

Australians at War Film Archive

Colin Elliot - Transcript of interview

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**Some parts of this interview
have been embargoed.**

The embargoed portions are
noted in the transcript and video.

Tape 1

00:35 **Okay Col can you tell us in a summarised kind of way, the story of your life?**

This is fairly hard for me because I have been a comedian for a long time. Yeah, okay. I left school very early. I was 14 years old and desperately I wanted to be a jockey. But they weren't racing draft horses and I was too big to be a jockey.

01:00 But I worked intermittently in the stables and whatever. I had a fairly poor background, working class. Unfortunately my old man was a drunk and died very early. But that was a bit later on. I think I was 21 when he died. But there was a lot of alcohol. And I guess in a way he was traumatised, in that he had just come out of the [Second] World War. He had 20 years

01:30 in the navy. He was in Dunkirk. My Mum was...we came out from England in 1951. Mum was in the Land Army and she saw a lot. She was in the Blitz in London. So I guess on reflection now, I look back and realise how they traumatised they were. So that reflected I guess on us and we were in a commission house, working class

02:00 in a place called Lyndale in North Dandenong in Victoria. We first came out in 1951 and I think I was 20 months old. Most people who know me think I'm Australian and I sound like an Aussie. But yeah, I was born in England. So I came out, did the normal things, went to school, played cricket, kicked the footy. We didn't have a lot but we made do as kids do, billy carts and whatever. By the time I was 14

02:30 my old man was a pretty tough sort of dude. I wanted out. I wanted to go. So as I said, I wanted to be a jockey. It didn't work, so I got a job as a salesman for McEwans. I thought I was pretty flash. I got a green jacket. But I still had to get away. I had to get away from him. So I joined the navy. I think I caught him on a day when he had a few beers and

03:00 he signed the thing. So I joined the navy. I'm trying to think...I was fifteen and a half. Back in those days you could join the navy as a junior recruit and they took kids, I think, from fifteen or fifteen and a half through to sixteen...to HMAS Leeuwin in Perth. It was a pretty tough school. A lot of the kids found it... the kids who had a more normal background...as I say, a more normal, as in nurturing sort of background,

03:30 found it very tough because it was a fairly brutal system. Fairly brutal coming from that sort of environment into full on navy. You weren't treated like a child. You were a man to them and you were treated as such and you were punished as such too. They can't do that any more but...so that was 1965. I had left school. I passed the exam

04:00 to the navy. I didn't think I was all that dumb at school, I just didn't want to do it. I just wanted to get away. But then again, when I look back at it, there was no encouragement from my folks. You just muddled through and whatever. I had an elder brother. He went to Vietnam too. He left home very early too to get away...and my sister, Carol. I had two others, later on

04:30 after we left, Mum had two more babies. But anyway... So we were all up and away pretty early. So I was sort of used to, at 14, used to being on my own a fair bit. By the time I got to the navy I still didn't

know what hit me. We travelled by train across the Nullarbor. I think there was 100 recruits from all different parts of Australia.

- 05:00 We came together to form Marks Division in 1965...I think it was October '65. And we embarked on a year, a fairly intensive year of training which took in schooling...you went back to school but you did naval indoctrination, you did seamanship, basic NBCD, Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Defence. You did seamanship.
- 05:30 You rowed boats. They taught you about ships. They taught about naval warfare. They taught you about small arms. They taught you rifles. When I joined it was 303s, so it was just on the cusp of...I think a couple of years later they went to SLRs [Self Loading Rifles]. But 303s were what I trained with. They were World War II...what was left of their guns I think. They were pretty old guns. They also punished you with those too. If you got into trouble, they made you run
- 06:00 for two hours at night with the rifle on your shoulder or above your head, and bunny hopped around the parade ground. So it knocked you around a fair bit. It knocked a lot of kids around. And I did a lot of punishment. I bucked the system a bit. I found it hard at first because I think I had been doing for myself for so long, I found it a little bit hard to work into a unit. When I realised you couldn't beat the system, you had to join them and I ended up putting in a good year. And in fact,
- 06:30 I'm quite proud of this. I came first in my exams for seamanship. I've still got the book. The admiral presented me with the book and that was a very proud moment for me. After that year, and as I say, a very tough year...there's things in that year I remember. They said okay, we're boxing this week. What? We're boxing in the ring.
- 07:00 They put you in the ring and you boxed and there was no instruction, you boxed. So you found out, oh I had better not do that again, I had better learn something about it. So I took an interest in boxing. They had one thing that I never forgot. They would never do this...I can never imagine this happening today, but they had a thing called the Mill. And they'd throw...I don't know how many guys, maybe a dozen, and they'd back to back and then they'd ring the bell and
- 07:30 the last one standing was the winner. Now this was I guess for the amusement of the officers and their wives and they'd do this. They can't do that stuff to people now.

Sorry but what do you mean by the Mill?

The Mill. They would put all these young blokes in the middle of the boxing ring, and I've never forgotten it. It stands out in my mind. They'd put them all in and they'd say...they'd ring the bell, and the last one standing was the winner. Now that's beyond comprehension today.

- 08:00 They couldn't do that to kids today. I remember...in fact I ended up teaching recruits myself. In my last year of the navy I became a navy instructor, and they said to me, I never forgot this, they said to me, "By the way Col, you can't give your troops any punishment like you used to have." I said, "What do you mean?" And what they used to do to us...they'd say, we ran WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s. Which is like the equivalent of KP [Kitchen Patrol] in the army? But in the navy it's
- 08:30 called WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s. You're running punishment. Number 14 punishment