah.

In a situation like World War II where men from the community were overseas, were their bodies brought

39:30 **home? Do you know anything about what was happening with the...?**

I don't think we lost that many from the Torres Strait. We had a few amputees, oh, one amputee who came back but he passed away on the island, way after, he was into his sixties. And, no,

40:00 I can't recall any deaths overseas, yeah.

Did you observe Anzac Day?

Do I?

Or did the community?

Yep. A couple of years ago we've actually taken out of, taken it out of Thursday Island, or the navy did. We played baddies and then we went to Murray Island because there was a lot of ex sailors came from Murray Island,

40:30 so we went there and had our presence out there for Anzac Day. But predominantly it's held in Thursday Island itself. And each community, each outer island, is seventeen communities or twenty-five

communities, and each community has their own little Anzac Day and memorial, but the big one's always on Thursday

41:00 Island for the ex service men, the World War I and II veterans.

I'll just stop you there.

Tape 2

00:30 **...back a little bit to some of the ceremonies. Did you observe European ceremonies as well?**

Yep, since Christianity came in, July the 1st, I forget my history here, don't exactly know what year, but yeah, we observed Christianity and Christian ceremonies as well. Christmas

01:00 one of, but...

What did you do at Christmas?

Just normal Christmas celebrations cause the community I grew up in, we sort of like, because it was multicultural, the whole island was multicultural with Japanese influence and Chinese influence and the Malays and Macassans. The unique part about the Torres Strait is

01:30 we're able to observe each others' ceremonies and, but still follow, if you can follow me, but still follow and injected into first nation, so to speak, first nation culture. So, for instance, if a Muslim dies, we'll observe the ten day grieving process.

02:00 They'll be buried as soon as possible because it's Muslim rule, following the, a Christian burial sort of thing, but in a Muslim sense. And then we'll observe the first day of death, and then the ten days, then the forty days there'll be a little... It's more like a debrief counselling sorta and keep watch

02:30 early intervention process. Then the forty days, then the hundred days, then the tombstone opening, like first nation would when the coffin breaks and the dirt sinks and then we'll put a memorial up. We don't put a memorial up as soon as possible, like down here, we wait till the coffin breaks. Because

03:00 it's wood of course, and as it rots and breaks down and all the dirt sinks, then we'll fill it in either with sand or concrete and erect a memorial. And then there's a celebration after that for, like the body's finally housed, it's got a new home. On the first day of the burial, the burial itself, not the death,

03:30 we have a ceremony which you call a theorabau ai, which is a celebration for the Mari Geth, the in-laws, for their part in... And it's offering them a feasting for their job and their part in the... It's the immediate family, offering them food and more like a celebration

04:00 that the burial's over, and we gotta look ahead. But during that time, that twelve months or however long it takes for the tombstone opening, there's still an observance of the immediate family, to see if there's anybody getting anxiety or any form of depression or whatever, so. In the mental health field, like for me myself, we don't

04:30 go in and inject ourselves into the family sort of thing, and we sort of like let the charge Mari Geth know that we're available and then we sit back. But yeah, going back to Christianity, yeah we observe all the Christian rules and regulations and...

With that sort of really mixed cultural influence of growing up, what did you personally connect with the most?

05:00 Mainly the islander culture because that's where I predominantly grew up even though my father was from Malay Town, but yeah, mainly with the islander culture. Early years was the church because it was like, sort of like mandatory, we go to church, because of the Christian rule. But

05:30 as I grew older and for me, myself, personally I sort of shied away from the church after about the age of fourteen, about thirteen, fourteen, because one of me mates got killed in a car accident, riding his bicycle, and young Timothy, sorry. But after he got killed I couldn't sort of like register that why, cause I used to shirk Sunday school sometimes and hide.

06:00 And I remember if we didn't go to church, grandma would give us castor oil to drink. And if you were lucky you'd get a slice of orange or something, if there was available from the shops. But you'd get a castor oil as punishment and a bit of a flogging, but that's just to get us to church. But Timothy never missed a day's church or Saturday night preps, and I couldn't register

06:30 how our Lord Jesus could take him when he was one of the mainstays of church, of religion. And it should have been one of us, sort of thing, or maybe it should have been one of us or, little hard heads or, "Oh no, not Sunday school again," and try and shirk or make excuses like you got a cold or something when it's forty-two degrees. But yeah, I sort of shied away from that and I just attended weddings and

funerals after that,

07:00 I never... Cause even in the navy was mandatory for the first year at school that we, no matter what dominion you were in, you still had to go to a church service on Sunday in uniform, sort of thing. So I used to hide then, in me locker, but, and think about sport. Yeah, I sort of like shied away from religion after a while and just attended the main

07:30 ceremonies, like weddings and tombstone openings and christenings and baptisms, yeah.

What did you think of the European people in the community when you were growing up?

I thought they were buggers, actually. Cause my grandma raised a family, she was the housemaid for one of the families and we sort of clicked with them, and because we sort of like grew up with,

08:00 grew up with 'em and... But the administrators themselves, they were so strict and so regimented in... And they weren't gonna change the rules for any little bits and pieces and whatever. I remember walking on, the pubs, and all the pubs were just white people drinking in the pubs, and used to walk on the other side of the road because they'd abuse ya as you're walking past.

08:30 Yeah, even though you're only in primary school or state school level, they'd still get up ya sort of thing and have a few remarks. So yeah, I just used to have a set path, how to get home, yeah. Either through the cemetery or round the back or, couldn't walk through town much because it was all, like that was the trading hub, and that's where everybody was, sort of thing.

09:00 But as you grew up, as the years went by, a few rules were broken I suppose. And the islanders started to drink and the pubs were then, you know, like after the referendum I suppose, like islanders were allowed to drink and vote and whatever. But no, just learned response I suppose, you know, which is as you go, like

09:30 different coping skills and that.

Do you think growing up you understood what was going on, and did it make you angry, that kind of segregation?

Yeah, the segregation made me angry cause at the picture show, islanders used to sit in the open part and the half-caste, like we usually use the words half-caste freely up in the Torres Strait because, whereas in the Aboriginal community it's a no-no. But for the half-caste would be

10:00 under cover but downstairs in canvas seats, we'd be in slats or laying on the floor out the front, in the open underneath the fig tree, open to any rain or flying fox droppings. And then the white community would be upstairs in much more comfortable seating. And so they were still on top of us. That's how I used to put it. They're always on top of us, sort of thing, and

10:30 above us. But you sort of like grow up with it. You go in little gangs and go in to pictures and you all sit in your little clique from the, from your own little street sort of thing and you walk home together. So it was a family thing, you, grandmas and mums and dads and granddads would sit at the back of the open area and we'd be at the front, looking up, looking up at this big screen, was a massive big screen.

11:00 And the older people at the back so there was age sort of segregation too, for them to be more comfortable, for their neck-wise to watch, they'd be at the back sort of thing, and we'd be at the front looking up, seeing very tall people. In the church, a few Anglicans would... Cause all the

11:30 white people were predominantly Catholic. And a few of the white people were Anglicans and they'd be in our church. We even had the segregation of churches for different cultures. Like the Aboriginals who lived on the island, and grew up with us, they're part of our,

12:00 my family sort of thing, and but they were still in the Presbyterian Church, so there was... But now I think there's about seven different denominations of churches up there, like seven different ones. But those days was just the Anglicans, the Church of England, the Catholics and the Presbyterians, yeah, 'pressbuttons' or something, they used to call 'em. But so we'd go to our different churches even though we had families in different churches, then after church

12:30 we'd meet and talk about church and just like normal kids and just grow up, growing up. But there's still that segregation, Aboriginals on one side and white people on one side and islanders on one side, even in the church scene. So I sorta like, like I'm still a practising Christian sort of thing but not in the sense of going to church every Sunday because, maybe because

13:00 of the segregation. I was always an inquisitive kid and always wanted to know what was going on and why this was happening, and why this was happening. And why we were segregated at school, when part of my family were going to the state school and we were going to Waiben School, we didn't become a state school until about '66 I think, yeah, or '65. [Waibene is a traditional name for Thursday Island]

Did you used to ask your grandmother about that?

13:30 Yeah, but her answer was always the same, sort of like, "Do as you're told. Do as I say, not as I do." And because she grew up mainly in the big change of industry and religion coming in and all that, so she

was pretty much regimented into the colonial system, so. But I was sorta like at that age group

- 14:00 where got a bit inquisitive, and how come they got that skin and I've got straight hair, and I've got...? But I can't go there and I can only go there on the weekends and why do we have to get a pass to go here and...? Yeah, got a few beltings over the lip and over the head and over the back, yeah, for asking too many questions. But I think just growing up made me who I am today. I've never changed. I'm still very much culturally orientated.
- 14:30 Even in the defence force I've still kept me culture sort of thing, kept my lingo going, my languages and dialect. And with the help of the people I suppose and support of the people back home. Like if I go to Badu, nobody will speak to me in English, they'd all speak Kala Lagaw Ya, which is our native tongue. And they'll, it's frustrating sometimes cause I forget a few
- 15:00 words and forget how to say a certain sentence, so I'll speak in Broken English, in Creole [Torres Strait Creole is now the recognised term for what was previously called Broken English]. But I speak Kala Lagaw Ya and I think it's great the support of the people even at this stage where English is a second language sort of thing. But they still speak Kala Lagaw Ya
- 15:30 to me. And even from the youngest, my nephews and well, grandchildren sort of thing, they'll speak Kala Lagaw Ya to me.

Can you give me a welcome in your dialect?

Mitha-kid, di-bay-dim, that's western and eastern Torres Strait. Yeah, so, mitha-kid is how are you, how are you coping?

- 16:00 Di-bay-dim is the same. Mai-em is welcome, sao-ki, sao-ki my-bolag is to let someone pass through your property, which we never sort of like hold back sort of thing. If they ask we let 'em walk through the yard, whereas down here you sort of like, yeah, you don't, you don't just walk through somebody's yard, even though, even if you ask sort of thing, maybe strike
- 16:30 up a conversation first. But they sort of like semi demand it that they walk through their yard, that's in the western Torres Strait. In the eastern Torres Strait it's, they still under the rule of Malo, which is their spirit God and his tongue, moki-moki tetere moki-moki which is you don't walk through somebody's yard or touch somebody else's property, you go round it. I worked at the health centre there where you can see the beach,
- 17:00 but you've gotta walk a hundred metres to go get to the beach. You can see the beach and there's houses in between the health centre and the beach. But just to go fishing you gotta walk about a hundred metres to go around all the properties and on the recommended path sorta thing, set a recommended course and, just to go fishing. But they're still very much under the law of Malo, and their saying that they live by is tug moki-moki tetere moki-moki
- 17:30 "You have to go ask first," before you can go through. But if you're not sorta like familiar with the family, you just walk the main street anyway, the main drag, get down to the beach to go fishing or walk down the beach. But yeah, that's basically, like the culture's still there.

I know we talked about it before but I wonder if you could tell me in a little more detail what happened on Anzac Day, on Thursday Island,

- 18:00 **just how the community came together, because of our interest in war and in the archive?**

Basically it carried on from the Second World War. Like all the regiment used to get, the infantry used to get together and have their Anzac Day ceremonies. And then as we got into

- 18:30 more into the navy and the air force side of things it was just a unified response then and organising and stuff like that.

Do you remember when you were growing up, that there was, do you remember Anzac Day being...?

Mandatory, yeah. For the schools to attend, yeah, though we all had to go Anzac Day and even though we didn't know where Gallipoli was, or what we were doing here. It was

- 19:00 like a religious response. It was like, sort of like a Christianity thing, but it was more religious based because religion was pretty strong in, Christianity was pretty strong in the Torres Strait. Yeah it was more a religious response I think that we had to be there and sing hymns and observe silence and they have their few little speeches, then off
- 19:30 we go again. And it was a public holiday...

So really for a kid, what was your concept of war growing up?

Not much at all, I didn't know much about the war at all, in the primary school years. In high school you sort of learned a little bit more about it because the boys had come back from 'Nam and from the navy and from the army, and you'd hear more, a little bit more about it. And then Audie Murphy had come on, and Audie Murphy and

- 20:00 Return to Eternity I think was the first movie I seen of Audie Murphy. And then you got the full grasp of, "Wow, this is war! I mean they're killing people and the Japanese. And they're killing Japanese and we're living with Japanese." And then it all started to click in why the Japanese and the Okinawans were removed from the island and anybody married to 'em or involved with them were removed to Brisbane and
- 20:30 Cherbourg [Aboriginal Mision] and places. And then it sort of started to click in, "This is war but it's gone, sort of thing like, it's over." But then Vietnam started, but we didn't know Vietnam was on until we started seeing US [United States of America] and Australian ships going through the straits and then the teachers then told us that Vietnam was on. And the, actually when I,
- 21:00 when I did join the navy, I didn't even think about going to Vietnam, you know, sort of thing, because there was no news that it was winding down or what stage it, what stage it was in and who was involved and... It was just mainly US forces and Australian forces that were portrayed on the big screen, on the newsreels, in black and white, so you didn't know what colour they were.
- 21:30 The only people you can identify was the Negroes in the film clips and you thought, "Oh, there's black people in there too," sorta thing. But as far as the Viet Cong and the South Vietnamese were portrayed, they just had slanty eyes and different uniforms on, but skin colour was the same, so except for the Negroes. No I didn't even realise
- 22:00 that one day I will be involved with the war. So you're so young sorta thing; everything's an adventure. Because, well the boys who came back also had good stories about Singapore and the US and Hawaii and, "Oh wow, I might join the navy cause they're all nomadic anyway." Well I was nomadic with, maybe with my Aboriginal blood. But also curious little fella -
- 22:30 I always wanted to try. Plus the economy in the straits too, I suppose, because I had to support my grandmother and everybody was becoming an apprentice carpenter or apprentice plumber so placement was pretty difficult sort of thing, and like I wanted to be a carpenter like the rest of the family. And plumbing in the building industry, just the placement wait
- 23:00 was too long and just had to support grandma, cause granddad had died. And yeah, so, cause my brother started his apprenticeship as an electrician up there in the Torres Strait, on Thursday Island but then he joined the navy. And I thought I'd joined the navy too so little band of merry men, four of us. And then after us followed a
- 23:30 couple of girls, Frances "Choppy" Ah Mat and Pamela Anderson. Pamela Anderson! Wow, thinking about Baywatch. There was a bay there. Pamela Bowie. Sorry Pam.

She'll forgive you, I'm sure.

Same size, yeah, she'll forgive me. And Frances Loban. Frances was before me. She joined the navy before me. But then there was Frances Ah Mat and Pam Bowie and,

- 24:00 and Coralie Jia and they sort of like joined about eighteen months after me. And then the female influence in enlistment got in after them. So, yeah, so was follow the leader I think, the good stories coming back.

So what were some of those stories that you remember hearing? I suppose your brother was a predominant story teller for you, was he?

Yeah but like, sorta like, cause he was a different age group,

- 24:30 so I used to hang out with his little clique when he come back because he missed his mates, cause we all joined pretty young. I joined at fifteen and a half and he joined at about seventeen, and he was about eighteen months in front of me, two years in front of me. And yeah he was just, stories about mateship and friendship and they were just the same as the white fellas and they done the same job and all drank the same beer at the same bar, rubbing shoulders with the same people. And
- 25:00 I said, "Whoa, this must be the go! Has to be better than being here, walking on the other side of the street," sorta thing. So yeah, I joined with different feelings I suppose. I didn't know what was ahead. Like we had to go by train to Brisbane, from Brisbane to Fremantle. And but the camaraderie started, I think, as north Queenslanders,
- 25:30 in Townsville. We done our medical and yeah, started from there. We clicked together as north Queenslanders and we stuck together all the way through and we're still together.

What was involved before that? Did anyone ever come over and talk to you about joining the navy or did you join up on Thursday Island? What was involved in that?

We joined on Thursday Island, one afternoon just sitting in classroom, they said, "Oh, we've got

- 26:00 navy recruiters who flew up from..." wherever, Townsville I think, or Brisbane or somewhere, probably from Mary Street, in Brisbane. And they flew up and just interviewed everyone, and anybody who was interested, and we sorta like, was on the spur of the moment, we said, "Oh, let's go, let's go," sorta thing. You know, the boys were talking about it and, "Let's do it." And yeah, myself, Billy Lui and Phil

Dorante,

26:30 Stevie Matthews, like we all joined up. Myself and Billy went first and then Steve and Phil came after, which, yeah, they were in the adult entry at Cerberus in Victoria.

So you joined, sorry, in, you signed up on Thursday Island?

Yeah.

And what was involved in signing up?

Oh we done the

27:00 tests and everything, there and then. I mean they must've been pushing for crews for Vietnam cause they just, we just done a maths and English test. And cause we were pretty young so obviously I think we were physically fit. And didn't worry too much about the mental state of things, and didn't counsel us into, like, there's a war on. Just maths and English, which I found out was

27:30 well not, it wasn't sorta like rigged for islander standards - it was standard basic entry exams - and we passed. And then the sad news was breaking it to Mum that I'd actually signed up - I'd enlisted and she had to sign me out. But she'd left, she'd left the island and my grandma was my guardian

28:00 then, which she didn't know much about the war anyway, or the navy, and I sort of like coached her into signing my release form, cause I was under age. And yeah, went from there.

How did your mum react?

Well she didn't know. She didn't know until she come back. And by April '70 like I was ready to leave, so, I'd already got my enlistment and my little duffle bag and everything in the mail.

28:30 And yeah, she was an islander woman and she said, "Oh well, you go. I'll see you when you get back," sort of thing. Yes, went from there to... Boarded my first aircraft, my first escalator.

So before you go there, that's before you go to Vietnam is it?

No that's before I go to recruit school.

Oh sorry, oh okay.

Recruit training school, yeah, that was '70.

So you went from signing up to, that was in

29:00 **Cairns was it?**

In TI [Thursday Island].

Right.

And then the induction in Townsville. We still had time to think, well they sorta like... But we didn't understand too much English anyway, so they sorta like briefed us that we can pull out if we want to. But to pull out of something you signed up for was not the done thing, was not the seen thing for islander warrior type status. So

29:30 yeah, we just went along with it. And done the medical in Townsville, then flew to Brisbane and done the actual sign up there, the swearing in.

What did you think of the flying and you said it was your first escalator?

Yeah, first aircraft. Oh, I don't know. It was just a new thing, for a kid, "Oh let's do it." Flew down,

30:00 done the medical in Townsville, got on buses - never seen buses before - and then Brisbane for escalators. I think escalators were brand new in those days, in the big city. And yeah, we were detailed to go off and buy some warm clobber [clothing] because we come down in the tropical in April, come down in tropical rig, shorts and whatever. So we had to go and buy some more clothes then in Brisbane for, warm clothing for

30:30 Western Australia, South Australia and Victorian weather, going across on the train, yeah.

How did you deal with the... Not being able to understand English very well, were the officers nice to you at the recruitment office and going through the medical and that process? Was it difficult?

No, well like we understood basic English and but not all the big words like, you know...

31:00 No, we sorta like went through it, yeah. Like it was always like there's the sense that if the other boys can do it, we can do it too, so if they got through it, we can get through it. So it wasn't so much a yes, yes, yes, yes, for everything sorta thing. We did have time to think and but it was more in that because we've signed up and we've gone away from the

31:30 island, we've gotta carry it through. That was my feeling anyway. And myself and Billy ended up doing over twenty years, and Phil. Oh, sorry, there was young Thomas Nakata too, he was, he, three of us left from TI, and yeah, but he got discharged on a medical. And yeah, Billy and I seen it through to twenty, and I went through to twenty-six.

32:00 Yeah it was just carry it through, just do it. But the screaming and the yelling when we first got there! Like soon as we put our lines on the, our names on the dotted line, our signature on the dotted line, then the screaming came out, you know. "Get this to fall in three deep and tallest in the flank, shortest in the centre." And, "You little buggers and you little rats," and the names they used to call us!

32:30 But it was, we thought, "Well this is part of it. This is part of being a recruit," like. But we're still in civilian clothing then till we got to Western Australia.

So what sort of names were they calling you?

Everything under the sun. Whit Little in the front, because he were so young, and you young this and young that and...

What were the other guys like that joined up that day?

33:00 There's a lotta, because they had, well was like apprehension thing for us sorta thing, because they had their mums and dads with them there whereas we didn't. So we seen 'em, the last we seen 'em was at the wharf, and there was a lotta tears and crying and stuff and them crying. And we were sorta seen as being tough because we'd already been through that, sorta thing, down in Mary Street in Brisbane. And...

33:30 **You cried when you left the island?**

No, because it wasn't seen, wasn't the seen, the done thing to be seen crying like, sorta thing. Plus there was three of us, so we sorta like, three boys we all were in the same class and same basketball team, same football team, so we were sorta like, "Oh yeah, three of us are going away. We can handle this and..." Wasn't until we got to Leeuwin I think

34:00 that I started crying, cause on my sixteenth birthday, yeah, they smashed my birthday cake. Cause one of my aunties over there, she was living in Perth then, made me a birthday cake, and brought it in and we weren't allowed to have birthday cakes and stuff like that, so. And I was sorta, "Wow, my first birthday cake and it's been smashed," cause I never had birthday cakes when I was younger, and but that was only a little tear. But...

Who smashed

34:30 **it?**

The divisional staff. But we all became mates after that, because I was in the boxing team, and Popeye was my boxing trainer so, and Hendricks. But we had a good division. We were one of the biggest divisions to go over there to Western Australia. There was about three hundred or so of us first, into the one block.

35:00 Where all the other divisions, Rhodes and Marks and Morrow and them, they were pretty small divisions, two hundred or a hundred and fifty. We were the first biggest ever division to go through Leeuwin, about three forty or three eighty or something, it was huge, yeah.

So that, can you tell us what you remember of that trip? That would've been quite a long train trip too, by rail?

It was, yeah. Lot of running around with the buffet car and the sleeping quarters and yeah, just normal fifteen-

35:30 year-old sense I suppose, brain ticking over and running around and getting into mischief because it's, bored about sitting in the one spot. And there's the train staff, ah, the divisional staff was, they had their job cut out for 'em, because we just picked up all these kids on the way through. They gotta stop in Melbourne and Sydney and Adelaide and even Kalgoorlie, we stopped there and picked up a couple of kids from there,

36:00 from the desert, sorta thing, to join the navy. And then we had to meet up with all the Western Australian mob, so. But the train trip over was just chaos I think. I can't imagine what was going through the staff, there was about twenty of 'em, they're all running around between carriages trying to get us to sit down and... Yeah, it was just running around, buying Twisties and drinking tea and drinking water and drinking soft drink. Yeah

36:30 just, would've been chaos. I remember just sticking with the North Queenslanders, like Tom Piper and he's from Tully, like we all just stuck together because he was a country boy sorta thing, like wasn't, mainly the country boys all stuck together and we clicked with them.

What did you do the pass the time on the train?

Oh wasn't much reading. Just play cards,

- 37:00 tell stories, yarn, share cultures, cause we had a few Japanese and a few Chinese with us, and Italians. And a few of the boys like from Redcliffe in Brisbane and some of 'em were cane cutters, kids were cane cutters, banana farmers, and Inala, all the rough ones from Inala in Brisbane, like they already had tattoos and...
- 37:30 But yeah we just click, just tell stories and what we done at school and what sport we played and just yarned up, basically, yeah, because Queenslanders are more used to the yarning style of talking anyway so yeah, we just yarned. And then when we got to New South we started meeting New South Wales boys, and they'd talk about cattle and their industries and where their fathers worked and city life and yeah.
- 38:00 **Did everyone mix pretty well in that group, or was there a division?**
- There was a, like division cause we were in different carriages, for obvious reasons I suppose, like try and keep the clique together. But in the end we were just all over the place, just meeting up and, "Where are you from?" And, "I'm from..." you know, here and there and from a rural background and from a city background. Yeah, we just clicked and
- 38:30 by the time we got to Fremantle we were pretty much a clique, we were stuck together. We realised by then, "Yeah, we're gonna be one, one division, and one family," and we stuck through it, through then, yeah. Through our boxing and football. And a few of the Victorians I made mates with, introduced me to AFL, was Aussie Rules in those days, and cause I was playing halfback for the rugby union team
- 39:00 over there and plus boxing, and just inquisitive nature. And the rugby union was easy to change over, but the AFL I used to go down there and watch the Aussie Rules, and wondering if I can play that, they're all so tall and they're all this. And he said, "Yeah they got places for you in there," and yeah, that's the way I kicked off with AFL, with Aussie Rules. And loved all three sports
- 39:30 since then sorta thing. Oh, the other two sports, yeah. Coach's nightmare, growing up, between boxing and rugby union and Aussie Rules, Australian Rules. But, and but that's when I broke away from basketball, sorta thing, because they were much taller, they were much taller in physical status. And so I just took over, went over back to boxing, cause I'd boxed in TI before, like at the Lions Club and stuff.
- 40:00 But yeah, the camaraderie started I think from Townsville, yeah. And we still are pretty much, there's only a few of us left on earth, now I suppose, but we're still very much in touch, like Stevens and 31st, yeah. Yeah.

Tape 3

- 00:31 **Sounds like a bit of a riot really.**
- Oh yeah well it was just like uplifting Thursday Island state high school, cause that was as many, you know, close to three hundred, and plonking 'em on a train and then taking 'em umpteen thousand miles across the desert and through all the different states, yeah. So yeah, we were pretty much multicultural orientated by the time we got to Fremantle. And...
- What did you think of the desert?**
- 01:00 Oh it was awesome, was so vast. Yeah that was one thing we used to do to pass the time, was count how many dingoes had taken, how many dingoes and rabbits we could see. Oh especially for us Queenslanders who'd never seen rabbits and stuff before, it was a bit of excitement for us. Then you get bored, you get to Ceduna or something, yeah. But just after we crossed the Nullarbor,
- 01:30 just after we, going across the Nullarbor, is just, didn't realise how big Australia was until we actually... Because you're going through the green part of Australia and everything, there's towns and stuff like that, but then there's hours and hours and hours of no towns. You know, where is everyone, who's living out here? And there's a train track in the middle. And yeah, it was pretty awesome, pretty eye opening,
- 02:00 yeah.
- Did you have uniforms by then or were you still in...?**
- No we were still in civilian clothing, yeah, our last little bit, and because when we got to Fremantle all our civilians were taken off us and boxed up, and we were allowed to keep some civilian clothes. Because the grading system over there, the divisional grading system, like, by terms, you weren't allowed to wear civilians ashore. Not actually
- 02:30 stepping out, we still had to step out in uniform. But you can wear civilians ashore sort of thing, whilst you're ashore. Whereas, for as, what we used to call new grubs, new recruits, was three months of uniform, see. And I think for the first six months, you had to wear uniform ashore, and also ashore.
- When you first signed up and you sort of went along and were accepted into the navy, did they at any**

03:00 **time at that point tell you about the possibility of going to Vietnam?**

No, because by that time we'd learned about conscripts and stuff, like just by, by ear and by some of the newsreels, that you had to be twenty-one to go over there, see. So we said, "Oh we're pretty safe," sorta thing. "War will be over before then," and all the rest of the stuff. So

03:30 yeah, we were pretty much still in the high school frame of mind sort of thing, and with little knowledge of the war. And yeah, mainly, just, you had to be twenty-one to get over there.

So you didn't think it would be an issue for you?

No, because thought we'd be on the home front, sorta thing, manning ships here, while the older boys'll be over there.

What did you think you were going to be doing exactly?

04:00 Well we didn't know, like because most of the island boys were engineers because they're all, because of the industry I suppose and the training that, on the pearling luggers and the... Because engines were just phasing out sail and going into engines. Most of their fathers were engineers, so they just took on engineering and I

04:30 took up gunnery. I originally wanted photography but I didn't want to spend an extra term doing chemistry so, but I took up gunnery instead.

When you first signed up did they ask you what particular type of job you would like to do or...?

No, there's none of that, we just going in to do Year 11 and 12 in one hit.

05:00 Basically just the college and you got, at the end of, towards the end of your term there, your twelve months, then they start coaching you towards which branch or corps in army terms, what corps you'll be most suited to, academically or physically or mentally.

05:30 **Just talking a little bit more about the fact that, you know, this was the first big trip for you and you were seeing, you were on a plane for the first time and on a bus for the first time and all these things. How was that? Can you describe that experience for us a little bit, of experiencing these things for the first time?**

Was just like a little kid. We were kids then but was just inquisitive, wanted to try everything, "Let's do this, let's do that." I remember I, in

06:00 Brisbane, the three of us, Thomas, Billy and myself, we had to go to the first floor to get winter clothing, because Brisbane was just gearing up for winter clothing then. And we had to go to the first floor. We came across the escalator and we were just standing there watching all the white people jump on first, and see what they were doing, which foot they were stepping on and how they were doing it. And then we had to get Thomas,

06:30 Tommy Knacketer, to step on first because he's been down south before, so he had to do everything first. So he was the first elevator boy, he was the first escalator boy, that was really, was the old elevators in those days, the old clanky things. But yeah, we got Thomas to step on first because Billy and I were from the back, back of the island, and he spoke better English anyway. So yeah, it was just trial and error, but very inquisitive

07:00 trial and error, sorta thing. I remember going up to City Hall where we got taken up to the tower, the clock tower, and I dropped chewing gum over the side, just to see what'd happen, not realising that the force of gravity probably would've knocked someone out. But yeah, we got a bollocking for that. But...

Who saw you do that and gave you a bollocking?

One of the recruiters, yeah.

When you say, gave you a bollocking, what did that actually involve?

Oh just gave

07:30 me the ins and out of science and all the different forces and gravity and that stuff which meant nothing to me - it was just chewing gum going over the side. I think was a one cent piece or something too, I think, somebody else threw over the side, one of the other fellas from central Queensland, yeah we all got a bollocking. So in those days when one got a bollocking,

08:00 the whole lot of us got a bollocking.

What did you think of Brisbane?

Too big. Too noisy. But the shops and stuff, yeah like all the shops was an eye opener. So big. I mean, yeah admittedly was like a slow injection into it, staying here overnight, couple of days in Cairns, acclimatising you, then Townsville for a couple of days. So

- 08:30 we expected Brisbane, what Brisbane expected was, because of our history courses and stuff, classes in TI, so we sort of learned about all the capital cities and what was there, and trams and trains and all that stuff, except we'd never sort of like witnessed it before. So more inquisitive, how to get on and how to get off, and when to get on and when to get off sorta thing. And
- 09:00 what to buy, how to buy it. But yeah, no, like cause we lived in the People's Palace area, I think it's in Grafton Street, to live there. So we ventured out from there, little adventures, going down to shops, coming back and, "Boy that was good, let's do it again," and going out, going a little bit further. Because Cairns in those days was a, every corner was a pub, you know, there was, oh there was
- 09:30 just heaps, just every corner of Cairns was a pub. And the old Queenslander type pubs before, and were pretty rowdy or the cane cutters and fishermen'd be coming in. So it was an adventure going out. Like little did I know that three years later I'd be back here in Cairns, on patrol boats, yeah. But no, Brisbane was what we expected it to be. We just wanted to test that out, try it out. We did get a bit of free time to go walkabouts, but not too far, sorta thing,
- 10:00 and come back.

Were you sort of unnerved at all by the number of people and the noise? You know, you said it was too big and too noisy; was it sort of unnerving or just exciting?

Just exciting I think because the three of us stuck together, plus we met up with Mick Mara, who's passed away now, from Townsville - he was an islander boy - and one of the Aboriginal boys from Rockhampton, Cliffy Daylight, so five of us stuck together and we just ventured out together. Plus we had like Tom

- 10:30 Piper, Terry Piper from Tully and we all just clicked, and a couple of the Cairns boys, Cookie and Company, and yeah we just clicked, Jimmy Simpson. So we just, all us North Queenslanders because everything was so big for us, we just... Cause Cairns was a one horse town then, Townsville. So, yeah we just cruised along and went everywhere together, pretty good.

So how long did that

- 11:00 **train trip across to Western Australia take?**

Seemed like two weeks, ten days I think. Cause there's a lot of stops there to stop and but we didn't actually get off, they just got on, sort of thing. We didn't go to their induction ceremony or anything, their enlistment ceremony. Mainly a lot of stops we got out and you can go walk down, like Flinders Street in Melbourne and be back by... We already understood train times by then, pretty

- 11:30 much veterans of trains by then, Queenslanders. And yeah, we understood the train times so, we just stuck to the same street and Pitt Street, and George Street.

What did you think of Melbourne?

Yeah with trams right outside Flinders Street, it was like, "What are these things?" Like we knew they were trams but we didn't try 'em, just, like we didn't know where they were going or where they were coming from, so we just

- 12:00 walked round Flinders Street and done a few souvenir shops. Dunno why we bought souvenirs cause they'd only be packed up and sent back home anyway. But we didn't know that so we just bought little things, just little tiny things for little sisters and brothers and whatever, yeah.

When you're in Brisbane and Melbourne, what was, you know, you talked earlier about that, the segregation that existed back home with white people

- 12:30 **and your people, how, what was that situation when you were travelling around places like Brisbane and Melbourne?**

We started getting used to each other, and sorta like become mates. Like I had a couple of mates from, Phil Kocav and stuff from Sydney and Victoria. And yeah, so you'd jump carriages and you'd go down there and sit down and spend the night with them having a yarn and talking. And got to know

- 13:00 each other, and know each other's family's background and different cultures and yeah. So they were more interested in us than we were interested in them, sorta thing, so they'd come and grab us. You know, like, cause Mick was pretty big. He was, at the age of fifteen he was about fifteen stone and wore size twelve shoes or something, size fifteen shoes - he was huge. And so they were more interested in us I think than we were with them.

- 13:30 So they were coming in and grabbing us and taking us down to their carriage and having a chat down there and having a yarn, then come back. Then we'd go to another one, we'd go to the Victorian one and yeah, oh, it was pretty good. And then the Brisbane boys'd come and grab us and, no all the southern boys anyway from Queensland, from the eastern seaboard, they'd come and grab us and we'd, yeah, just cruised all over the place. We were more like the invited guest, so it was good fun.

- 14:00 **Yeah, how did you enjoy that? I mean that was a bit of a change in a way for you?**

Got repetitive after a while, telling the same story, same family background and same what we used to do and the campings and the picnics and different cultures back home. And some assimilation to their culture, to the, like the Italian families and stuff. Like we had Italians on Torres Strait and some Chinese and Japanese

- 14:30 and Asian influence, yeah. But no, we just got on like house on fire I suppose, yeah. It was good fun. And still had that, still, school boy sense of humour and sense of adventure I suppose, like but even though we were on, all on the one train, you can only go two ways. But yeah it was good, was good, I enjoyed it.

So when you got to Western Australia what happened?

- 15:00 All bundled up and told to keep quiet and bundled up onto buses. Oh, God knows how many buses there. It was like, same thing again, was a bit of segregation: New South Wales on one bus so they can be processed differently, and Victorians and Queenslanders on one bus, and off we went to the main gate. From Perth to East Fremantle by bus and into there and fell in with our little duffle bags with our

- 15:30 minimum civilian clothing in it, and duffed ah, mustered out on the parade ground, and yelling and abuse and everything like that, it was... I actually wrote a poem about it but I've forgotten now how it goes. It's hidden away somewhere. And there was a song, 'Come to Leeuwin', but I won't sing it here.

No?

But...

We'd love to hear it.

\n[Verse follows]\n'Come to Leeuwin,\n

- 16:00 Come to Leeuwin,\n

It's a place of misery.\n

And we got there, it was just on the start of winter and we were all mustered out on the parade ground in different states and stuff. And just drilled and semi drilled, cause we didn't know the first thing about attention or standing at ease and whatever. We just shuffled off into our blocks and wait for the next day. And there was like another induction period again, another enlistment period again, like signing off

- 16:30 sponsorships for sponsor families to take us for the weekend. And bank details and passbooks. And there was passbooks in those days, and passbooks of how much pay we're gonna get and who should we allot money to. And which wasn't much, we weren't getting much. Over the table we were getting about twelve dollars I think, and the rest was banked for us. So, yeah, so

- 17:00 twelve dollars a fortnight, that was my first pay with the navy. Oh no, it was ten dollars, then I got, I graduated to twelve dollars, and then fourteen dollars, then after that you got your full pay after you got back, which is about a hundred and something. But the rest was already banked for you, like. But it wasn't much in those days, in the recruit days, as junior recruits, cause we were still under the age of seventeen, so getting about thirty

- 17:30 bucks a fortnight or something, you get twelve max [maximum], fourteen max and the rest was banked for you, so. You did have some amount of money when you left cause it was already banked for you, whether you wanted to or not.

What did you do with the money that you actually got in hand?

It went a long way actually, like we got pretty good with looking after our money and joining our money. I remember

- 18:00 well I started smoking then so used to buy a packet of Drum or Bank [tobacco], or whatever it was. And yeah, used to last me the fortnight. Some ridiculous price in those days, a pittance, compared to now. But, yeah, cause all the books and stuff were supplied, and the pens and pencils and stuff, all the academic stuff was supplied to us. Mainly on spit polishing,

- 18:30 gear and Brasso and can of, which you all used to pool together anyway, and shoe polish and stuff, yeah. And a few sly civilians, get leave without sponsors.

Do you remember why you started smoking?

Mainly cause everybody else was. Like even though we were under age, it wasn't condoned or anything like. It was up to us whether you wanted to smoke or not. I was still fifteen

- 19:00 and no, probably didn't start smoking till I was about sixteen I think. It was mainly because everybody... And the cold, mainly was the cold I think. And probably the pressure of academic, like we had to do near on Year 11 and 12 in twelve months sort of thing, bits and pieces of each.

So what did that involve? How did, what was the course, what was the studying like and can you describe that academic year for us?

19:30 Academics wasn't sorta too bad but the naval subjects. Like we had, really had to brush up on the naval subjects and mainly was open air. And in winter it was pretty bogus, cause, but...

What did you have to do?

Like seamanship and boat driving and rope work. Parade training,

20:00 parade and ceremonial training we had to do. It was always out in the open. And plus the sport and stuff, but the academics of it all. But it was easy because it was all teamwork. Only the maths and English and stuff they, and the science subjects were, you're on your own sort of thing. But I actually had my teacher from, two of my teachers from TI, was actually in the

20:30 navy as lieutenants; they came in as instructors. And that was a bit of a bummer because they knew the three of us from TI, and there they were in charge of us in the classroom again as lieutenants, Bass and Pearce. So they knew us inside out sort of thing, cause they'd spent three years on TI with us, in science and maths. But no, it was all right, was all teamwork. We clicked together. We got

21:00 broken up into classes, so we stick together as classes. And there's like the camaraderie and then the mateship stuck then too. Like in seamanship we'd all help each other out in boat driving and boat work, and the phys ed [physical education].

What did seamanship involve?

A lot of rope work,

21:30 a lot of boat driving, a lot of small type navigation exercises, a lot of time spent out at Jandakot and in the rivers and stream orientations and...

And how did you find all of that?

Rifle drill and rifle practices, rifle range, all the military stuff.

22:00 **And how did you find all of that, those things?**

Every day was a new day. Just took it as it come I suppose, like it was a new thing, like you're always inquisitive for new things for learning. I kind of liked the boat, well, I was more interested in the boat work and boat driving and seamanship side of thing, and knots and bends and hitches,

22:30 and the navigation side of things. And, but also like you combined them with little trips away to Garden Island and Rottnest Island and you'd do adventure training there, kayaking, canoeing and you involved all that in... like small type man management courses too, like how to take charge, leadership courses, and so that was

23:00 pretty good, yeah.

Where were you living?

HMAS Leeuwin in East Fremantle. And there was, which is, now I think is a supply depot I think, but and the SAS did have it for a little while. And, but yeah was pretty big, was just a big naval school, wasn't really a college, but it was also a topmans, which were officer candidates

23:30 school there, so yeah, was like a college. I don't know how many trainees were there, heaps, there was heaps.

Can you describe the living conditions for us, where you were sleeping and eating and all that?

Bit more modern than the army recruits. We had brick buildings, about three floors high, four to a cabin, yeah about three hundred of us to a block. And there was,

24:00 G Block and F Block I think were the big divisions, and then you had A Block and B Block and C Block which were pretty much small, but they're in the two hundred mark. But us and Rhodes, who were in the three hundred mark, Stevenson and Rhodes Divisions. And the, yeah there was four to a cabin, and about twelve to a floor I think, twelve cabins to a

24:30 floor, so three floors.

And how did you find the discipline aspect of being in the navy?

Yeah we slowly got injected into that, but after a while you become pretty much regimented, like you doubled everywhere. We never walked. It was doubling everywhere, whether it's for sport or whether it's for classes. It's all fall in, all fall in, and double away to classes. And every morning, there was parade every morning,

25:00 the whole parade ground was taken up. And regimented into phys ed, into physical fitness, into cross-country, into rifle drill. Everything was teamwork.

How hard was the physical training?

Oh I suppose we were pretty young then so it came pretty easy. I found it pretty easy cause I was, always been a sportsman. But I look back now and I think, like we used

25:30 to stay back and hold back for the slowest person, and which I found later in life that the diving motto, which I was part of the... wasn't actually a clearance diver, but I was a ship's diver working with mine warfare. That the diving motto is 'United and Undaunted', which basically means that you go only as fast as the slowest person in the team. So, and that's how we used to help each other out. Like in phys ed and, which was pretty intense, like

26:00 you get a period every day, for about an hour and it's pretty intense, like it's go, go, go, go, go. Wall bars, if you stuff up you go and hang up on the wall bars and stretch yourself a little bit and stay up there, and holding medicine balls above your head and rifles over your head going round, and duck walking round the parade ground. So yeah it was, but all part and parcel I suppose of the training and the main focus there was graduate,

26:30 and graduate out of there.

Did...?

And take each term as it comes.

Sorry. Did any of the young blokes have trouble with the training?

Yeah, there was like a, I suppose you can say a culling period within the first three months, those who the navy or the school training establishment found not fit for duty

27:00 in the navy, whether it's physically, emotionally, they were discharged and, which cut our numbers down a bit. And those who could take optional discharge with permission from their parents, they can, within the first three months of HMAS Leeuwin, you had the option to discharge yourself, yeah, with parental permission.

What do you remember about those

27:30 **who were found to be unfit in some way? Do you remember anything about them?**

Pretty, yeah, was pretty sad moment because you'd been together for three months and been in the same... But they had to be discharged medically or they've opted to opt out of the navy or change over to the army or... Cause they could've like just got out for a period and then re-enlist with the army or air force.

28:00 But yeah was sad, like there was a few tears and shake your, hand shakes and hugs and yeah, "See ya later mate," and, "We'll see ya later." And yeah, you sorta miss 'em. And then you meet up again later on because you know the defence force was their focus and if, for a majority of 'em. So you probably meet 'em in the army or the air force and we're, they knew where we were, and they'd write back letters getting, because telephones weren't too

28:30 crash hot in those days. So there was a lot of mailing, so we got a lot of mail, the boys who'd changed over to army and air force or in civilian life, wherever they were.

Do you remember what it was about their training that those boys couldn't handle?

Mainly, some of it was the discipline, the abuse. Yeah there was bits and pieces of everything.

29:00 Like there was a lot of physical abuse going on, from the higher terms, like the, oh we used to call 'em the, we used to go to like, new grubs, grubs, shit and top shit. So, from top shit, top shit used to abuse us a lot, like not physically but emotionally sort of thing. Some physical stuff there, though obviously was physical

29:30 fights and stuff, no sexual abuse or anything like that, was more man-to-man physical abuse and emotional abuse. But top shit had the option of either looking after you or putting you to one side, and like jacking you up the line for lunch, for, like. And because they were top shit they'd just walk straight to the front of the line regardless of whoever was there, for the line up, for lunch, before the doors open, so

30:00 be all segregation again of different terms. The first years, the first termers and, be out the back, and I remember 'em, when we all got in for our first haircut, I'd already got a square cut flat top before I left, thinking that'd be enough. We all got crew cuts when we got there. I remember all the top shits and shits standing outside the barber shop

30:30 while we were all lined up, and they were just ripping through our hair and just giving us curry I suppose, yeah. And we were just sitting there sad eyed and going, "Oh no." And some of the boys had, you know, like because it was in the '70s, obviously long hair was the in thing then, and yeah I'm going backwards... And they were getting all their hair ripped off, so I'd already had a haircut before I left. I had long hair at school. But

31:00 yeah, they were just giving us curry there. And they sorta like, they can either take you in or put you on the outer, sorta thing, depending on how you felt. And for us Islanders and Aborigines, I think they took

us under their wing because we already had a few Aboriginal boys in the last two terms, ready to post out, so yeah we got sorta like taken under them.

- 31:30 And we made a mark for ourselves for respect in the sporting field also, in the basketball and boxing field and rugby field, so we earned our respect in that way I suppose. Plus being nice guys.

Of course.

So yeah, so we never had any problems with, in the term segregation. Yeah mainly we just,

- 32:00 we just took it as it comes and if we got curry, we got curry. If we didn't, we didn't. Like if you got jacked up the line, well done. And...

So some kids, some of the boys were receiving emotional and physical abuse. What form did that take, how did they abuse them?

Fights, ganging up on 'em, belting 'em up. We had a couple of suicide attempts.

- 32:30 Yeah, then these, yeah it was mainly just abuse. And there was, it wasn't so much the culture, or their cultural background and stuff. It was mainly on the attitude, sort of thing. It was a big test of attitude, see how you put up with it like and if they sorta like stood up to it, or try and buck the system, then they got a flogging, and everybody else just looked the other way until the suicide

- 33:00 attempts came into it.

Can you tell us about those?

None of 'em were completed, but we had one guy jump off the second floor but he landed in a pile of sand, broke his collarbone; he's still alive today. No names, no court martials, but yes he's still alive today, all of 'em are all alive today, like we've been in touch, sort of thing. And one tried to hang himself with the, off the fan, with a lanyard, which was,

- 33:30 had a breaking strain of a ten pound snapper so it just broke. No, but that was like, with my job at mental health now, that was their warning signs for completed suicide, sort of thing, so. And a couple of them just became reclusives and depressed, mainly because of homesickness and just the emotional abuse I think,

- 34:00 yeah. And the, just general, general abuse from trainers, instructors, teachers, and the divisional system. You know, like maybe they're so used to being, everything done for 'em where, and now they've gotta comply with the rules and regulations, it was different life, I mean it was a regimented life. And yeah, but good on 'em for having a

- 34:30 go and yeah, I wasn't involved in any of the physical abuse to any of the other trainees and stuff but you know, like just stuck by their guns and they got out.

How did the other boys react when you heard about those boys trying to kill themselves?

Well we didn't know too much about suicide then, and the signs and symptoms of suicide, so it was just mainly taken,

- 35:00 was a yarn up counselling type stuff after. They'd been to sick bay and stuff. But the counselling and all that stuff was really done by divisional staff. And whether there were, I don't know whether they were trained in counselling or whatever and mainly by the doctors and medical staff I think. But...

Do you remember the boys talking about what had happened at all or...?

Yeah there'd be like an division debrief sort of thing, you

- 35:30 know, like, "This is what happened," and stuff. And then we'd, oh for care I suppose to...

Sorry Marsat.

That was mainly just a semi informal debrief I think, like, "Why did he do it?" And then we'd, and we'd change. But for the physical abuse, like we'd

- 36:00 hear of something and then the division'd get together and then we'd, like back him up or try and go... (UNCLEAR - eight seconds without picture and/or audio) ... Yeah, it was pretty much parental I think.

Did the instructors address the boys at all about what'd happened, or talk to people about the kind of abuse that was going on?

- 36:30 Yeah but it was sorta like seen as a manly thing to do. So they'd get in trouble, but they'd get a fine and go on WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s, on punishment. But it wasn't like the division'd be briefed or debriefed on what happened and stuff, it was formal charges'd be laid. And then another instance'll happen and formal charges'd be laid again, so. But there was

- 37:00 no early intervention or no promotion and prevention, if I can use the mental health terms, of the abuse, yeah.

And when you look back on that, what was going on there, I mean, how do you think it affected some boys? I mean you weren't a victim of that abuse, you said, because...

Or a perpetrator.

No, yeah. But how do you think it affected some of the boys?

- 37:30 Some of 'em were pretty good knucklers and stuff so they handled themselves pretty well and stated their claim on the land. But emotionally I think it affected a lot of the boys because, you know, all they'd read about being in the navy and army and air force and sorta thing was just blown out the window, sorta thing, you know. Or maybe they were mummy's boys or,
- 38:00 and they were too, weren't too used to... Like for me I was grew up with getting a flogging from my parents and grandparents and uncles for doing the wrong thing, so I sorta like expected it if it was going to happen to me, because I'd done something wrong. But it took a while for us to realise that there was a system in
- 38:30 place, divisional system in place for your protection, but obviously for some kids where they grew up with the protection provided for 'em, they weren't used to policy and procedure protection, sort of thing, in the system. So that's probably how it affected 'em emotionally, and socially, cause they
- 39:00 would just not mix. Cause you really had to stake your claim, not so much academically but in the sporting field and in, cause mainly because sporting was the man thing to do - we all trained to be men. We were little whippersnappers but that's how most of the boys staked their claim, either through sport and
- 39:30 well, for some, physical status, how big they were. But that never used to worry about cause you can always gang up on the big fellas and belt the shit out of 'em but, and then you'd have the division to back you up, sort of thing. And the divisional staff would look the other way when something like that turned up, because we were protecting our own see. So there was a little bit of, there's a lot of inter-divisional rivalry going on. But...

Did you see some of the beatings that went on?

- 40:00 Only in the shower. I did see it once but because I was, maybe my upbringing I suppose, like we were just told by the older kids to move out of the way. And they didn't belt him up too much but. From the ones I've seen it's just a touch up, get 'em on the straight and narrow. Some done this for not having a shower, not ironing your clothes and not sticking by the
- 40:30 rules. So you get a few breakaways, a few vigilantes, so for the name's sake of the division, or the class, they'd get a touch up. So it was more on the, your own status, the class status and the divisional make up I suppose, the demographics that you always to be spit and polish. If you step outa line, you get a touch up, yeah.

So they weren't beaten up too badly?

No, not

- 41:00 to the point of stitches and stuff like that, but you know, like bruising and stuff. But you know, like if you do it constantly it starts affecting someone emotionally and socially so. And yeah, but they toed the line after a while when they learn that, learn from their mistakes. But some parts of the system will pick up and formerly lay charges, some parts the division'll look the other way, for the name's
- 41:30 sake of the division. Cause all the divisions were named after admirals, ours was Stevenson, who was commanding officer of Melbourne, when Melbourne collided.

I'll just stop you there Marsat cause...

Tape 4

- 00:31 **Okay, just quickly about those particular suicide cases, what happened to those boys?**

All of 'em stayed in. Yeah, we joined the fleet together, or the ships, yeah, we joined the fleet together. Yeah, and maybe was just, it was just signs, I think, just signs of depression. I think

- 01:00 only one ever got a discharge after they got in the fleet, probably just couldn't hack the pace any more. And the, the regimented structure of the defence force, I suppose. And but yeah, the others stayed in, completed their twelve years, yeah.

So you were talking about the different divisions, can you describe the divisions and how they worked and...?

They were all like the grubs, new grubs and shit and top shit, they're like

01:30 terms.

You were talking about your, sorry, misunderstood, but you were talking about your division, how your name...?

Oh yeah, they're all named after commanding officers and admirals I think. Ours was Stevenson and then there was Rhodes, Marks and Morrow. And they were just term divisions, which is,

02:00 the year was twelve months of course, and you'd graduate to a new level of training as you go along. And the inter-rivalry division, ah, divisional inter rivalry, was through sport, through, not so much academic because that was on the one side but through sport and social, the social status, the social living. And

02:30 where Marks and Morrow would stick together because they were one intake, Rhodes and Stevenson would stick together because they'd be sort of like looking after us. And then, but then we'd, when we'd go after and look after the new division and you sorta like, it's like, yeah, it's just, you get, it's like a promotion, and you've,

03:00 like the old saying in the navy, 'Rank has its privileges'. And you use those privileges like to, whether it's for sport: "You're not supposed to win. We're supposed to win." But we were a good sporting division, so we made our mark there. We were pretty well, pretty much liked because of our sporting prowess I suppose. Maybe because we had so much to pick from, for a rep team, but yes

03:30 it's more on the status of your social living, not so much on the academic and the military training, and the naval subjects.

Can you tell us about the sporting competitions and how they worked and describe those for us?

There was no, like, the new grubs playing new grubs sort of thing and whatever, was just like everybody whether, no matter how old you

04:00 were, you're all in the one competition, so. And then you get a team picked from Leeuwin itself to play against Catholic schools and Anglican colleges and other high schools outside. And we'd get a, from the four divisions and the topman division, which was five divisions, we'd get a rep team together of whether it's AFL or rugby union or boxing or basketball, or volleyball or whatever, and then we'd

04:30 play other schools around Perth and Fremantle. So out of that five division comes a rep team, a Leeuwin rep team, regardless of whether you're a new grub at fifteen or a top shit at seventeen going on eighteen, so you're still in the same team, sorta thing.

Which teams did you, were you able to get into?

Rugby union and boxing. So, I was too short for volley ball. But

05:00 didn't go for the...

So you were in the rep team from the time you were fifteen?

Yeah, so in the boxing team and in the rugby union team. In and out of rugby union but, because of academic studies to be done and stuff, so it was all worked around your academic and naval subjects, and availability.

And you were a good boxer?

Yeah, got up to Golden Gloves level in WA, and then again in Victoria but

05:30 I gave up after that, stuck more to AFL and rugby union, and then later in life I went back to rugby league, yeah.

And how competitive were those competitions between Leeuwin and the other high schools and so forth? How serious were they?

Pretty serious, pretty intense. Like we'd get busloads of supporters from, all men, to go and play other colleges. I suppose how you meet girls I suppose, but they were always on the other side of the field,

06:00 but from the colleges and schools. But Leeuwin at, in the '70s did get trainees from there to rep, state reps. I never made it that far because of... But there was a couple who did go on to state level, at school boy level in rugby union. Yeah, rugby union, yeah.

And how did you

06:30 **enjoy all those competitions?**

Just a normal day in the office I suppose, just going out and doing your thing and doing your job. Won a few games and a few cups. Like we used to have sailing regattas too, like we used to compete against adults and high schools, and colleges. And yeah, so I wasn't much into the sailing because, I don't know, I just didn't like getting wet

07:00 in winter, didn't like getting wet in the cold. But, and then we get a few go down surfing and like for Wednesday afternoon sports, all the ones who are real good surfers, like they'd let 'em go surfing with divisional staff with 'em to keep an eye on 'em, couple of hours surfing and come back. I used to just stick with the team sports, like boxing

07:30 and rugby union.

And what about social life? What was that like?

Nil. Yeah, we just step out together, sneak into our civilians and just try and mingle with the crowd and just go out, go to the pictures, go to the movies and stuff in Perth. Another adventure, catching a bus from Fremantle to Perth. And yeah just

08:00 wander round town, until, cause we all had to be back by midnight, so then catch the last back, the last bus back to Freo [Fremantle], and from Freo just walk back before eleven thirty, twenty-three thirty at night, and into the gate and off to sleep, at the weekends. And it was only on weekends anyway - we weren't allowed any week leave, only weekend leave. And those who had sponsors could stay over till Sunday four o'clock or something and their sponsors'd bring 'em in,

08:30 yeah, about Sunday afternoon, five o'clock, or something, seventeen hundred they'd come back.

What about drinking alcohol? Was that an element at all in socialising then?

There was a bit of sneaking in the alcohol there. I didn't drink much, not much. But even inside the confines of the establishment, there was like sly grogging over the fence, but I

09:00 never used to get involved in that because I was thinking, "I'm gonna get in trouble then get discharged, then go back home and face the music." No, we just used to go to training. But yeah there was, it was drinking going on and they used to sly grog in Supreme Court gardens in Perth. I don't know, the older girls, like some of the boys used to have older girl friends,

09:30 and they used to go and get the grog for 'em, and they'd have a few beers in there.

How did they get the alcohol into the grounds?

Oh over the fence, under the fence. Like there'd be an old fella round the back or couple of old dears out the back selling it for a dollar or something for a goonie [flagon] of port, or sauterne or something, anything they can get their hands on. Yeah, then they'd have it on the floor or sly grog at,

10:00 on the floor or inside the, after lights out, you normally after lights out and stuff

Was it beer or other alcohol?

Nah, wines, yeah, port, rough red, sherry, anything that was cheap cause we didn't get much money in those days anyway, so the boys used to pool their money in together. So...

And when you went into Perth, did you go to pubs?

No, too young, was, twenty-one was the drinking age then. I think eighteen came

10:30 in at about '72 I think, or something, or '71 the drinking age came in, so we were still in the '70, '70 mark then, and it's still twenty-one was the drinking age then, and we didn't look twenty-one at all. At five foot two and seven and a half stones, nah. No, we'd just walk around, do a bit of shopping. We used to go and make some extra cash, put

11:00 Mick Mara up there, the boxing competitions to win some boxes. He used to flog all the adults cause he was pretty big. He'd be boxing in the heavyweight division and he'd flog 'em and we'd get a few dollars together and that's it, that's our little lunch money, and a few beers maybe if we can get someone to get us a few beers, and but never heaps, just enough for us. I remember going out to me sponsors place and we drank shandy and I thought it was a wimp's drink,

11:30 my first taste of shandy. My sponsor said we had to mix it with lemonade to get it... It was a birthday party, yeah.

Can you tell us about your sponsor?

I never visited her really much cause I was so into sport on weekends. But I did go out, she was a Torres Strait islander woman, Torres Strait islander husband, and they lived out at Nollamara, was too far out anyway, was way out the other side

12:00 of Perth. So I just visited a couple of times, and stayed over for the weekends, had a re-make of my birthday party at one stage. And yeah so. And one of me uncles was a boxer over there, Ali Ketchell, and he'd been in a car accident and so, and in a wheelchair, so I used to go out and visit him sort of thing and stay over for the weekend. Come back, they'd drop me off at five o'clock in the afternoon,

12:30 yeah, on Sunday. So no, I never visited 'em much. Was good to go out there cause we'd be talking about home again and what everyone was doing, because telephones were not too crash hot then so it was all done by mail of course. But yeah we just talk, catch up on home and all the people back home and all

the rellies.

What communication did you have with your family back home?

Just letters.

13:00 Did you write very often or...?

Yeah, nearly every week. I did try to get out a couple of times, for the optional discharge, but got talked out of it by Mum and the publican's wife, Joan Lynch, which was... Mum was working at the pub as a chef. And yeah, between 'em they schemed and kept me in. Thanks.

Why did you want to get out?

I was just missing

13:30 home, like this is not the done thing that fifteen-year-olds should be doing, oh strutting round the parade ground and lugging .303 rifles around the place, which is taller than me with the bayonet on. And even though the camaraderie was great and the teamwork and team scene was grouse, sort of thing, but nah, I just wanted to be home, sort of thing. Maybe it's, it's always the same thing for the first three months at

14:00 Leeuwin you get a lot of applicants for discharge, for optional discharge, yeah. They get flooded with it cause all the boys just wanna go, just a lotta counselling by parents and divisional staff to try and keep you in, keep the numbers up.

What did you miss about home?

The fishing, the going out on the weekends, just the bushwalking, all the cultural stuff, cause it was a big

14:30 culture shock within two weeks sort of thing, you're in another world, in two, three weeks you were in another world. And yeah, but basically everything, not so much me mates, because like we all had a little pact that, "We'll be back," and "We'll see you then," and, "We'll see you at Christmas time." "We'll see you in July," or whatever. But after I went on my first leave, mid winter

15:00 leave in, no I went on my first leave was Christmas, and after you get up and meet the family and talk about it and debrief I suppose as you can, well now that I understand it as being debrief. Yeah it was, after that it was easy, like after July it was, the first mid winter leave was easy.

What was the biggest cultural shock for you, do you think,

15:30 about the navy?

Having to be regimented, whereas everything was automatic, here you actually had to be told when to do it, how to do it, why you had to do it. Whereas back home you grew up with it and you're automated into doing things, like raking up the yard, doing the washing up, ironing your clothes and stuff like that. It was just, without being told.

16:00 The biggest culture shock was, well uniform wasn't such a big issue because like, because of the church upbringing and school uniforms, strict ruling. But yeah, just being told how, when, where or why you had to do things, and just keep getting told over and over and over again, and over and over, again and again. Even though you

16:30 knew what you had to do and you were automated into doing things, you still had to be, someone still had to tell you, and tell you in a screaming voice and not sorta like nicely - it's always a bark; it's always barking, yeah. But you soon get used to that too, sort of thing, like because you're at that young age, you're still learning phase so you learn to handle that. "The screaming's just part of his job. He's probably just a

17:00 nice little husband who's got a, like quaint little family, who just screams because it's eight o'clock in the morning, and he's back in the navy, yeah." Yeah, so.

Do you remember when you first got your uniform?

Yeah it was too big, because I was only tiny. And you had to go to the tailors, and the seamstress, and the tailors to get our clothes tailored. Yeah, my sleeves were too long and the waist

17:30 fitted and I was just oddly built I think. So, but they just, you just get issued with the clobber, and then you... I think the shoes was the only thing that fit I think - the shoes, boots, and the runners - but everything else was too big so I had to go get 'em all tailored, so. And I had a, I had to wear civilians for the first couple of days while me clobber got tailored,

18:00 and then I grew up and I got, fit into normal clothes.

How did you like being in the uniform?

Pretty good, like because everybody looked the same anyway so you always try to outdo each other with

creases and copious amounts of starch. Fabulon wasn't invented then so it was all starch, spray starch and yeah, it was just, all our money was spent on just spit and polish and,

- 18:30 whether it's shoe polish or Brasso or Fabulon or spray starch and washing powder, so. You only get issued with three uniforms for the day, for the normal working hours sort of thing. You get about seventeen hundred dollars all up, but the main uniform you used to wear was either shorts and shirt, and they're ones that had to be ironed anyway. And
- 19:00 your eights, which is your long trousers and long sleeve shirt, they had to be spick and span, and little white caps. And even your gym shoes had to be cleaned with white shoe cleaner, yeah. They were all canvas in those days so had to be painted with white canvas cleaner, and the white shoe polish. Yeah, so everything was spick and span, everybody looked the same, except for skin colour. So yeah it was competitiveness
- 19:30 in the drill and the dress too, so. But our uniform didn't worry me at all. I ended up being a drill instructor so, yeah.

What about the weapon, what experience had you had with weapons prior to joining the navy?

Quite a good amount of, a fair amount of introduction to weapon when I was a kid, to weapons and stuff cause we used to go shooting a lot, back home, for deer and pigs. And

- 20:00 so the .303 full stock wasn't really a surprise to me sort of thing, it was. But we were just at the stage of phasing over to the SLR [Self Loading Rifle]. Oh the SLR was already introduced to Vietnam by then, but drill wise on the parade ground, like, you're always waiting to, when you can graduate from new grub to get an SLR, so. And then the rifle drill and the range drill. And going out to
- 20:30 the rifle range was always exciting for me, was interesting, cause I used to love firing weapons and shooting and stuff, so. Being with an SLR and this whole seven and a half pounds was pretty big in those days for me, but yeah, has become my real weapon of choice, sort of thing.

What did you love about it?

Just the size of the calibre, the looks, had the

- 21:00 military looks, even though we seen the .303 in the old movies, and the few, the SLRs and SMGs [submachine gun] on some Vietnam video, ah, news clips, but to actually hold one and then fire one was a thrill sort of thing. Then you got sick of it cause you had to carry it everywhere. But yeah, the first month or two months was good, you know. I used to enjoy going out to the rifle range and competing.
- 21:30 Got me marksman's with the peak sight, like was a competition against myself I suppose, a challenge against myself to be a marksman with a peak sight so, as opposed to blade side with the .303 and all the other rifles we had at home like a Gevarm [rifle] and stuff.

You said that the .303 with the bayonet was taller than you; how did you find handling that?

No, you get drilled into it, you get drilled into

- 22:00 handling it pretty well sort of thing. Like they had the pistol grip built into the magazine so, and one size suited all, sort of thing. But was just a bit daunting that the bayonet was taller than me, and everybody else it come up to their, sort of like head, their head or their shoulders, and here was the bayonet, with the long bayonet on it was taller than me, just about, yeah. So just looking to your right, when you're doing a dressing and all you can see is the blade - you
- 22:30 can't see the other person. Yeah, so, but you get used to it. You get used to it, yeah.

Was there any aspect of the naval school that you didn't really enjoy?

Just the fact that we couldn't walk out the gate in civilian uniform like. And one time I got on punishment and we had to dig the pool by hand, the officers' swimming pool.

- 23:00 And there was about twenty of us and was all manual labour, yeah, from start to finish, before they done the old concrete type pool, before the concreters come in and concrete. We had to dig it by hand every afternoon for two hours. And yeah, that's about it.

What was the punishment for?

Probably not doubling or something, or, yeah, I can't remember what for.

- 23:30 Probably walking, strolling, an afternoon, or walking across the parade ground or something. They used to pick you up for all sorts of little things: dress, your belt buckles not polished or your boots not polished or... And they used to give you little punishments. I think that one was for fighting, I think, like wasn't physical abuse, I wasn't in a gang or anything,
- 24:00 was just one-on-one fighting, yeah.

Did you, I mean, were there many fights with other boys?

Yeah little, girlie little fights here now and there, nothing much.

What were they about? Do you remember?

Probably, oh, some of 'em were really like minor little things, like tripping the man in front of you while you're doubling and it's like, "I'll get you later." Little high school stuff.

24:30 But no girlfriend stuff or anything like that, like high schools nowadays, but just yeah, mainly like sport. Like if it's with another division, it'd be like a fight over a high tackle or something or... Cause we never used to be like, cause we got beaten by another team, but mainly personal things on the field. And

25:00 but all in all our division was pretty much a clique, just little girlie-type spats now and then, scratch, scratch, scratch. Nah, it was some full-on ones but they were sorted out straight after, shake hands and... Or we used to get like, if we were caught we have a grudge match in the boxing ring, so. And then the whole division'll have to go out, so you'd be offside with the whole division because we'd all have to get up in the morning and go down and watch you

25:30 fight for three minutes and then get out of your rig again and go back to bed. And, or we'd have pillow fights until the last man drops, whatever hour of the morning it is, so one person gets himself... Fighting was really a no-no divisionally because if we got caught fighting then the whole division's in trouble and then we'd all be out on the footy field

26:00 pillow fighting and just keep pillow fighting while they sat down, had a cigarette and watched us. Maybe a packet of cigarettes while they're watching us till the last man drops, so just fake it, "Oh I'm tired." Yeah, so, no we used to go, one in, all in.

What was the food like?

Good, they fed us well. Maybe because of all the doubling we used to do, they'd counter all that. We never used to walk anywhere, or stroll anywhere,

26:30 like it was all marching or doubling everywhere. So, was a dietician type meal, except cooked in fat. But we'd have one serving, so anybody, the bigger boys who needed to eat more, we'd share with them, or if you were top shit and you wanted to eat more you'd go and grab somebody else's. But no, they fed us well,

27:00 three full meals a day, with all the lashings.

What was your first major experience on a ship?

Damage control exercises. That was a whole new lifestyle again. Oh, because like we went to the ships as a clique, as a group from

27:30 one division sort of thing, so we'd get posted on some here, some there, and but they'd try and keep you together. But yeah, just a new style of regimentation I suppose, a new regimental style. And waking up in the morning and then having to go to work on a ship and doing different stuff and using all your training and getting further training on top of

28:00 that is just... Cause the first eight months at sea was all training again so, you're here in different classes.

While you're at naval school, did you have any sort of major training exercises on ships?

Only a couple of day trips on Gascoyne and Stalwart, and which introduced us to damage control and fire exercises and action stations and stuff, but that was only for a day trip on each.

So wasn't until you finished the

28:30 **schooling that you actually had any real...?**

Yeah it's the establishment, and then you go into full-on exercises and all the ordinary seamen, like we were graduated from junior recruits to ordinary seamen. And then we'd go into like, two hours, three hours a day on damage control and damage control exercises, where the rest of the crew'd just work their normal part of ship. We'd be taken away to show us the engine room and

29:00 fire fighting equipment, different fire fighting equipment, different watertight integrity and gas-tight integrity tests, and NBCD [nuclear biological chemical defence] systems and just gearing us up and it's just full-on training all the time. And then the afternoon or in the morning, you'd go and do your normal part of ship and ship's husbandry and stuff.

So before we continue with that, at the naval

29:30 **school you spent the first year doing your final year of high school, effectively. Can you tell us about graduating from that and then how things changed after that?**

We were expected to be men but still kept, expected to be men but still kept as junior sort of thing. Well still kept at the under seventeen level but in our attitude

- 30:00 and actions we were expected to be men. And just learn as much as you can. And yeah, like even stepping ashore, even stepping ashore like if you're a good guy, one of the leading hands or one of the able seamen'll say, "Oh you can step with me." Wow, wow a privilege! I must've done something right! And so they'd slowly introduce you to be in
- 30:30 to adulthood, some a little bit faster than others, onto the boys from Cerberus sort of thing, because they were all already nearly adults anyway. But for us as junior recruits, they slowly injected us into manhood I suppose, and adulthood, what girls to go out with, what girls not to go out with and where to walk, where not to walk. And show us
- 31:00 the outline and demographics of the Cross [Kings Cross], because all the navy bases are underneath the Kings Cross. But eventually we felt our way around and fitting in socialised with training at sea and normal ship, part of ship duties.

So how did your daily routine change after that first year, when you finished the high school?

More as a working role I think. You're in the office now. I mean you're not in the training field, you're in the

- 31:30 office. You worked as a team, but with a different team, and just eight o'clock in the morning we have a muster and after we say good morning to Queen Elizabeth II, and salute the flag, then we just go away and do our normal part of ship duties so, and it's as a team. Whether it's in the gunners store working on weapons, or whether it's seamanship duties or ship's husbandry, on the upper deck or
- 32:00 mess deck cleaning, and then with training in between.

So it wasn't...?

So yeah, you're in the office. You're actually out in the field now.

At what point did you actually get posted to a ship? I'm kind of just trying to clarify that, that training, how it worked? How long were you at Leeuwin for?

Twelve months.

So you spent twelve months there and then you got posted to a ship?

Then you get posted to a ship.

Oh okay.

And then you spent a further eight months training and

- 32:30 learning sea life and...

So which ship were you posted to, was that the HMAS Vendetta, or was that...?

Vendetta, Queenborough and Sydney in, all in eight months, in twelve months or something.

So can you tell us how you felt about graduating after that twelve months and being posted to a ship?

Graduating from Leeuwin was a big buzz but no family to celebrate with, sort of thing, just with your mates and, even though there was a lot of

- 33:00 families there, mainly from Western Australia and South Australia and Northern Territory, but yeah, it was just a relief. Yeah, we've done one phase, like we've come through all the different phases to finish this phase, and just looking forward to going out to sea and doing seamanship work, yeah, just going out. How they trained us at sea too, like, they didn't
- 33:30 stick you in the one department sort of thing, for the whole time at sea. They'd move you round after three months or two months. So you'd be say like, upper deck duties for two months, and then you might go in the engine room for two months and then you might be with the engineering, electrical engineering for a month. And yeah, like the ship, feel your way around, so, just so you can choose your branch where you wanted to branch off into.
- 34:00 And yeah I spent most of my time with the gunnery, cause I sorta like didn't wanna go down the engine room, cause everybody else was in the engine rooms, so I spend most of my time with the weapons and explosive side of things, yeah. And that's where I ended up, so.

You said that you were also interested in photography?

Yeah, I was interested in photography, with the old box cameras back home, taking photos. And I guess my

- 34:30 eagerness and urge to go to sea, I bypassed photography, because I would've had to go away to another school at Cerberus to do chemistry and then graduate as a photographer. But I wanted to go to sea first. That's what I joined the navy for. Yeah, so.

So can you tell us what it was like when you first went to sea, in the Vendetta was it?

Yeah my first,

35:00 my first trip was up to Rabaul. Like we had a few trips down to Jervis Bay and stuff to indoctrinate us in to NBCD and nuclear chemical warfare and damage control, gas-tight integrity and watertight... All the other stuff that comes with NBCD, and fire fighting and gunnery duties and stuff. And my first trip was up to Rabaul, for a volcano that went off up there.

35:30 And there was, yeah, us and Vendetta and Anzac went up to Rabaul to standby to evacuate people from there, so that was my introduction to the navy and work I suppose. Like, cause we had to get all the gear ready to evacuate people and but by the time we got up there like it'd already settled down, and so we just cruised to Port Moresby. Went up to Rabaul then back to Port

36:00 Moresby, bit of R&R [Rest and Recreation] and back to Sydney and back into training again.

Did you actually evacuate some people?

Oh some, just to hold 'em off a bit till everything settled down and just provide civil aid, that's all, aid to civil power and stuff.

What did you see of what had happened there?

Oh was just a big blackout, literally. Cause I was mainly boat crew,

36:30 but we couldn't get in too close anywhere cause we didn't have the landing barges and stuff. We just had sea boats. But it was mainly just standby, going in, checking with the administrators there and all the civil departments, civil aid and aid powers there, and come back again, so I was just boat crew. But it was pretty hectic as any volcano'd cause, I suppose, with ash everywhere and people covered in ash. But the whole crew didn't

37:00 actually motivate into mobile and go in to assist, so we just hung back and let the civil authorities take charge.

How did you like being at sea?

Enjoyed it. Yeah, I liked being at sea full stop. Except for the last couple of years I've gone into, after discharge I suppose. But yeah I enjoyed my time at sea. Every day, every day brings a

37:30 new days, new job, new stress.

And back then, when you first went to sea, what was your sort of feeling about finally being in the navy and on a ship like the Vendetta?

Yeah, it was like a big buzz, sorta like, wow, you finally actually going out, and your first big trip away is to actually giving a hand, lending a hand somewhere else, and we're actually doing something

38:00 meaningful sorta thing. Like, cause we thundered off at high speed. Anzac was one of the fastest ships in the navy and we had trouble keeping up with her, until she blew a boiler. But yeah, but we thundered off at high speed from Sydney, up north, and was actually the thrill of being on a ship doing twenty-eight knots. I mean, you know, like three hundred foot long or something, doing twenty-eight knots was just a big buzz.

38:30 Cause they were built for speed in those days and, as they are nowadays, but there was the old boilers, all furnace fuel oil they were burning. And yeah, it was just a big buzz. Like two warships blasting away, it was just a buzz, and the anxiety of having a race, sort of thing, I had to get up there. Yeah, it was good, was a

39:00 good day, nice flat day going up there. Took us about four days, five days or something to get up there.

What was your job in that day?

I was fo'c's'le, fo'c's'le part of ship and so we were just doing normal duties. Stopped a few times for man overboard exercises and then kicked off again, but yeah, just everybody just goes into their normal part of ship. Like all the guns

39:30 and all the weaponry and all that stuff. There's no need for them so they lay silent while we just do ship's husbandry, working round the place or helmsman, driving the ship, or being lookouts or being lifebuoy sentries, boat crew. Yeah just, cause you get detailed off for each watch on deck, so it's mainly watch on deck duties and ship's husbandry duties.

How did you like actually living on board the ship?

40:00 Because from a crowded family, yeah, nah, didn't worry me too much. There was forty-two of us, 2 Charlie mess. This is space, oh, God knows, about five metres by ten metres or something. Yeah but communal living, you get used to it after a while. Like from, big shocker from four in the cabin to forty-two in a mess deck,

40:30 and they're all different ranks and higher ranking than you. But then I got transferred down to 3 Charlie Zulu, which is more of an ordinary seamen's mess, so you were in your own ranking, in your own rank group there. And, no it was all right, just communal living. Stay out of each other's way.

We'll stop there. We're at the end...

Tape 5

00:30 ...make it work.

Can you tell us about the lead up to Vietnam and what happened before that?

Well we were still in that frame of mind where only twenty-one year olds went over, and then we got posted to, a few of us got posted to Sydney, and we were still, oh actually seventeen I think, and we got posted to Sydney. And soon after Sydney came back from

01:00 San Diego from picking up the new Wessex helicopters. And then we got posted up to there, and we're just got told we're on our way to 'Nam for the first retreat, for the start of the retreat anyway, from the Australian forces. And off we went.

How did you feel about that when they told you that?

Another day in the office, because by then we still didn't know, we only heard little smatterings of boys who had come back from Vietnam, from

01:30 being on the line. And we did have a few stevo [stevedoring] boys on the Sydney who went to San Diego, that was during when the bastardisation first come to light, of one of the boys jumped ship and got picked up by the Mexicans and blah, blah, blah by some oil tanker, ended up in Mexico City or Panama or somewhere. And...

So what happened, he was telling people about bastardisation?

Yeah,

02:00 like it all came out in the open. And...

Had you experienced it yourself?

Nah, not really, little bits, touch ups here and there. But his case was a little bit more I think, so he actually jumped ship with a life raft, let it go then jumped over with it, Clough I think his name was. And yeah he got picked up by an oil tanker and dropped of in South America somewhere, Mexico.

02:30 But nah, Vietnam was just another day, day at the office. Well, joining the Sydney was another day at the office. We just packed our kitbags and off we went, lined up and up a gangplank we went. Got the intro [introduction] and all the indoctrination, where each compartment was, what decks were which and where we were bunking up. And...

What were your first impressions of the Sydney compared to the Vendetta?

Wasn't a warship,

03:00 sort of thing, you know, was an aircraft carrier, was a troop transport. Wasn't an aircraft carrier then. By then it was just troop transport. But being a troop transport we understood we might be going to Vietnam because... But it was just another day at the office. We just went through our drills and induction period and post-on period, and then we were told we were

03:30 going to Vietnam, and we looked at the other boys and said, "This is it. We're going." And but going up was, we went through the Whitsundays. Where the other ones used to go through round the Great Australian Bight, we went through there, so it was like a coaching period I suppose to go through. There's a lot of exercises going up, like prep for Vung Tau. And we had our escort with us, I've forgotten

04:00 who the escort were, who the escorts were. But yeah, it was just another day in the office, damage control exercises and NBCD exercises, gunnery drills, a lot of gunnery firings in open water, just prepping the crews for Vung Tau harbour.

How did you get, I think this is backtracking, because you got involved in gunnery specifically didn't you?

Yeah before, in training, but I was

04:30 still under training at, on Sydney. So I was still under training in, as an ordinary seaman.

So when did you first become interested in gunnery and how did you train for it?

Vendetta, yeah, Vendetta. You know, like Queenborough was getting... We were on Queenborough just for decommissioning crew, just to hold us off, or just the holding pen. And when that fell through, the

decommissioning trip to

05:00 New Zealand, because she sprung a leak, she came back and we all got posted onto Sydney because we... They had to put us somewhere, so we all got thrown on Sydney.

Why did you choose the gunnery department?

Just interested in weapons and explosives and anything else that goes bang. Just, yeah, it was just, just interested in weapons

05:30 I suppose, yeah.

So the first exposure to the gunnery's training was on the Vendetta?

The Vendetta, yeah.

And what was the machinery that you were using?

The forty-sixty Bofors gun, fifty-calibre machine guns and the 4.5s, the big guns, we just worked around them, doing maintenance and drills on them and firings, live firings on them. And I just thought,

06:00 "Well this is me. I'm gonna stay here." Cause I didn't feel like going away and doing another course, going completely off track sorta thing. I just wanted to focus just on gunnery, so I stayed with gunnery. And the camaraderie was good with the gunnery teams. They were very helpful even though they were older and higher ranks. But they were a clique on their own, as were the stokers and stuff, the engineers. They were a clique on their own there.

06:30 The rest of the team, rest of the crew mixed with everybody else. Like we mixed, we mixed with everybody else, but when we were on focus, you just gunnery, you just spoke gunnery, lived gunnery, got dirty with gunnery. Yeah, at a young, young age I suppose, I just got interested in gunnery and just stayed gunnery. And on Sydney I just got,

07:00 went back to gunnery again, and just done gunnery drills all the way up to Vietnam. And cause Billy - Billy was on board with me - he went to, down the engine room of course cause his focus was the engineering branch. But yeah, just going through the normal drills, NBCD, fire fighting,

07:30 boat drills, gunnery drills, plus your normal daily duties sorta thing. And they'd spring it on ya, or you'd prep for it, going into defence watches for six hours, eight hours. Going into action stations and staying there for twenty-four, thirty-six hours on the way up, sorta thing, just to get it all prepped, get the team operationally ready. Cause obviously there would've

08:00 been a new crew come on board, so we had to drill, they had to drill us again, into their style of ship workings. Nah, no we fitted in pretty well cause you basically trained for it anyway. It's just different compartments and different necks, weaponry still the same, the orders are still the same. The drills are still the same for fire fighting, except there's different compartments and stuff, so you're pretty much drilled into it. And, well, over the last

08:30 two years now, like, cause we done fire fighting at Cerberus, ah, at Leeuwin, but during all the other ships it's just intense training, fire fighting and NBCD. And...

What's NBCD again?

Nuclear chemical biological defence.

What's involved in that? What's involved in training for that?

Gas attacks, chemical attacks, shutting down the integrity of the ship,

09:00 watertight and gas-tight integrity. Long periods in a gas mask and full suits, so if you're going up in the tropics it was pretty hard yakka sorta thing, but you had to keep your gas masks on. And yeah, just use of the new gas masks. We had to train up on them, cause we had the old canister ones before, the cords and stuff, the old World

09:30 War II jobs.

And what was the new gas mask, what did that involve?

Just a complete facial set, yeah. Different ones now for the Gulf War, for the different strains of gas attack, they're more modern, more updated now, and they get suits with it. We never had, used to have suits, we just have to wear gloves and boots and anti-flash coverings. Yeah basically just

10:00 gearing up to go up there. And this ten day trip to get up there so there's a lot of training, all day every day, and a lot of late night sleeps and stuff plus normal duties. Cause they'd spring it on you, all hours of the morning, whatever, whichever watch was on. The skipper'd just come up and say, "Well we'll have a damage control exercise will be, either it'll hit Alpha or it'll hit Bravo," like we've been hit by a beau missile or something and we'll have to go and

10:30 tend to that. And fire drills and damage control, watertight integrity.

Did you have troops on that trip?

Skeleton crew of troops. They were mainly the logistical staff for getting their gear on board, so they're more on the catering side of things.

You weren't transporting troops to Vietnam?

Nah, we were actually going up to bring 'em back, yeah. And...

How did you feel leaving Australia on that particular trip?

11:00 Didn't sink in till about, outside Newcastle, Brisbane, I think, that we're on our way. Like, because there was a lot of up... There was a big uproar in Sydney before we left. All the mums and dads come down because we were so young. Obviously, my parents weren't there so I just stuck to my normal day's duty. But there was a lot of Garden Island strikes

11:30 and we actually had to be pulled out by our own barges I think, and by our own LCMs, landing craft mediums, to pull us off the wharf. Because the tugs were going on strike, and the wharfies were going on strike and there was protest on the wharf. So Bill and... like a bit of anxiety, like, "What are they saying? Are they saying we're all gonna be killed or

12:00 someone's gonna get killed or what?" Not realising that we're still, sorta like, under age in a sense.

So when you were on the ship, what could you see on the harbour, of the protests?

Lot of people on the wharf, on Garden Island itself. A few boats around cause not many people owned boats then, I suppose, only the rich. But yeah, a few protesters on the water, a lot were on

12:30 the wharf - they actually let 'em in. And Lady Macquarie's Chair, the point there, McMahon's Point I think it's called. I lived across from there for so many years and I don't know what it is. Yeah and a lot of protesters there and flag waving. But there's also a lot of people there like waving us goodbye sorta thing, so there's... You tend to look on the good side of things and concentrate on your job, like rope handling and stuff, cause pretty big hawsers we had to handle.

13:00 And operate our own LCMs at the same time and try and pull us off the wharf with the tug wires and stuff. So you pretty much got stuck to, into the day's job and left the sightseeing I suppose to all the other people who were falling in. Cause when we're leaving Procedure Alpha, that's the whole ship's company's lined up on deck, and us seamen we operate all the lines and stuff, so you haven't got much

13:30 time to be looking around. So yeah, so...

What about going through North Queensland? As you got further to the north, closer to home territory, how did you feel?

Yeah pretty like, apprehensive and, "This is home and we're going through there." And going, just going through North Queensland they'd, like once I knew we were around the Whitsunday Islands I knew we were at Mackay, cause family live in Mackay,

14:00 we were round about there somewhere, and Townsville's next, and Cairns is next. And, but you couldn't really see land sorta thing, cause we were outer Barrier Reef and, oh inner Barrier Reef then we went out. But yeah, sorta like, few tugs at the heartstrings, like, "We should be sitting on there, fishing, not sitting out here going to war, going, oh part of the war."

14:30 And but after that went behind us, we sorta like, come the straight and narrow again and focus. Yeah, like got asked a few times if we wanted to go to ashore. But we stopped at Hamilton Island one time and Hamilton was just a little place then, a little, starting up as a tourist resort. We stopped for a little while, and Dunk Island. Just to let this

15:00 troops ashore for a little while. I think that, and then we... Cause the commanding officer had his wife and kids on board I think, then we had to drop 'em off in Cairns, then we continued up to 'Nam by the, round Papua New Guinea. Yeah, so mainly concentrating on the job I think, like, cause you're so young, every day's an

15:30 adventure, you're always competing with somebody, you're guns looking better than theirs, or your weapons are cleaner than theirs and...

Did they talk to you about the Vietnamese people or VC [Viet Cong] or did they give you any briefing on what you'd be expecting?

No. Just, maybe because it was logistical staff, like we weren't gonna be really involved in it. But no we didn't even get an outline of

16:00 where Vung Tau was or what it looked like or the Mekong Delta or... You know, like cause I was already a trainee ship's diver by then too, like, and so I was always occupied with them too, like checking cylinders and stuff.

When did you first become a trainee in the diving?

On Sydney, on Sydney yeah.

And what was involved in training for that?

- 16:30 Oh, well it was pretty quick-time training, just on, cause we had ship's divers, we had ship's divers and clearance divers on board already. They were already posted on board. They were pretty seasoned divers. Was mainly on shallow water diving, hull searches and stuff, so you just got acclimatised to the equipment, diving on surface
- 17:00 supply compressed air. Yeah, mainly just surface swimming and hull searches. And but I got a cold when we got to Sydney, ah, when we got to Vietnam so I didn't dive so, thank God for that. All brown water, was all mud, silt, but I was boat crew for 'em in the rubber ducks.
- 17:30 Yeah. But yeah there's a lotta like, you'd be at gunnery training one day and then next day I'd be with the divers, be checking divers and stuff and maintaining all the gear. So every day on the ten days up was taken up with something to do. At night we'd, if you're off watch, you'd be just playing cards or something, or watching the big screen,
- 18:00 super eight, a sixteen mill [millimetre] movie or something, and everybody sorta just relaxed around, and then in the next day just get into it again.

What sort of films did you watch on the ship?

Old black and white jobs, like yeah, comedies and, mainly comedies. Not too many war movies, cowboys and Indians and stuff. Yeah, bit of [Jimmy] Cagney and mainly the old stuff, like

- 18:30 Charlie Chaplin and stuff, and maybe just to get the morale up I think, just keep everybody...

We heard in Vung Tau that they had porn [pornographic] films playing. Did they have those on the ship at all?

Nah. Nah they didn't show any on board. Maybe in Vung Tau itself but nah, strictly outlawed in the navy.

- 19:00 Cause nah, I can't remember any. Because, maybe cause there was so many young blokes on board too I think it's the... But I don't think it was condoned on board, like because we all used to have the old reel-to-reels and all the movies came on board were all come in packages, and with security and stuff I suppose. Oh everything was checked so, and nobody had little eight mills or whatever.
- 19:30 Oh they probably did, probably show mess deck showings but mess decks where there were no juniors in it. And nah, didn't see any porn films or anything.

What sort of preparation did they give you for what action was going on in Vietnam at that time?

Just defence watches and action stations, like just fully drilled, really, really well drilled into... Going into defence watches and

- 20:00 waiting, like the, just on standby, plus full on action stations and damage control, that was trained every day on the way up, and on the way back it'd be wound down a bit. But it was full-on yeah, so you really never had much sleep, like I had much rest, unless you were nocturnal and you wanted to watch a movie. But most of us would just get our head down, all
- 20:30 the younger ones anyway, because there was nothing much in the way of ordinary seamen having their own little clubs sorta thing, so you had to mix in with the older guys. And if they say, "Shut up," shut up, so no more orders, so get our heads down. So we just get our heads down and get prepped for watches because all the watches were four hours. So just do our watch and go to sleep, eat and go to sleep, and do our washing and whatever.

Had the guys that you were mates with that you'd all left,

- 21:00 **you'd all done training together, did you all end up on the Sydney?**

Some of us, like we got posted around the place where there's vacancies and stuff or where there's a need, where one training group goes off another, they'd get another batch on. And they're all in preps for Vietnam because nobody knew when Vietnam was gonna end really. So there was all, always training going on, on all the ships, they always had trainees, about twenty or thirty trainees in each ship.

- 21:30 Yeah. And there was all, they were all the same, all full on training. Whereas now I think they train the corps training and then they just do NBCD and stuff nearly every, once a week or something, they do... Unless they're going to the Gulf. But then used to be like every day, just every day you're in your anti-flash,
- 22:00 or you had to carry it around with ya, and your gas masks and stuff with ya, at some, any time they're gonna spring it on ya. And fire parties used to just be cruising all the time, all day every day. Even if

they had nothing to do they were just checking compartments and stuff. It was just, not so much a monotonous phase, but just had to be done, it was just automated into doing it. Like as soon as you get,

- 22:30 fell out from your muster you just go, checking, checking, checking, checking, checking, yeah. I don't know how many times I pulled the bloody breech block out, had a look at the firing pin and put it back together again, just for something to do. Yeah.

You said...?

Or pull weapons apart.

You said prior to joining the navy that you were keen to get in there because there was less segregation, that they pretty much treated everyone equal. Is that the sort of experience you had on the Sydney

- 23:00 **or did you find that there was discrimination at all?**

There was some discrimination, but, like there's one in every crowd I suppose, one in every ship, or couple in every ship. And there was discrimination there, like probably from colour and probably from the sporting field or whatever. But for colour wise and culture wise yeah, but you experienced that all the way through the navy,

- 23:30 there's one in every crowd. But you get to know and understand how, why now, sorta thing, you know, probably got knocked back by a black woman or something. I come up with all these little quick liners, one liners and stuff, and you create a coping skill I suppose and a resilience for it, and usually double backs on 'em. Yeah, you just learn to handle it

- 24:00 after a while. Like when I was younger, I used to get really depressed and, "What am I gonna do about this? He's bigger than me, he's older than me, he's got more rank than me," and all these little things used to sneak in. But after a while I just learned to be quick off the mark and do it in front of a big crowd so the whole crowd'll be on my side, sorta thing. And yeah, you learn to be pretty quick after a while, and that's with all the indigenous boys in the navy now,

- 24:30 they're pretty quick off the mark.

What was the worst case of that you experienced in your younger years?

Just chest pushing, like he was a leading hand and I was a new able seaman I suppose, and he kept calling me 'coon boy', and chest poking and chest poking. And at one stage he even put a knife in me back and drew blood, and that's when I,

- 25:00 that's when I said, "Enough's enough," and I actually goaded him then. And pulled out my knife and I was gonna slice him up, and he said, "I'm only joking, I'm only joking," sorta thing. And I said, "Yeah, well your jokes have gone a little too far then," sorta thing, you know. And it wasn't reported or anything like that, but I think the whole crew understood now like, a joke's a joke, but for constant, "Coon boy, coon boy," and for a week or so, it's

- 25:30 just not on. Now like, now I joke with my subordinates and I say, "What are you asking me for? Like, you lonely or something, you wanna talk to a black fella?" Like, you know, but it's all in jest now and, no it's, maybe something to do with human rights and stuff like that and new policies in the defence force system, it's much better now. But certainly in those days it was,

- 26:00 wasn't full-on, but it was there. It was forever present on every ship, on every establishment, yeah. And not only had your own rank to contend with, you had to contend with your culture and your colour so, and probably your, probably because I looked like a Vietnamese. But, no I learned to handle it at a pretty young age, from Leeuwin actually, I started from there, like, "I'm just as good as you guys

- 26:30 are, and I'll show you through sport, and I'll show you through academia," sorta thing, "and naval training," and just went from there. But no that was the only bad one I suppose. Couple of me other mates had run-ins but they handled it basically the same way as I did, and some got into fights, big fights and stuff, and got discharged.

- 27:00 Some just went to grog and, to mask it all, and got out on medical discharges. But no, this was my career, no-one is gonna kick me out, sorta thing, I was gonna roll with the flow and stand up when I have to stand up. Whether it's, you know, when it gets a little bit too rough, I'll stand up for meself but when it's just a little ripple in the water, I'll just brush it off. So, yeah, that's how I got through.

- 27:30 And...

So when you got to Vung Tau, did you get off the ship or what happened when you first got there, and what could you see?

A lot of flat land with mountains in the back, sorta thing, a lotta smoke, like probably from the camps and stuff, and a lotta... And I was LCM crew, went on a couple of trips inshore but didn't actually step ashore, like just stepped on the wharf sorta thing and

- 28:00 the beach sorta thing, come back. And was just full-on. It was just people going everywhere, just traffic,

traffic, traffic, because it was the hub I suppose, actually the nerve centre. And yeah, it was just a lotta people, a lotta kids, a lotta beggars. Yeah, sorta like a

28:30 lotta carnage. You sorta didn't realise, like, even though I haven't been, like by that stage I haven't been to the Philippines or Singapore and seen the slums and... That's the first thing I thought of, was like, "Is this normal or has this, has it been done like this," sorta thing, you know, like.

Is it a reaction to the war or is it, is that what you mean, to the war?

Yeah, did the war do this or is this a reaction to the war or... Cause there's a lotta traffic,

29:00 same thing again, you just focus on your job and keep a look out and just listen to orders. And gone in and gone back, gone in and gone back a couple of times. Then we changed crews and stuff and I went back to guns again, and the diving team.

What was the diving team responsible for doing at that time?

Ship's security around the ship, to about five hundred metres,

29:30 doing little patrols and thunder bungers in the water plus hull searches every hour. So there was teams in the water all the time, coming up having a break then another team'd go down and doing necklaces and half necklaces under water, where the teams buddy up and they do a hull search.

What were you looking for?

Just mines and, just limpet mines and clearing,

30:00 also because of the delta, with all the muck coming down out of the river, just cleaning filters and stuff. Like, so we'd have other divers doing filters and stuff. And yeah I was just boat crew, just cruising round, cause I had a cold. Yeah.

Did they find anything?

Nah. No, I think we opened fire on some monkeys on a log one time, thinking it was the enemy.

30:30 But that was normally, just with ARs [assault rifles] and fifty cal's [calibres] until we realised they were monkeys, and then divers went out and checked, and no, that was the only time we opened up I think. The other time was on alert, just staying awake.

So did you have weapons all the time?

Yeah, had weapons all the time yeah, we were just armed all the time. Ship's husbandry ceased, there was no working on the upper decks,

31:00 so it was mainly just loading, loading up the flight deck, work that was going on, on the flight deck with the helos [helicopters] coming in, Chinooks coming in with all the gear. Plus barges coming alongside with the troops, bringing a few troops back with all their gear, so done a couple of trips with them. And yeah just, and then I went back into the gunners store to stow ammo [ammunition] and

31:30 weapons and stuff. So all the equipment they bought on board had to be registered in, so we went full-on in there when the troops started coming on aboard.

What was the demeanour of the troops and how did they treat you?

Just like they were relieved, plus a lot of anger, animosity, lot of sadness, lot of... Like, obviously, like I can't imagine how they felt emotionally. But mainly the

32:00 relief I think. They displayed mainly the relief of being on board and going home I suppose, yeah. Yeah that was, you know, I was sorta little bit scared of 'em at first when they come on board cause they were all rough and tumble and unshaven and whatever, cause they're just straight out of the holding pen. And yeah was just

32:30 getting their gear off 'em, and like they had to hand over everything, the bayonets. All the grenades and stuff and ammunition stayed on Vung Tau, but they bought their weapons back with 'em, so had to get all their weapons with 'em and weapons of all sorts, not just Australian. So a few souvenirs, just bring 'em back, stow 'em away in the armoury.

What sort of souvenirs were they bringing back?

Oh Colt 45s and, yeah.

33:00 A few rabbits, like rabbits... I mean like things they acquired like different bayonets. And any other weapons they had was already checked in ashore anyway but, you know, some people had 45s on 'em and they had to be checked in, double checked in again, and destroyed later. But yeah, all sorts of things, little daggers and knives and

33:30 bayonets and, of all sorts. Some different types of magazines, double magazines and like, home-made jobs, for their own use, doubled up. They had to, we had to get rid of them, those who didn't come on the first check, the first register ashore. But yeah, mainly just rolled with the flow with them. After

34:00 a couple of days you get used to 'em after a while, you say, oh they're, you know, leave 'em alone, speak to 'em, you speak when you're spoken to, sort of thing. So, yeah.

So did you end up striking up a conversation with any of them?

Yeah, in the end we sit up and have a yarn and watch movies together and...

What sort of stories were they telling you?

Oh not war stories. Mainly of how, what they're gonna do when they get back and...

34:30 Mainly just a few jovial laughter stuff that, incidents that've happened, but not actually patrol stories. But mainly Vung Tau stories and bit of R&R they had. Just normal clean up round, clean up round Vung Tau. Yeah.

Oh that's what they were doing?

Yeah, just normal, normal debriefing and stuff. And

35:00 what could've happened and what should've happened and they had a bit of a laugh about it. But on actual patrol stories and stuff, they just have, they'd shut down after that.

So what did they do during the day while you were going about your own job?

After a few days of rest, like couple of days of rest, they then get put to ship's husbandry duties, like cleaning up and

35:30 like join in with the crew. And they get, they can either lay around and sunbake, which most of 'em did, or they can join in with the crew and work, and whether it's in the engine room or in the armoury. A few of the armourers used to come and work with us, just to check their weapons and double check their weapons, and there was heaps of them, so... Most just got their gear ready for the big

36:00 parade in Sydney and the homecoming, and yarned about, washed their clobber, ironed, pressed their uniforms and, the jungle greens in those days. Got their slouch hats ready and pressed them again and again and again and again, and spit polish their shoes. Yeah just, those who wanted to work, worked. Those who wanted to do make and break worked on their clothes and stuff. And some just lazed around

36:30 who finished, cause you can't do it forever sort of thing, so some of them just laid around and sunbaked. Sunbathing and ready for the trip back.

How did the navy and army guys get on generally?

Pretty good, like there's a few jokes and few humorous times going on. Like joking about, like even the army used to play on the army blokes. Like somebody'd, they'd all be asleep and somebody'd walk in, one of their sergeants or

37:00 something, and sing out, "Grenade!" And they'd all jump out of their bunks and hit the floor, and all the navy blokes would still be in their bunks, sorta, "Grenade? What's a grenade?" You know, like, and everybody'd be... effen bees'd be flying all over the place and they'll all go back to sleep. Oh little, like tricks like that, sorta thing; they used to play little games. But an operational readiness is just the big difference between the navy and the army sorta thing, where we're listening to an alarm, they're listening

37:30 to a shouted commands, yeah, so. So they'd sing out, "Grenade!" And everybody'd hit the deck and the navy guys'd be still in their hammocks, in their bunks, "What grenade?" sorta. So the army guys'd get up and like, pull the pisser out of them and there'd be a big laugh over that and the story'd go through the whole ship, that 4 Bravo had a grenade attack and all the navy blokes got killed. And,

38:00 but they got 'emselves involved in like damage control exercises and stuff like that, just to learn and be part of it. We had one bloke actually come back, Maddion, he was a conscript, and he got back and then he joined the navy and ended up back there with me. So he was up to the old tricks, and he met a few soldiers over there that he

38:30 knew from before he joined, so he just sorta liked introduced us all around and indoctrinated them into navy shipboard living, sorta thing. And plus a few of the water transport blokes who were on board with us going up, and they sorta like indoctrinated them into shipboard living. And but yeah, so yeah there's a few laughs, a few sad times when you know, they'd get debriefed again, like they were getting debriefed nearly every second day

39:00 on the way back in preps for coming back home.

In what way was that a sad time?

Like you get emotional times come up when they've lost mates and stuff, and they'll go on the quiet and... But there's always the team spirit there to bring 'em up again and get 'em going again. Yeah.

Did you actually, before you bought those troops back, did you spend any time in Vung Tau other than

39:30 **those bits of crewing? Did you actually go into Vung Tau city?**

I did go get a helicopter ride into, halfway to Saigon with the commanding officer, cause they just said, "Who wants to go, go." And that gave me a real look at what army operations is all about I suppose, like it's, it was just a mess. Yeah, like

40:00 in a Chinook with an Iroquois cruising alongside ya, and just to turn around just for a joyride and come back, and over Vung Tau itself, yeah. So yeah, we were all over the place really, like doing bits and pieces here and there.

What could you see from the Chinook?

Just like the camps and stuff and the buildings, lotta smoke, mainly because of fires that they've started

40:30 on there. But mainly just green, it was green and green and open land area. Didn't go towards the delta sorta area, we sorta went straight in and straight out. But yeah it was just like a tropical rain forest that's just been messed up, sorta thing, you know, like. And I believe now it's a tourist resort, like yeah,

41:00 it's all prettied up and done up, but yeah it was pretty messed up. Like just the camps and stuff, the few...

Tape 6

00:31 **...one thing about the Vendetta, when you joined the Vendetta it had recently returned from Vietnam, is that right?**

Yeah.

So when you joined the Vendetta what, were they talking much about what they had experienced and what had been going on?

Mainly gunnery talk, on the gun line, when they're actually on the gun line, how many rounds, salvos they fired and what the watches were gonna be like if we, if I ever get in the situation. So there's a lotta

01:00 briefing on them and what actually happens, and not so much where the shell lands but what actually goes on in the gun house, in the gun bay. And the, so we had to get ourselves up to a standard that was required for Vietnam sort of thing, if we ever ended up on the gun line. And so a lot of practice in that, air defence

01:30 for the 40-60s and stuff.

Did they talk much about the war and what they'd seen at the war?

No, mainly about the Philippines, because they were just on the gun lines. Well you don't see the enemy when you're on the gun line. Maybe the boys on the Perth had a, on the Perth was it? Perth or Brisbane, had that accident on there with the missile, the boys on the Vendetta, the veterans who were still on board

02:00 just spoke about the daily routine and stepping ashore in the Philippines. Because they just went straight from Olongopo to the gun line, done their fuellings and stuff and re-ammo-ing off the supply ships and then back to the Philippines so, no there's no mention of Vung Tau or the enemy or... Probably just a few jokes I suppose, writing names on shells and

02:30 messages on salvos and shells to pass the time away.

So when you joined the Sydney, how did things change for you? Or what was the difference between say, working on the Sydney and the Vendetta, in terms of the type of ship it was?

More work, more work and smaller guns. Like they only carried the 40-60 Bofors guns on board,

03:00 the twin mounts, the single mounts, which is mainly for our own defence, air defence I suppose, like cause she had the escorts with her when she was going up. But, and just different duties I suppose, like all the rest of the stuff, the training was the same, like the action station stations and all them, but

03:30 it's just the different compartments and the size of the ship itself.

You got promoted to be a loader on the Sydney, is that right, to be...?

Yeah.

Yeah, can you tell us about what that job involved and...?

Oh I used to be the supply number, cause the young ones started, as supply numbers and two or three supply numbers to each gun, and then one supplier. And then I got promoted to be, well, if you can say

it's a promotion but, got detailed off to be the

04:00 loader. And the loader becomes the loader on the 40-60 plus the lookout sorta thing, while the aimer reads a book or just listens to the orders on the headphones. Well the loader doesn't carry the headphones so we're mainly just visual and listening to the PA [public address] system. Yeah it was a big....

Oh sorry...

Yeah it was a big step but you trained into it, like everybody has a go at loading and supply

04:30 number and aimer, and it's just that the older blokes, the more experienced blokes are the aimers and stuff.

So the loader was actually loading the guns?

Yeah.

Can you tell us what's involved in doing that?

Grabbing a clip of four and loading the ammo rack. How can you say it? Yeah, in time of battle,

05:00 you just gotta keep the, the weapon loaded, armed, and while he's firing away you've just gotta keep up. It fires at about a hundred and twenty a minute, so you got a clip of four and while you're pulling 'em out of the letterbox racks, the supply number is feeding the letterbox racks, so it's a three-man thing, sorta thing. Oh for supply of ammo, it's a two-man thing or three-man thing, and if it's battle situation,

05:30 then you get a third or fourth supply number who brings 'em up from the magazine and places the boxes and opens the boxes and gets 'em ready and, while the supply number feeds the letterbox racks. Yeah.

Can you describe the guns on the Sydney for us?

Forty millimetre, Bofors, about a hundred and twenty a minute. We had single barrels,

06:00 hydraulically operated and twin mounts which were, can go into, switch to manual elevation and manual, manual elevation depression and training, and two supply numbers, two barrels and just one aimer.

06:30 So yeah, was a joint thing, was pretty old fashioned and, but it used to work. But you get, but they're water cooled cause they were like pumping out more.

When you say old fashioned, was it old fashioned for that time or...?

Yeah, for that time, yeah, like pretty outdated equipment. Well they still had 'em, they still got 'em now, but not the, not

07:00 the twin mounts, the patrol boats, Fremantle-class patrol boats still carry the 40-60 Bofor at the front, on the fo'c's'le. But they're a reliable weapon but just the aiming and the elevation and stuff, they're like hydraulically run, so they'd be much more smooth if they were electric.

07:30 So, yeah so there's a lot of anticipating the order, like for actual pulling the trigger, so you actually gotta... Like they used to have the gyro sights on 'em, which predicts where your shell's gonna actually land, as opposed to the aircraft or the surface target, but yeah you just get used to 'em. I became an aimer on Vampire, like promoted again, wow, and to an aimer there

08:00 mainly because of my marks on, at Flinders firing range I suppose, like and working on Bofors all the time. So, but there's a lot of anticipation where the shell's actually going to land and you follow tracer anyway, like all the 40-60s are tracer, hundred per cent tracer. So if it's an air attack, you just follow tracer and just realign as, where the shells go,

08:30 and keeping the target in the sights itself, but readjusting and adjusting to where the tracers land. Yeah.

Was it a big deal for such a young, just new recruit really, to get that job?

Yeah, well it was, yeah, to get the job, cause usually we ordinary seamen are loaders for fifty calibre, or supply numbers.

09:00 And but to be elevated to loader on a 40-60 at a young age, like yeah, was a buzz, was, "Look at me! Look at me!" sort of thing, not knowing what would've happened if there was really come to crunch time. But I expect like we were all trained into it, your heads down you don't look at the target, you just concentrate on loading. It's a no-no to look at the target while you're loading, because you lose your fingers, or your gloves. But

09:30 yeah, soon as firing starts you just concentrate on loading and it's just, once the first round goes off, it's switch off time and switch on to loading and safety procedures.

So why do you think you got that job, being so young at that time and...?

Inquisitive. I don't know, maybe because working on the weapons all the time I suppose and

- 10:00 maybe they thought it was time for someone else to have a go. Or maybe they can go and have a rest and sit back and let me stand up there being a lookout, probably a bit of both. But, I don't know. It's just, you just take it as they come, like just take each appointment as it comes, each detail.

Can you describe the Sydney for us? Can you sort of walk us through the boat, the ship, for us?

- 10:30 Old rust bucket. Yeah, was pretty old, poor girl. Never really had any time for a refit or good refit and sandblasting as such, sort of thing. And yeah she was just cosmetics, just cosmetics was holding it up I think. And she was nearly the end of her time anyway, although the Melbourne kept
- 11:00 going but Sydney was also majestic class. Yeah way past her use-by date, but she done the job, good girl. Yeah, big, even the flight deck, if the Halo crews knew what we knew they wouldn't have landed on it. All pretty, all pretty coats and cosmetics done up, some parts were roped off for safety
- 11:30 where they can't land, but it stood up to the test, yeah, done the job.

What was the crew like?

They were pretty jovial crew actually, most of 'em were, probably done a few runs on the ferry, and so they were pretty much used to it, and yeah they were pretty jovial crew. Like, well nearly all the ships I've

- 12:00 been on, they've been a good crew. But Sydney was a special crew, maybe because they kept 'em on there, because they've done it before and they could train others. So they just went about their daily duties and yeah, helped everybody who joined the ship, like, "Welcome to the family," sorta thing. Like we all stepped ashore together, in ranks, but then met ashore again later so,
- 12:30 because you couldn't be seen stepping ashore with a petty officer or a leading hand, but then always meet ashore and stick together ashore. Like on the second trip we had R&R in Singapore and we all hung out of the same spot, everybody went to the same place. Stayed away from the Kiwis and the Yanks, but the Kiwis, like we used to mix with them all the time at British forces. But usually kick off by
- 13:00 ourselves, just the crew. We all go to the same place, hang out there. Petty officers'd go bowling or something, or go somewhere shopping, all us younger groups'd stay together, able seamen and below. And yeah, so it was pretty good, all ranks, all rates mixed together. We had engineers and gunners and electricians, we all hung out together. Maybe it was just like family, like we're on the one,
- 13:30 one ship we're going somewhere, doing a job.

You said earlier that, you know, when you joined the navy, you sort of knew that the you know, war was on but you thought, well you're probably not gonna get there because you're too young. When you were told you were going to be going to Vietnam, how did you react to that?

Had all these thoughts running through, racing through my head like, "Will I tell Mum?

- 14:00 Will I tell Dad? Will he be proud?" You know, like all these little things racing through your mind. "Do I tell my girlfriend?" Because by the time they get the letter anyway, through Australia Post... "Hi," be donkey's years later anyway. So I just got on the grog I think, the last week before we went. Was still under age cause twenty-one was the drinking age, but a few bars in Sydney
- 14:30 used to let us in, few pubs down near Circular Quay. And yeah, we just got on the grog and waited, yeah, cause most of us didn't have family, like only the New South Wales-men had family, immediate family, close. Yeah, rest of us just partied.

And were you con...?

Maybe to block it out.

Were you concerned at all for your future at that point?

- 15:00 Yeah of course, yeah I was thinking like, "What if we get hit? What if we get attacked? They've got Russian MiGs [jet fighters] now and Chinese MiGs, they're pretty mobile through the air." Thinking about my own job, like, "How will I cope with it?" And I wasn't a loader then, I was a supplier number. "How will I keep up with supply?" But knowing where these things are buzzing round at high speed. "How will the escorts assist us," sort of thing.
- 15:30 Yeah all these things race through your mind. Like, you sort of like, it's like double checking on yourself, "What would happen if we had a hit close to our gun sponsons?" and sort of thing. "Would we go to help them or, do we keep firing at the enemy, or does fire party take charge, or do we let one hand go, one spare hand to go and assist in the
- 16:00 fire?" But you're briefed in all that again and again and again and again anyway, so. But yeah, you get all these different thoughts running through your mind. You get concerned for your own life, because I was only, I was like one of the watches when we're going to defence watches when we're in harbour. I

was boat crew so I was always thinking about, "If I'm boat crew up in the for'ard fifty cal, will I get hit?" cause we didn't have flak jackets,

16:30 just tin lids. Yeah, all sorts of things. But it all comes back to like, focusing on your job and what you've been trained to do, like get in and get out.

Did you express any of those fears to anybody else?

In the mess deck, we all sit down and have a yarn, like we're all the same age group, have a few laughs over what might happen.

17:00 I think it's a form of debriefing, before it even, before we were even briefed. Yeah it was just anticipating the order I suppose and just talking about, you know, what'll happen to my girlfriend and what'll, you know, what would Mum and Dad think, and what're they thinking now. And because we're in uniform, we know we've got a job to do, we gotta go, just we all more worried about what's going on at home. Cause they know what ship

17:30 you're on anyway, and they'll get a message that we'll be going over, through Australia Post. But yes, it's mainly not thinking about ourselves. It's mainly about, thinking about friends and families and a few thoughts about what are they doing now, while we're doing this. Yeah.

Did you actually write to your parents at some stage, to tell them what you were doing?

Yeah but only

18:00 just briefly because, just to explain the whole operation of the thing, like she wouldn't have understood anyway, so. So it was just a brief letter that we'll be, "I'm on HMAS Sydney and we're going to Vietnam." Cause she didn't know where Vietnam was anyway or what Vietnam was all about. Yeah cause by that time my brother was on, still on Melbourne yeah; he was still on Melbourne.

18:30 So yeah, he wrote a letter too, saying that I'll be going over and yeah was only brief, from what I can remember.

What about your girlfriend? Can you tell us about your girlfriend?

I used to, I stayed in touch with her, like I used to write to her every week,

19:00 but I never really got back any, like answer, referencing Vietnam. Like she used to write back every week also, but was never any expression on Vietnam, so to speak, sort of thing.

Where was your girlfriend?

In Thursday Island.

In Thursday Island. So when did you start going out with her?

Year 10, my last year at school, and she was in Grade 8, I was

19:30 in Grade 9 ah, 10. Yeah so she was pretty young so she probably wouldn't have understood it properly anyway, so.

So had it been hard leaving her behind?

Well by the time we'd met I'd already expressed my thoughts about going into the navy anyway so no, like my mindset was already embedded into, "The next recruit is coming up. I'm gonna join up," so

20:00 she knew about that. No, I don't think she, it worried her too much, like I hope so, I hope not. No we used to just write normal teenage stuff, yeah. Not too much expression on the war and trips overseas sort of thing.

20:30 **So when you did make that first trip to Vung Tau and you said that your job had changed to the supplies...?**

No, to loader.

Sorry, oh by that... You were loader when you went to Vung Tau were you?

Yeah.

Oh okay, right. So prior to that you'd been working also in, as the supplies.

Supply number.

Did your job change again after that, after being a loader, while you were in...?

Oh you work all over the place.

In Vietnam, okay. So were you involved in weapons

21:00 **stores or something?**

Gunners store, yeah.

Gunners store. Was that while you were in Vietnam as well?

Not because of that but just part of the crew, and you get allocated parts of ship. Like I'm gunners store in cruising stations and action stations and defence watches, I'm a supply, I'm a loader.

Oh okay, so depending on what the situation was on the ship, your job changed.

Yeah.

So can, so at action stations, you were loader?

21:30 **Can you describe a little bit for us what action stations meant in that, exactly, what happened on the ship?**

The whole ship moves. Everybody just goes into battle stations. All basically battle stations are you man the guns, special teams going to the engine room, the ship is shut down, watertight integrity, fully waterproofed and gas-proofed,

22:00 and you don't move, you just stay at your station and fight it out. And damage control team from HQ [Headquarters], HQ1 is the only team that moves around the ship, and they're doing checks and stuff.

How quickly can the crew sort of get into that sort of situation, from being in a normal situation to...?

Depends on each ship but usually you go into,

22:30 if attack is imminent, you go into defence watches before that anyway, so you got partially the crew closed up in readiness. So with, depending on the ship, I think the least amount of time would be about four, five minutes and for the crews to change over and action stations take over. Cause usually the, say for the guns, the captain of the mountain will be there

23:00 in the turret, it's just the gun bay and all them gotta close up where the actual supply numbers for the shells for the big guns, and on the 40-60s. It'd be just a quick changeover anyway, matter of someone putting on his gear and coming up and changing over and the chef leaving the galley, putting on his gear and coming up as supply number for the ammunition. So, yeah, different

23:30 ships.

So on the Sydney, as you approached Vietnam, at what point did the situation change on the ship? At what point did things become more crucial, if you like?

Two days out we start getting into full defence force, defence station mode, defence watches and we stay in that state of readiness until we get in to Vung Tau, and we stay in that state of readiness again until we leave, until we're about

24:00 a day out. It's closed up, cleared away basically for about four, five days, and it's full-on - you eat where you are stationed at and you drink where you're stationed at, and you only go to the toilet, sort of thing, go to the heads when needs be. So everything's brought to you. There's a catering crew that runs around. They're made up of bits and pieces of every

24:30 thing, bits and pieces of everybody. And they come round, and engineers feed engineers, and all in Chinese takeaway boxes and, so you basically eat and sleep where you sit, that's it.

So for four days or so you are like that?

Yeah.

So that must've been pretty exhausting?

Yeah you, like you leave one on lookout, on lookout duties and one on headphones, and the others'll sort of play cards under a red light,

25:00 red torch, have a bit of a yarn, let one have a sleep, and you take turns sleeping. So you sleep out in the open like on the gun sponsons, no mattress, no nothing, it's just laying on the deck or whatever, curl up where ever you can. Yeah it's just, make do. That's those days, I don't know about nowadays, they're probably just sent to bed. Nah, I don't, nah they'd still be the same. And defence watches could be anything

25:30 from four hours, depending on what state of alert we were in, from four, six hours up to eight hours, so you could be there for a long time.

So on that first trip into Vung Tau, do you remember what the situation was there with how long the defence watches were and...?

Yeah, about the same, like was just full-on, motors running, the guns, motors and the guns

26:00 running all the time. Until we actually drop the pick, drop the anchor, and then you go into a modified defence watch where people can go away and do other jobs. Like in the past, the ship, check paperwork and do whatever, but still be fully geared up, fully rigged up ready to go. And so, and then you get, like two left on the gun, as opposed to four, so they can go away and do stuff and write

26:30 letters and whatever, and cruise around and have a yarn and whatever. And you just break it up, that's all.

So how would you describe your state of mind as you were approaching Vietnam two days out and you sort of go into this high alert situation. And how, what were you thinking about as you approached a country that was at war?

How can you say it? Like, your mind's focused on the

27:00 job, obviously, but I suppose as a gunner it's, your thoughts are like, "Will I hit? Will I hit or will I miss?" Or, "Will the barrel overheat?" Or like, "How much will I have to pump out before the barrel overheats?" And, "Will they get me?" sorta thing. And you sorta

27:30 joke with the other fellas, like, and you jeer each other up at a watch, so we're against starboard watch closed up, or whatever. "Won't let any of the buggers get us," sorta thing. "We'll be on the ball." And it's mainly like more to the point of jeering each other up, like clicking as a team, clicking again as another team and seeing it through I suppose, like till our eight hours

28:00 is up. Yeah so, like, because of the space in between, like you'd be, you'd close up and you'd be sorta like hyped up for the first two hours sorta thing, even though you know you're still in the South China Sea. The two hours, you'll be like all geared up and gung-ho and whatever, then you go to sorta relaxed stations and you're sent to yarn and you play a few card games and talk about girlfriends. And

28:30 then as you're gearing up to go off watch, you're geared up to jeer up the new team coming on, and you get everything ready for 'em and what the state of the gun is and where the ammo's, double check how much ammo's in there. Just do a count, headcount, and the gun covers are off and you know, like whether, basically a proper handover. So, and you get about half an hour before

29:00 the actual watch changes again, and you're jeered up again, and you're geared up and jeered up to gear up and jeer up the next team coming on. So you get that break in between, about three hours in between where you just lolly-gag around and play cards and have a lookout and, because there's lookouts closed up all over the place. But you just look after your sector, and then you take turns, like one gets his head down the other one goes up. But for the hour on the other end and

29:30 two hours at the start, it's full-on. It's sort of like, even though you know you're miles from Vietnam but we're in the waters, so we know we're in the waters. So it's...

And when you were in, when you did arrive in Vung Tau, could you hear any of the military action that was going on?

Nah, not really, mainly a lot of helicopters, there's a lot of helos flying around, there's just a constant buzz of boats

30:00 and helicopters, and just the landscape itself.

That's all right. Could you, so you were saying there were lots of helicopters. Could you hear any artillery fire at all or...?

Nah, one night we did see some gun ships going round the perimeter. there was tracer, there was no noise or anything, but it was just a shower of tracer. I don't know what they were doing or where they were doing it, but it was just a little bit of

30:30 a show. Cause we were closed up anyway so we, like with ear muffs and stuff on. And because we go into PA silence, there's no information being passed over the PA system that gun ships are on the perimeter. But our GDP, gun direction platform, tells us that, you know, through the headphones, that they're doing a strafing run.

31:00 Probably suspect Viet Congs or something, or some area there, but you could see the shower from where we were.

So were there any really tense moments for you while you were there?

Just receiving the troops I think was the most tense, intensive one, because it's just a look on their faces and stuff, where it was like mixed emotions, like happy and sad. So you tend

31:30 to fall into their mode of thinking sort of thing, but yeah, tend to be more empathic with a little sympathy thrown in, but you can't sort of throw too much sympathy into it, because like there's a job ahead, so yeah, you just stick with the job ahead. But it's intense, like when they actually come on board, because it's like, "Wow, youse guys have been there,

32:00 eighteen months in the scrub and the wet and the rain and the mud and slush," and now they're going

home, so at the end line and now they're going home, so that lightens you up a bit. But the first load that comes on board, like it's pretty intense, like you don't know how to feel. You feel sorry for 'em and you feel glad for 'em at the same time sort of thing. But then the

32:30 second load it starts to ease off a bit cause you gone more automatic into unloading stuff and helping 'em up, and helping 'em up with their gear. And by the third or fourth barge that comes alongside, you're pretty well over it. But it's just the first one that comes on board, because they're looking at a grey ship and Australian faces and they're going home sorta thing. But yeah it's pretty intense the first boat. Cause the helos that land on board, they're just

33:00 faces that come and go, so you know, they probably be there for the next eighteen months sort of thing, you know, they're just landing, they're just dropping gear off and going again, dropping gear off and going again. But it's the actual boarding, when the troops are actually coming on board or jumping off the helo, they're still pretty well switched on to the job, like they're not safe yet, like that, to what I can appreciate is,

33:30 they're not safe and sound yet, you know, they're probably still not safe and sound now with emotional problems and stuff, and social problems. But even when the deck, when they're on deck they're still apprehensive of what's going on around 'em and trying very hard to follow orders but at the same time watching their back sorta thing. Like it wasn't until about a couple of days out that they started mixing in

34:00 and feeling free and yeah, that's about...

What was your impression of them as soldiers?

Pretty proud I think. Sorta like, looking at 'em was just yeah, it's like wow, it's just a buzz that, not only

34:30 that they're there on board the ship, but a professional looking outfit who's been in the scrub for eighteen months and still coming out looking professional, sorta thing, like in their dress. Where we've seen the American soldiers just wear singlets around the place, and well, maybe our boys were the same while they're in camp, but just coming on board the ship, they're still

35:00 professional sort of thing, and a few rips and tear here and there but still keeping the image up. And not looking, not showing any emotions that are like, depressing or anything like that; they're still at it like a professional attitude. Like they're always checking each other, checking each others' backs, backpacks, and they're

35:30 on a ship out in the harbour but there's still the drill, the drill and the regimentation, so just checking each other, still professional. That's one thing that I can remember that we didn't even have to direct 'em, like maybe at one point but all the other points where they were dismounting, they were just listening to orders and being very professional. They relaxed later

36:00 and, you know, walk around with no shirt on and feeling a little bit more free, but while they're embarking, they were pretty professional looking, with all their gear.

How did you feel about being a young sailor who was involved in bringing these troops home?

Not having been involved in the war as such, like conflict

36:30 wise, like face on, but you feel proud to be bringing 'em home. That was sorta like intensified a little bit more when we had the march in Sydney and we got bombarded with all the rubbish. But, that made me really angry, but once the anchor came home and was housed and we sailed away, you sorta feel that sense of relief and being part of a team that brought 'em home,

37:00 for the first, especially cause it was the start of the first retreat. Yeah, you feel that sense of pride I suppose, yeah, and at a young age, "Wow, I'm part of this." And I think that went through the whole crew, like, bringing 'em home. Yeah.

And on the trip home, what sort of entertainment was there?

Oh Miss Sydney

37:30 contests and Miss Vung Tau contests. So yeah, so we had a little... Oh you had horse races, like uckers contests, there's all these little games that're, it's just fun and games on the way back. All the off watch navy personnel, they'll join in and the rest'll stay on watch and drive the ship and

38:00 drive the engines, and keep lookouts and stuff and look after all the cargo. The normal duties that, yeah. Every couple of days there'll be something going on, a talent quest or something, or the band'd strike up, we'd have a makeshift band that'll start playing. And barbecues and more barbecues, and barbecues and doing everything to make 'em feel at home, back to Australian sorta thing.

38:30 Some crazy things like crossing the line ceremonies and introducing 'em to King Neptune, even though they'd been across the equator. But doing it, like the boys who, for the navy boys, the ones we missed on the way up, who were on watch, we'd get 'em on the way back.

When you say crossing the line ceremony, was that...

Crossing the equator.

...crossing the equator? And what did that involve, the ceremony?

A lot of initiation

39:00 to King Neptune and his missus, forgotten her name, yeah, anyway. But yeah a lot of dragging sailors through garbage, week-old garbage, a lot of floggings and whippings and there's bears and sheriffs running around, rounding up the ship's company and all the young officers and young sailors who had never been across the water before, the

39:30 equator. Yeah, get a few of the army blokes who wanted to be a part of it, didn't force them, but they all get a little certificate after that, they been across the equator on HMAS Sydney . And but yeah, so there's a lot of barbecues and a lot of bands and a lot of instruments playing, lot of games, lot of talent quests.

Tell us about the Miss Vung Tau contest?

Oh they all gotta dress up with whatever they got, and with bikinis or whatever or fancy dress,

40:00 oh not fancy dress but in some sheila's clobber, usually a roll of cheesecloth is the favourite and cut it to your size. And yeah, they're all got hairy chests and big beards with lipstick on, yeah, make up. Usually they'd buy, some of the boys buy it in Sydney before you leave, like all the make-up kits and stuff, and they already nominated a Miss for their mess. So each mess has got their own

40:30 Miss, like Miss 2 Delta or Miss 4 Bravo or something, or Miss 1-1 RAR [Royal Australian Regiment], or something, or 3 RAR or, so yeah.

Did you dress up?

No, no, no, I wasn't dressed up, I was a social organiser. I don't look too crash hot on a metal deck with high heels.

Tape 7

00:30 **...pulled in and there was the parade, were you there for the parade?**

Yeah.

Can you tell us what happened on that parade?

A normal parade where, a welcoming home parade, just marching down George Street in Sydney, navy, army and bit of air force from the rotary wing from Vietnam were, came back with us.

01:00 Just a big tickertape parade but with a few moments of anxiety when people, all the protesters were throwing ink and stuff at us and rubbish and... But the show went on, went through the whole street. But that really bought a few blokes undone like, after the sense that they'd been over for Australia and

01:30 have this happen to 'em when they come back, sailors as well. And like, I even went through a stage where, because we were still stepping in uniform, going up to red anchor and changing my tally band on my ship to go to red anchor and get another one put on, from another ship that didn't, hadn't been to Vietnam, and just to go through town like that. And that was only for a couple of weeks sorta thing, like in, going incognito

02:00 under another ship's name, cause we were still young and stepping ashore in uniform, until I turned seventeen. But yeah, was sad in a way because you know, they'd just been through hell and got back, and lost so many of their mates over there and countrymen, that this could happen to 'em. You know, like, it was mainly the rent-a-crowd I think,

02:30 the political arms. But the show went on, we just kept going, didn't stop the show, just kept marching. Bands were playing and clangers were clanging.

When you say some of the blokes came undone, how did they display that?

Oh just like taking off their slouch hats and just swearing in disgust and stuff, but they regained their composure and put their uniform back on.

03:00 And I don't think some, or word is, I think some of 'em didn't even attend the march, I think, because they were so depressed. But certainly the ones that were there, held their composure pretty well, kept their composure.

So then...?

Mainly just looking at the cheering crowd rather than the jeering crowd.

03:30 But cause the police were there and they were trying to stop a few of the protesters. But some had even come out of the tall buildings, yeah. You get all the tickertape coming out of the buildings and stuff round George Street, but you also get a few ink bottles and inkwells and, come flying down. Yeah, but oh, other than that, the show went on.

And what happened for you after that, you went back for another trip

04:00 **to Vietnam?**

Yeah I went back for one more trip on Sydney. But that was mainly just a logistical operation where we brought back all the containers and stuff and we come back via the west coast, Western Australia and back. And then I went to Cerberus.

On that trip coming back, the second time though, you picked up Americans, was that the, did you pick

04:30 **up American...?**

No we had some gear, onboard containers, didn't have sort of like Americans as such, but American equipment on board and we had to ditch, well we did have a few Americans on board. We had to ditch some of their stuff over in the South China Sea, because there was past their use-by date and wrecked. And they went back by helicopter and we came back with all the Australian stuff.

05:00 But we went to, around the Great Australian Bight. There was a few soldiers on board and that was rough as guts, oh was fifteen metre swells or something – it was massive. Lost a few containers over the side there so there's a present from the government, laying at the bottom of the Great Australian Bight. But that was more of a quiet trip, just straight in, straight out. A few days of

05:30 R&R in Singapore and South China Sea with a few typhoon rescues. That was, but pretty much operationally that was pretty quiet trip, just in and out and back to Sydney, unloading the gear.

Can you explain what happened when you hit that, those rough seas in the [Great] Australian Bight? What happened on the ship when that, when you, and describe what was, what you were seeing?

06:00 Just white water. I mean for an aircraft carrier, for the flight deck to be going underwater, spoon, as we call it, to go into the water, that woulda meant that the fo'c's'le where the anchor's kept, and the anchor cables and stuff, would've been also underwater. But to see the flight deck go underwater and out again and just the whole ship shuddering, old as it was, and we just, everybody was awake for the whole twenty-four hours or something, just

06:30 waiting for leaks to spring. And it was just uncomfortable, even though it was a big ship. But once a big ship gets a roll on, it just gets, it just keeps going and takes about twenty miles of calm weather to right itself again. And even when you're turning in calm water, it takes about twenty miles or ten miles of calm water to, for it to stabilise again. And with us being top

07:00 heavy with all the gear on board, like with the spooners going into the swell, we just lost a few containers, a few Land Rovers and stuff, those that were stored on the upper deck. And yeah, pretty wrecked when we got on the other side and towards Spencer Gulf. And smooth sailing after that but a lotta cleaning up to do and a lot of paperwork to be done and counting, counting of all containers and equipment in the containers and

07:30 stuff, and what went over the side, what was in those containers, which is all...

Was it fierce enough for you to be afraid for your life?

Yeah. Like because it was an old ship and you knew, like it only takes one leak and probably the whole side would just rip open, because it'll just continue on. Like we'd be on watch on deck in the funnel space and there'd be a big wall of water coming in through the funnel space

08:00 and actually ripped one of the Geminis off, and ripped it off and left it dangling and we all had to scramble into the hangar deck and kept watch from in there, the actual muster. Yeah, it was pretty terrible. We shoulda come the east coast, inside the reef. But no, the weather was good until we got round to about Albany, Albany-Bunbury area, then it hit full on,

08:30 and all the way to Adelaide. Oh days and days of rough weather. Yeah.

Is that the worst weather you'd been in?

No, I've been in worse in oh, two occasions on Vampire going across, on my third trip to Vietnam as an escort to Vietnam and that was, we were in the South China Sea. And we actually got,

09:00 got, our fo'c's'le, the front deck actually sunk about three or four inches, up to six inches I think, because all the poles underneath were bent and we had to go into Japan to get fixed up, to get it cut out and redone. And that was on the, yeah, third trip to Vietnam escort duties for the Sydney. I think that was near on our

09:30 last trip I think, the Sydney's last trip, or near on.

So what happened to, for that to, did you hit bad weather?

Yeah, bad weather, same thing, huge, huge, monstrous swells. It was a typhoon and we just got buried. Went up and up and up, went in through one trough and out the crest of another and just dropped off the, dropped off the crest into a trough, just shuddering, just smashed everything, all the

10:00 ventilation, trunkings and light bulbs were popping and... And the fo'c's'le and the poles that hold up the fo'c's'le was actually all bent inside the ship, so the weight of the 4.5 on top had just sorta like shuddered down. And yeah but it didn't destroy the gun itself, but the fo'c's'le actually sunk, so we had, so Vampire's now sitting

10:30 in Darling Harbour with a sunken fo'c's'le and reconstructed mess deck, 2 Charlie mess, yeah.

So when you hit bad weather like that, what are you doing underneath when it's all...? Can you feel the ship going over those crests?

Yeah, you can feel it, like it's, how do you...? It's some moments of terror, some moments of apprehension like, or

11:00 you appreciate it or you respect the weather. Mainly it's in for respect I think, how to handle it, from the commanding officer down, how you handle it and how you handle the ship in that weather because it's not gonna change for you. You either slow down or speed up, or turn or change course for the comfort and safety of the crew. And this one was just a fluke, fluke crest that we went over, it was a

11:30 big dipper on the other end, and it just crashed and it was just horror, just screams and... And one bloke lost an ear, had to be stitched up on, while we were in that weather. And yeah, was busted knees and busted elbows and medically unfit and half the crew was on the front end anyway, up the front end of the ship and by the time we got to Japan.

12:00 Next day was dead flat. It's just what the weather does, just a cruel sea and sometimes could be beautiful sea. And but yeah you learned to respect it, and how you handle the water with the safety of your crew. And...

How did your commanding officer...

...prioritise it.

...deal with that, at the time?

How...?

Do you remember how the commanding officer dealt with it at the time?

He stayed pretty cool and he, we actually slowed

12:30 down, cause we normally cruise at about fifteen knots so he slowed down to about, oh, ten knots or so, just to give us a little bit of headway and rolled with the weather till we got clear water or the swells got a little bit smaller, the seas got a little bit smaller, then we rearranged that course and veered back to Japan. Yeah but we went in there for a couple of days to get cut up and

13:00 shored back up again and welded up. But yeah, it was pretty frightening. And the other one was coming back from New Zealand when I was on one of the patrol boats here in Cairns. We got up to ten to fifteen metres in a patrol boat and the, we were in a trough where, we were in troughs where the crest, tip of the crest is taller than the mast. And we had to cruise five miles apart from each other, with another

13:30 patrol boat and, just for safety. And that one for about eight days, and then we got to the [Great] Barrier Reef was dead flat.

So eight days in that weather?

Yeah. Normally would've been a four day journey but we done the same thing, slowed down and rolled with the weather, played with the weather, conserved fuel for any emergencies we have to do.

So that's a

14:00 **smaller vessel than the ones...?**

Yeah they're only 44 metres these ones, the patrol boats, so, yeah we just about fit in the gutters, so it's pretty big. But because we fit in the gutters I felt a little bit better, cause you sort of like can ride it in and ride up the other end, was still fierce winds, 50-60 knot winds and no-one allowed on the upper deck.

14:30 Other than that it's been pretty good out there, handled it pretty well.

So that, after the Sydney you moved to, what was the ship?

To Cerberus.

To Cerberus.

To training establishment, yeah and done my corps training there, my branch training to be an able seaman. So that was after two years in the navy I went to Cerberus and done my actual course for gunnery.

- 15:00 And then posted back to Vendetta, to do escort duties again back to Vietnam, so. Same drill on the way up, full-on every day. Then...

Were you proud to become an able seaman? Was it a big deal?

No wasn't a big deal because it was, because you're sorta like been doing the job for the last eight,

- 15:30 twelve months anyway, but with a different rank so it was just a matter of getting your shoulder patch on and your little piece of paper saying you're now an able seaman and your pay changes. No it's just a, especially after what you've been through, you probably done more than other able seamen anyway. Like after two trips to Vietnam and the rough weather and all the logistics that go with it, and

- 16:00 you feel you're already an able seaman, except you haven't done your three month corps training. Yeah, so, yeah so you're sorta like looked on by the other trainees as someone who's been there, done that, so it's just a formality of doing the course and getting it over and done with and going back to sea. So we had options where we wanted to go. I wanted to go back to gun ships so I went back to Vampire, but knowing that we were going to go back to Vietnam,

- 16:30 but I was more prepared for it, more broken in, if you can say. Like all the intensity of closing up on watches, and defence watches and NBCD was, just came second nature, just... And you're looked on as, some of the crews on Vendetta were the crew off Vampire anyway so you're looked on as now more one of the team, or part of the team, and

- 17:00 you fitted in much better.

And was Vampire similar to Vendetta as a vessel?

Yeah they're both Daring-class destroyers yeah. The early gun ships are full of, just full of weaponry. Maybe why I fell in love with them because they're just full of weapons. It's full of weapons.

And that's your thing.

That's my thing, yeah.

And what, did you ever feel in the, when

- 17:30 **you were escorting, was there any cause to, was there any time where you had to get into action stations worried about protecting the Sydney?**

No we just remained in the defence watches, and maybe for two, three hours before Vung Tau we go into action stations and we're fully closed up and, until Sydney goes to anchor, we just keep cruising at action stations and,

- 18:00 until she goes to anchor then we remain cruising. But we go back to defence watches and we don't anchor at all, we just slow time, ten knots, fifteen knots or something up and down. Or then steam away, clear some soot, some FFO [furnace fuel oil] soot, clear the boilers at high speed, usually do at high speed and then we come back and just cruise the line again. And mainly just

- 18:30 giving her air cover, yeah.

So how many trips did you do to Vietnam with the Vampire?

Just the one, and I think they shut down after that cause '73 I think was the last of the retreat, and they're all coming home by plane after that, so we got their logistics outa there. Our, yeah they're all flown back I think, yeah, they started flying back from Hong Kong I think, or somewhere.

- 19:00 But all the logistical stuff for ship borne duties were all finished by then, yeah. So...

So leading up to, well in the years between those trips to Vietnam and say, the experience in Cambodia, what are some of the significant experiences you had in patrols and...?

Being on patrol boats for most of my life, oh

- 19:30 part of my life was, I think Vietnam geared me up to be more alert, more aware, and be more alert and aware for my troops, subordinates working with me. That safety is paramount and you never trust a safety catch and, and just look after their wellbeing cause, and a lot of debriefing, and briefing and debriefing after each operation. Because on patrol boats,

- 20:00 unlike other ships, all our boardings are done armed, and we do it every month, whereas other ships, the bigger ships, larger ships, major war vessels, they don't do as many boardings as patrol boats. And cause we do it every month and it's boarding every month, armed, armed boarding every month,

sometimes sixteen times in a month, sometimes five times a day. And it could

20:30 be any time, any hour of the morning or night. And I just promote resilience through 'em I think, like, "We've got a job to do. It's three o'clock in the morning. I know it's wet. It's raining and we'll be wet going over. We'll be wet while we're over there. Even though they're little fishing boats and stuff and, or pearl trawlers, we'll still be wet. The big Indonesian fishing boats or Taiwanese boats, or the small Indonesian boats,

21:00 we still go armed, and we still get wet, so bear with it." Yeah, so...

I'll just...home for a while?

No I was posted to HMAS Bayonet here in Cairns and just working on general patrol duties then, yeah.

Did you manage to get home much to Thursday Island?

Yeah, yeah I actually

21:30 our patrol area covered the Torres Strait, as far as Darwin and south, far south as Brisbane so, yeah got home yeah, pretty often. So that's what sort of like kept me on patrol boats for a little while.

How had the community changed, or how had you changed in that time, since you'd first joined the navy?

More mature, I was more mature by then. Yeah, I wasn't even twenty-one

22:00 then I don't think, but I still, oh well I consider anyway, at a young age into a new job like patrol duties where you didn't have so many bosses around, sort of thing. So, yeah, like patrol boats were more lax, more lax, not as stringent in the rules as such. But on patrol duties, like we

22:30 were still, abided by the rules and rules of engagement. But that's on the patrol boat side but the community itself, it changed, the Torres Strait. Like government policies had changed since the days I'd joined the navy and, but the community spirit was still the same, like the culture and everything was still running, up and running.

Was it nice to

23:00 **go back to?**

Yeah, was good to go back, been back every year since. But just like any other place, I suppose, you see the changes come in as policies change and policy implementation changes and different governments. Yeah there's, the rules weren't as

23:30 stringent as to visiting rights and stuff like that, there was more free flowing traffic, there was more freedom amongst the islander groups, and the social life had changed. We're not, we were not strictly islander community social groups anymore, we were more into the multicultural society that we were before,

24:00 but more mixing in the open. So yeah, that changed, the economics had changed, there was more job placements for islanders, cause Comalco [aluminium smelting company] had kicked off, Weipa had kicked off, so the bauxite mining, there was more Islanders working there. And yeah, we were steering towards autonomy, I think that they were then.

24:30 There's still the ruling of, all this is in '73, there was still the ruling of Department of Native Affairs and, well was changed then to Department of Aboriginal & Islander Affairs, but it was more, sort of like, for the people. Was more freedom, the health system had changed a little bit. There's still predominantly a white people dominance

25:00 sorta thing, in government positions and stuff. But as far as the navy goes it was more relaxed being on a patrol boat. Like only fifty foot long and only nineteen in the crew, so there's a big change from three hundred to nineteen. Yeah, I stayed here till '76, '77, yeah.

What about mates of yours from your home area that went into say, carpentry or

25:30 **electrician oriented fields? Were you very different to them? Did you find it hard to relate to them?**

Not sorta like culturally, but socially. Where I was more open, more mature I think, if you can put it in, in... Because I'd been exposed to growing up real quick. Some of it got a little bit boring sort of thing, some of

26:00 the things they were doing, like because I'd been going home for Christmas, on Christmas leave and mid winter leave, in between joining up and '73. But I slowly sorta like understood what was going on and why I was more sorta like mature than them sorta thing. And but they also got married younger than me,

26:30 sort of thing, where I was, I had more scope to be open I suppose in my social life and mix a little bit more and play sport a bit more. Like, a few of my mates gave up playing sport after they got married to

concentrate more on their home duties. And, I don't know, I was freelance for a little while, till about '78 when I got married.

27:00 **Freelance as in, you met women in all different areas or...?**

Oh no, just me and sport, me and the oval ball. Like it took more time for football, like I had a couple of girlfriends sorta thing but it was serious and not serious, sort of thing. Like I was more into sport and maybe that was my outlet I suppose after being grilled for

27:30 the past three years, to '73. No, I've always had the interest in sport and respected anybody who sorta like sat next to me on the sideline for sport and those who didn't, so I respected their wishes, and whatever, you know, so. But yeah, like patrol boats was pretty, was a single man's

28:00 posting, ah no, was a married man's posting. We were posted there, myself and young Kenny Spruce as two of the first 'singlies' I think to be posted on board a patrol boat, when it was a married man's draft, sorta thing, posting. And so we just cruised and young Eddie Hinspeter at the time then, three of us shared a flat so yeah, we were into sport and fast cars and motorbikes.

28:30 So we didn't have, well, we had time for girlfriends but Eddy married his long-time sweetheart and I met my wife in Canberra in '77. Yeah, Kenny just became a cruiser - he just toured the countryside after he left the navy. And I don't know if he's married or not, I haven't seen him since about oh, '78, '79.

29:00 Stomach making a noise.

Where were you when the Melbourne went down?

Where was I? Still at school probably.

Oh okay.

Yeah still at school when HMAS Melbourne hit USS Frank E Evans. Cause that was about [1969], yeah, about then.

What did you hear about that from your brother?

A lot of screeching noises

29:30 and he was actually asleep, he got flown from his bunk and yeah; it's pretty horrific. Sailors crying and the cries of the sailors who were drowning and he actually... We still talk about it sometimes, because so many people went down with Frank E Evans, and a few on Melbourne got injured, hurt I think.

30:00 But yeah, just a lotta screaming and screeching of metal and smoke and boilers going off, like, because of being submerged in water. And a lot of screams of fright I think, yeah.

That's right, it was the Melbourne, it wasn't, the Melbourne didn't go down?

No.

The other one came in front of it.

Frank E Evans, yeah. USS Frank E Evans, yeah.

That's right,

30:30 **yeah.**

And Melbourne was involved in Voyager with the sister ship to Vendetta and Vampire before then, and this was the second go at it. And yeah, she was a troubled ship. But yeah, he spoke about it for a while but then he shut down after that and went down to submarines, because of the Frank E Evans.

31:00 So he didn't want to be general service any more. He just wanted to go somewhere else so he went underwater. Yeah.

Was, so were they taking bodies out of the water or... Did he talk about that aftermath?

Yeah, all rescue operations after that and plus trying to damage control Melbourne cause the whole front end was chopped up, the bow. And so there was different operations going on at the same time, all at the same time sorta thing, people running

31:30 everywhere and... There's one story of one of the lookouts on Frank E Evans ended up on Melbourne's flag deck, pretty busted up, but he was alive, but that's how much the impact was, the force of the impact that whiplashed him from the mast area, from the bridge area to Melbourne's flag deck, ah flight deck, yeah. So that was one of the stories that came out of it. The rest was all

32:00 pretty much negative, just death and destruction I suppose yeah. Yeah.

Are you and your brother very different?

Yeah, because he's a submariner and I'm a grey navy, general service. Yeah, we're sorta different.

Different outlook to life, I suppose, yeah, politically and, like I'm not politically motivated; he probably a little bit is.

32:30 Stagnates, I'd say stagnates on politics, but I tend to move on and take each government as it comes, for good or bad. You still gotta ride with it, no matter who. I always had this little saying that, no matter who's in power, we're still under them as the navy, because I spent so long in the navy, the defence force will always serve under that government so. He had different ideas because he was submarines and they thought, they think

33:00 differently anyway.

Do you think that? How is it they're different? I know they're in a smaller space and they're way underwater, but what is the different thinking?

They're a different breed of animals I think, they're; they just think differently. They socialise differently, they, yeah they're on their own, which is probably a good thing because they've got so many confidential material

33:30 that they have to deal with. And on the isolation they have from the rest of the fleet and the rest of the navy. They just inbred into behaving and thinking like they do. Like they're quite different socially and emotionally they're different - they're strictly submarines, that's it. They've gone away into another village and grown up there sorta thing,

34:00 into another life. But they're professional in their own right I suppose, yeah.

So when you were doing the patrols, did you have any experiences that are particularly memorable over that time?

About oh, from '73 to about '70...

34:30 '77, '76 I was mainly on the east coast then on patrol boats and stuff, on the attack class patrol boats. And no, it was mainly, like we were the first ones to arrest, apprehend the Taiwanese clam boat. That was when they first started. That was about oh, September, August '73, the first arrests just off Cairns here. That's how close they were coming.

35:00 That's when the wave started to come over and patrol boats stepped up their patrols. This is only three boats based in Cairns and three in Darwin. But after that was, so we were mainly patrolling and doing coast watch duties and apprehending clam boats in those days, cause they were mainly after the clam. Then Russian trawlers

35:30 came into the gulf, so we were patrolling there to keep them out, under rules of engagement of course, with Russia being Russia. But the memorable ones on patrol boat days, the attack class, was actually start bringing in the boat people, like in Darwin, when I got posted to Darwin on a sail and we started

36:00 the influx of boat people coming over. Heaps. And Darwin was the staging point and the three patrol boats there, we had to get help from the three from Cairns and the two from Fremantle to come up and give us a hand on operational duties cause it was just one after the other in all sorts of boats. Tugs and little fishing boats and

36:30 was just like, "Is this what we caused, in Vietnam?" sorta thing. And I actually, not recruited, but I actually trained one of the Vietnamese kids that I brought in to Australia. I'll say we brought 'em in because we did, escorted 'em in to Darwin harbour. But yeah, there was

37:00 just the thought of it, like, the sorrow that this is what war's caused, to travel so far to the promised land. Because as they're coming through, we found out later that they were turned away by other countries. And because Australia was part of the war in the SEATO, South East Asian Treaty Organisation, we should, they should come here, so.

37:30 And we heard stories of, through the pipeline, that Indonesia was fuelling 'em up, giving them bags of rice and water and say, you know, "Keep the sun to your left as you go down and make sure in the afternoon it's on your right, and you'll hit Australia somehow." And yeah, that's one of the memorable ones that, but, you know, like you get all...

What was the demeanour of

38:00 **the people on board those boats? Generally. I know it's hard to say specifically.**

Yeah, pretty sad and weather-beaten. We even had a baby who was born in the bilges because there was so many people on that one boat - I think there was about eighty something on that one boat - and the only place she could give birth was where she sat and that was in the engine room in the bilge, and the baby was covered in oil. And yeah memorable

38:30 moments, like feeding them ice cream and they're eating it with chopsticks. And, you know, Darwin area it's about forty-two degrees or thirty-eight degrees or something, they're just eating ice cream and just basically feeding 'em for the first day, we were just drifting along with them. And then once we get 'em under way, sort of thing, and check their engines and stuff then we make our way to Darwin Harbour. Sometimes it's three,

39:00 four day trip, but that's nothing to what they've been through.

How were you instructed to treat those people?

Just as refugees. There was no gun pointing or anything, or the... We didn't even go on armed for them. We just offer assistance and look after their

39:30 welfare as best we can till we get to Darwin Harbour and hand it over to the authorities, hand 'em over to the authorities. But...

Were there any among them that were aggressive toward you?

Nah, none were aggressive. They were too weather-beaten I think, too hungry to a point of starvation. And they've actually, we heard stories that we still had the passports on board but they'd actually buried

40:00 a couple at sea who'd died from old age or hunger. Just wrapped 'em up and buried 'em at sea. So no, we were just instructed just to treat 'em as refugees and bring 'em in, and go and get the next lot cause they were really coming in thick and fast. Yeah that was one of the good things we done on patrol work I suppose, like humanitarian

40:30 type things, plus maybe a few cyclone reliefs in the gulf, the flood reliefs in the Gulf of Carpentaria, Normanton. Bouncing in there in the river, touching bottom on the way through, just to bring 'em blankets and stuff and canned food. Cause, yeah, so the job description I suppose varied a bit, like it was a bit of

41:00 rescue and relief, refugee work, bringing them in. And plus all the other duties like patrolling and apprehensions of fishing vessels and stuff. Yeah, so...

Just...

Tape 8

00:31 **So how did that experience of bringing those boat people in affect you personally, do you think?**

I felt a little bit sorry for 'em, maybe because of our part in the war itself. Like, I always, didn't feel guilty but certainly thought about it, that yeah, "This is a cause from war."

01:00 But may, and, but it was like, knuckle down again, do the job at hand, bring 'em in, make 'em as comfortable as possible, debrief some of 'em. There was a few questions, I suppose, to be asked. Not, well you can't say it's interrogation but a briefing of how they got here, where was their

01:30 last port and all the normal stuff that was gonna be asked again anyway, by customs and immigration. But mainly we just made 'em as comfortable as possible and steer 'em towards Darwin, yeah. And sometimes like I said, it took four days, sometimes it took just overnight. And one boat was nearly in Darwin Harbour, we were on our way out when we spotted 'em. It was like, and coast watch spotted 'em I think,

02:00 and said, "On your way out, be prepared to go back because we got a boat load of people coming in," yeah. They actually landed in Melville Island, in the community there. The sun came up and there they were, anchored in harbour, yeah.

What were your thoughts about these people, about their resilience and determination?

02:30 Just, especially for the bigger boat we seen like, and the small ones I suppose and the cramped conditions they were in, like they were, must've been pretty tough or pretty determined to get where they wanted to go. Because anywhere on the Indonesian archipelago you could just pull in and set up a village and... But they, they steered their way pretty well. They knew they wanted Australia,

03:00 and they got to Australia. And I don't know how many boats were lost in between, at sea in rough weather, or got put into the camp at Hong Kong and Malaysia, Singapore. But the ones who wanted to get to Australia certainly did get to Australia. And like I said, I don't know how many boats that were lost, cause there's no record of how many boats left, obviously, cause they were all under cover when they left.

Did it,

03:30 **to any extent, make you question Australia's role in the war and your own participation in that?**

To a point, to a point. Like we thought the war was... Well me thinking that the war was just a war for freedom for South Vietnam, and it was gonna be it. But we didn't, I didn't think, certainly didn't think that it was gonna be something that there was gonna be just years and years

04:00 of a flow of refugees coming over, you know, like, and probably still coming over. But no, it sorta did question our role in the war but we're under the understanding that we were under, not NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organisation] then but under SEATO, so we had to be part of the war because

04:30 we were part of the South East Asian Treaty Organisation, later to be moved into NATO. But no, it was just a role that we had to be at war because South Vietnam was in the SEATO agreement, yeah.

And years after that you were involved in going to Cambodia; can you tell us about that?

Oh that was years and years and years after.

Yeah, many years later yeah.

05:00 Yeah. Well same thing again, this was, we were the first boat there, first warship, Australian warship since the Second World War. And our duties there were just to, for maritime assistance under the MAP program, the maritime assistance program, project, to assist 'em in maritime duties and patrol boats,

05:30 their operational capabilities, mainly for the commanding officers to sit down and chat with their hierarchy over there. But it was also a goodwill visit and meet the Australian MAP project officers over there. And because we'd built a

06:00 shed and, a big shed and maritime operations building over there for 'em so they can have better capabilities for maintenance and stuff.

What ship were you on and what was your role in that...?

Launceston, I was on HMAS Launceston, and we were, and I was the chief bosun's mate on there, which is in charge of all weapons and explosives on board and ship's husbandry.

06:30 **And what are your sort of significant memories of that experience?**

Playing volleyball on concrete, played soccer on concrete, mainly because of the mines. Oh no, we went on tour, tour with the army and with the security forces over there. Just showing us buildings from the Pol Pot regime had damaged and attacked. Sihanoukville, we were in Sihanoukville and that's where the

07:00 Australian, I think, lady was kidnapped and shot. And yeah, so, yeah we were treading warily, treading lightly.

What point in the, when were you there and how long after the Pol Pot regime was it?

We were there in '96. I think Pol Pot was on his

07:30 way down then I think [Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge regime ruled Cambodia from 1975-79]. But it's just actually, when you're actually speaking to people who were, and it's not the media sort of thing, the Australian media, and you're actually speaking to real, live people whose lives have been affected by Pol Pot, and that's really sad. It's disheartening and you sorta can't imagine what they've been through.

08:00 Just the chief of naval staff, their chief of naval staff is the only one left of his family and extended family. And because of him, his involvement in the defence force, Cambodian forces, they'd wiped out his whole family and he was the only survivor, so, and he was chief of naval staff. And I sat at the same table as him for dinner that night and he just spoke freely and looking ahead to

08:30 the new government and changes and stuff. But you couldn't sorta like be too social sorta thing, cause you didn't know which way to step, what, you might over step the mark or something or... So yeah we just played it pretty cool and just followed the routine they laid out, the program they laid out, and just went along with that.

So did he talk to you about his

09:00 **experience of losing his family?**

Yeah, yes and no. He spoke a little bit of his mum and dad, how he lost them, they were executed, and then bits and pieces of his family were tracked down sorta thing and probably executed also, or jailed or something, or kept, held hostage somewhere. But he's got no

09:30 immediate family left; he's got nothing. And it sorta makes you wonder, "Wow, I've got a family, you know. He's got nothing because of his status in the politics of it all. He's lost his whole family. Yet he still strives to go further and not be knocked down," sorta thing. Dunno what he's doing now but...

10:00 **What did you see when you travelled around, of the destruction or killings that had taken place?**

Well the Pol Pot army had sorta like probably moved on or went back into hiding sorta thing, but there was still a lot of bullet holes in buildings and a lot of reconstruction going on, sorta thing, like villages that were burned.

10:30 And one place that comes to mind is a little resort type place, was a magic little place right on the

waterfront, and the whole building has been abandoned of all, and stripped of all its equipment and gear and the whole building was just riddled with bullet holes; it's just been strafed and strafed and strafed again. And you sorta can't imagine

11:00 who was killed in there or how many were killed in there sorta thing, because it looked like it was a pretty good, full-on attack and it was just the bare shell. It was a European venture that yeah, dunno how many tourists were killed in that lot but it certainly was, destroyed the building. And there's no hospital, immediate hospital or large hospital around the place,

11:30 like that's one thing we never visited, a hospital or a medical aid post, like.

So how long did you spend there?

About three weeks, two, three weeks, yeah. Cause mainly just to link up with them and do a few operations with 'em and move out again and support the MAP program and move out again.

So, I don't know, you had

12:00 **such an extensive career in twenty-six years, we've spoken about some of it. Are there any other significant events that happened during your career that you would like to talk about?**

No, not really. Like everything sorta like just slotted into place after that and it was just normal every day at the office. Except for patrol boats of course, like we're all on

12:30 the go all day, every day when we're out at sea. I'd just like to commend the crews of all the patrol boat sailors, I suppose, like the old ones and the new ones for all the hard work they go through and leaving their families behind. Where I think the larger vessels are, whether it's between Gulf Wars or pre Gulf Wars and after the Gulf Wars, they sorta more

13:00 home with their families and they go away on little trips and they come back and... But whereas the patrol boat sailor is on the go all the time. They're always on standby for rescues or fisheries work, or patrol duties, just the resilience of them and the families, I suppose, gotta put up with this.

Well you got married at some, at what point did you get married?

'78.

'78. So,

13:30 **and how did you meet your wife?**

Back home in TI. She's a TI lady a Thursday Island lady and she knew I was in the navy so, and she knew I was going to be a patrol boat sailor, so she just yeah, stuck by her guns and we had a family. And...

How hard was it to have that sort of career and family at the same time?

Pretty difficult because all the work's left to the

14:00 women, and all the, yeah, basically all the child rearing and administration of being married is left to the woman. And we sort of just come home after an eight week patrol or something, come back for two weeks, three weeks, everything changes, they've got their own routine in the house. We don't mow the lawn just for mowing the lawn, it's gotta be on a certain day because they're,

14:30 they're regimented into their own little program. Yeah, so we just basically come home, tidy up a little bit, sign a few papers, do a few loose ends, service the car and we're off again. And yeah, so...

And what was it like to be a father in those sort of circumstances?

Well I missed the boys growing up. I only got 'em in the latter years, towards high school, but

15:00 the taking them to school, the births, I didn't see 'em actually being born. But whenever I went ashore, sort of thing, on a shore posting for two years or something, maybe I spent two years with 'em but cause most of my life's been at sea. Yeah, you just miss being there in the maternity suite, in the birth suite watching 'em being born, or

15:30 being part of the birth and part of going to school in their first year in Grade 1, going to school with them in the first year and all the little things that go along with that. And being there for their football games and... Yeah I missed them growing up but they understood, like they understood Dad was in the navy and have to go away all the time, and whether they liked to or not I suppose. But they learned to cope

16:00 and help their mum, like the two boys in the middle were pretty good. Like the older one was already, had his own set ways but the two middle ones they were pretty good with Mum; they were always helping out. And I got 'em towards high school, yeah.

So despite the times you missed out with them, how did you enjoy being a father?

Pretty good, like every spare time was spent with 'em,

16:30 going to footy and watching TV together and explaining things and helping 'em with their homework. Like I enjoy that part, it was really good, gave the wife a break. Yeah every spare moment was spent with 'em sorta thing, even to a point where I was duty on the weekends they'd come down the boat with me and spend the day with me on the boat, and then she'd pick 'em up in the afternoon and take 'em home.

17:00 But yeah, not trying to introduce 'em to the navy or anything like that but, oh one of 'em was in the naval reserve cadets for a little while and then, but that was only just to like please me sorta thing. I always told 'em to do whatever they wanted to do, play whatever sport they wanna play, not to sort of like imitate me sorta thing or mimic me. I wouldn't want that to happen. But, nah.

When you...

17:30 **I don't see why not. When you decide, came to decide to leave the navy, why did you decide to leave?**

I think it got a little bit monotone for me, I think. Got tired of it and I wanted to set up house and like be more with the family before the boys left school. I did get out in '93 and then I got back in again for another three years till '96. But

18:00 That was mainly because of staff shortages and stuff, so I went back as training staff. But they'd already grown up by then. But getting out of the navy was the hard bit, like it was, I was posted ashore to be retrained into civilian life, I was HMAS Cairns, the shore establishment here for about

18:30 eighteen months, just trying to acclimatise back into civilian life. Didn't work.

What do you mean it didn't work?

I just couldn't fit in, like oh fitted in but I wasn't a nine to five worker. I just had to do something different. I worked security, which was shift work and stuff which was, I was more used to, being nocturnal and whatever.

19:00 Then I left that, I went driving a, skippering a crayfish boat back in Torres Strait for a little while, three months, till I got a recall, to go back on HMAS Bendigo as training staff, and then Launceston after that, so. Yeah so, got itchy feet and went back in, put the uniform back in, got a haircut.

What did you

19:30 **miss? What did you miss about the navy?**

Just the work, the troops, the boys I suppose. Like just the camaraderie at sea, the mateship, the, because coming into the civilian world in Cairns. Even though I had a lot of footballing friends here, cause I played a few years in Cairns, it was just different. Like they

20:00 all had their families and stuff, and to me my family was my immediate family plus the navy sorta thing, like, you know. And being in middle management I was always there for my subordinates, with their families, if there's any welfare cases, and try and sort them out for 'em.

What is it about the relationships that you form in the navy that makes that sort of mateship so special, do you think?

20:30 I don't know. It's just the communal living I think. It's just, you've just gotta put up with each other and learn as much about each other and each other's cultures as much as you can, and change your lifestyle to suit everybody else's while they, at the same time, they're changing their lifestyle to suit you and the navy sorta thing. And to us,

21:00 the mateship and the brotherhood is, if you can say it's a brotherhood, is coming home after a patrol and having a few beers later or a barbecue a few days later and just debriefing again, but with the family there, and sort each others problems out, and offer assistance to any of the other families, the crew members. And, you know, some person might have an idea or done something differently and yeah we just, us helping

21:30 ourselves, and plus us helping our friends' families, our crew mates' families and stuff. That's the difference between big ships and minor war vessels. It's more of a mateship thing and a brotherhood. Yeah, when there's a death in someone's family, or there's a newborn in someone's family, we're all there to offer support and yeah, this is just like one big family. And

22:00 yeah, we're always there on hand for any of the wives or girlfriends and offer assistance. Oh the wives offer assistance to each other while we're away. They maybe go out to dinner and talk about things that could be done differently or helping another family out with the yard or something, or they all meet and have a barbecue. Yeah, so we always know that

22:30 the wives and girlfriends are pretty well set. For the younger ones, you know, they're stuck with work, but for the older ones who are not working, they've always got the neighbours to go to, because all the navy houses are pretty much close to each other, the defence force housing. Yeah, so they're always there within walking distance of each other, yeah.

So since the navy and after those first jobs, you became involved with mental health. Can you tell us how that came about?

23:00 I was just getting a bit tired of, I'd just got back from Darwin and I had a ruptured Achilles tendon, from football, sport again, and I was just sitting around reading the papers and I saw a position open for a mental health worker, indigenous mental health worker for the Torres Straits with the Torres and Northern Peninsula Area Health Service District under Queensland Health, and applied

23:30 for it, and yeah, enjoyed it from there. I think the only requirements was counselling skills and a bit of man management and which translates into case management. Yeah, was originally just for three months to set up a program, a mental health program, but I ended up staying there seven years. So yeah, so I kicked that off and stayed there for the next

24:00 seven years and enjoyed it, working in mental health. It's like a new field, no weapons involved, unless it's from the client. But, and no, still the mental health policies and guidelines to follow and stuff like that, but...

What do you enjoy about that work?

Helping like, yeah helping people because always been my nature I think. Yeah just

24:30 helping the client and the carers in the family, and whether it's clinically or holistically. And I think an important part of my job in the branch, in the mental health branch, is able to, being able to translate culture and cultural healing into mainstream type healing therapeutic methods,

25:00 which is a bonus I suppose, a plus. And translation of medical terms to the carers and families, and how psycho-pharmacology works and how medication works. Just to sit down and yarn with the families and say, you know, "This is an anti depressant it'll take three weeks to kick in. Don't expect..." But doing it in our language, our native tongue. And

25:30 like not to expect too much, it's all trial and error sorta thing, because each client's different to each medication. And case managing, yeah, I enjoy case managing, yeah.

And the work that you're doing now, is...?

Oh more in the training field with social emotional health, with the Far North Indigenous Consortium for Social Emotional Wellbeing, health and well-being. But my role, I've only been there since January but my role will be predominantly training

26:00 field and later on in social emotional health and in the community level, then later for the indigenous health workers, the indigenous health force, health worker force, more mental health training, and for mainstream staff as well.

How have things changed in the Torres Straits since you grew up there?

Heaps.

26:30 Yeah it's more modernised, video games, like it's changed for the worse and changed for the better. There's no, no longer any sit down story type yarning any more and stories of the old days and cultural stories sorta thing, and traditional stories and learning periods. It's more taken up with videos and video games now and

27:00 television. But I think there's been a lot of promotion into trying to go back to the old ways of the rearing of children and youth, but I don't know too much about what's going on now sorta thing, what programs are up and running. But yeah, it's

27:30 changed with modernisation round the world, like globally. Religion's changed now. It's like, there's about seven different denominations up there now. And the Anglican Church has split, which is a bit sad. They're still under the one banner but it's Church of Torres Strait now and the Church of England,

28:00 two separate divisions. Yeah there's, it's just the modern influences I think have changed it. It's changed the kids. The old people are still the same - they're still set in their ways - but it's the younger ones growing up with the modern influences of... Some for good and some for bad. Like

28:30 with new technology, like the computers and stuff now, which is more beneficial for the kids, to be online and do learning online with computers and the use of computers. But also the videos itself and the video games is taking up times. And where we were once fit young men and women, you see a little bit of obesity setting in.

29:00 Modern influences such as the foodstuff that we eat now has been the cause of diabetes, and smoking and drinking and... Yeah cause diabetes is a big killer up north and the cape and Torres Strait. I think we've got the most cases of diabetes for one area per capita than the rest of Australia. I think it's... And

29:30 but that's all through modern living and... But some islands are taking charge and going back to market gardens and vegetable growing, the old traditional gardens and traditional way of eating, with a little bit of modernisation in it, but...

Are there social problems as a result of those changes?

Domestic violence for the drinking and stuff, yeah. It's on the, it's been on the rise for donkeys years now.

30:00 I think mainly because of the, well yeah it is from the drinking and the use of, of substance abuse, and alcohol and smoking and but also because of the, I think the modernisation of the policies and stuff where the

30:30 rights of the men have been taken away from 'em, so they're sort of bit lost. And so they get incarcerated and repeat incarcerations in jail, and they're repeat offenders. And in some communities you don't go into manhood or adulthood unless you've been to jail, so, as a very bad learned response

31:00 to all the issues that are going around at the moment. But oh, yeah, it's changed.

Do you see any positive changes?

The health system, because we've gone autonomous in the health system under the new Torres Strait and Northern Peninsular Health Service primary health care model. Where it's a crossover between,

31:30 it's a biomedical model where with an injection of the Ottawa Charter into it where the people make the choices of what health care they need. And whereas Queensland Health just sits inside the model, Queensland Health has more input in the clinical aspect of it and the treatment and early intervention screening, disease screening and prevention. But

32:00 health education and health promotion and community development is all done by community, with fifty per cent of health education to Queensland Health. And it's a good model. It's working. There's been a reduction in amputations and social health issues because there's now a fully integrated mental health team, mental health and social health team in Torres Strait after I left. There's only two of us before,

32:30 for the whole of the Torres Strait and northern peninsula but now there's about seven of 'em I think, six or seven in the team where they were child psychologists included in it, and social workers and stuff. But yeah, I don't think it's getting better, the health side's getting better, the politics has just taken another tumble again with the collapse of ATSIC [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission]. Don't know exactly what the Torres Strait Regional

33:00 Authority, which was an arm of ATSIC, and the island community councils, what their roles would be with the collapse of ATSIC. Soon to be seen I suppose, yeah so. But we were a separate arm to ATSIC anyway so probably be no major changes. They'll still keep it as the Torres Strait Regional Authority and Island and Aboriginal Community Council,

33:30 yeah.

So going back to your navy career and looking back at your career, what are, for you, what's the most important or significant aspect of your career, do you think?

Being part of the crew of every ship I've been on, cause that's always important, and the mateships. Operationally

34:00 I think Vietnam was taken away by being posted to England. In '87 I was posted to England as training staff, ceremonial training staff for the Hampshire region, working, training up ceremonial guards for, guards of honour for Princess Margaret, though I never shook her hand or saluted her or anything,

34:30 I was always in the background but...

So how did you enjoy that role?

Yeah, though it was cold, it was freezing over there, but yeah I enjoyed that role, as being part of the training team, training staff over there. And quickly learned there, their ceremonial drills and stuff, and injected a few of ours. Because even though we're Commonwealth forces, the rifle drills are all different. Where we've got

35:00 SLRs they were with SA-80s which is a another NATO weapon. And the drills were different, but nah, once we got into it, yeah it was good, training every day. The big one was Remembrance Day, big ceremony for Remembrance Day, in the middle of Hampshire. Yeah, no it was pretty good, like a new influence,

35:30 another culture. Yeah football, played football over there, played rugby. But no, and just a different outlook onto how another navy work, how another navy establishment works and how the different dress, different codes. Yeah it was a completely different culture. We might speak the same language but

36:00 pronunciations are different, but they are a different culture, I mean the weather's a different culture.

And when you look back on that time in, during the Vietnam War, what do you think about now when you think about that experience for you?

Just, I think it made me who I am today, like that was the start of it, like I had to knuckle down and

36:30 which way I was gonna be steered. And that was, be job focused I think and after what I've been through and what I've seen, it's just changed me completely to be a more caring person I think, and more respectable person to other people's culture and to other people's beliefs, and that's a pretty stringent requirement with mental health anyway. You've gotta be

37:00 able to sit on both sides of the fence. But yeah, I think that's how I fitted, slotted into mental health quite easily because I've had those values of other people and other cultures and other nationalities. Like I've got friends from all over the world, in nearly every culture I think, except Afghanistan. But yeah, I'm friends with

37:30 Pakistani taxi drivers in Sydney. I've been with their families and stuff and just through meeting 'em and telling 'em about my nearly going to India or nearly going to Pakistan and just in conversation they, you know, they probably understood the respect that I have of other cultures and invited me to their families. And yeah, Chinese families and Vietnamese families, you know.

So what does Viet... Sorry, what does Anzac Day mean to you now after your experience

38:00 **in the navy?**

I've missed out on a couple of Anzac Days since I've been a civilian but when I do go it's a, even though at my age now, there's still a respect for the remaining ANZACs and the World War II veterans, because Vietnam veterans we've got our own day. But Anzac Day is strictly looking after the old fellas I think, and having a yarn with them. I don't even think about

38:30 Vietnam unless I see a set of ribbons or a set of medals that indicates Vietnam, and maybe we'll have a chat. But it's still chatting with the old fellas, World War II and Korea and stuff, and don't see many World War I veterans around now. Yeah it's still respect for the elders, maybe if you can put it that way. And maybe when they're all gone, maybe it'll be my turn for the young fellas to yarn to me sorta thing.

39:00 But yeah, but that's just my upbringing is respect the elders and stuff. And to me it's their day, like even, whether I spent six years in the navy or twenty-six years, it's still their day so, and their wives and their kids. Yeah, basically just respect for the old fellas...

So Marsat, do you have a...?

...and push their wheelchairs for 'em.

Do you have a final comment you'd like to make at all,

39:30 **to have on the record for future generations who will listen to your interview one day?**

Yeah, I spent two years in the recruitment branch, navy recruiting. Nah, yeah, oh defence force not everybody's choice of course. Don't be forced into it. If you do go into it be prepared to be resilient. Roll with the flow, do your best when you're in there, learn a lot, share the cultures and

40:00 yeah, when the crunch comes, knuckle down, heads down, bum up and do your job, and everything will flow smoothly. And yes, just build on your coping skills for different situations, yeah. Yeah that's about it. It's been a good life, a good twenty-six years. I certainly enjoyed the glamorous and the unglamorous side of the defence force.

40:30 But yeah, even in the recruiting department I've always counselled towards, in the recruiting branch I've always counselled towards making sure that they are suited for the navy before, have a bit of a think about it, for, about the defence force and really what you want out of it. And you can get a lot from the defence force. Nowadays there's opportunities everywhere for

41:00 civilian qualifications and stuff, whereas before, I had to get out of the navy to get a Bachelor of Health Science in mental health, as an adult entry. But now the world's at their feet in the defence force. Yeah, they can use it or abuse it, do whatever they wanna do with it. But there's a lot of opportunities out there with the defence force, all three services and the reserve forces, yeah.

Oh, Marsat, it's been a great pleasure talking with you today. Thank you

41:30 **very much for your time.**

Yes, it's been good sharing. Thanks a lot.

Thank you very much.

INTERVIEW ENDS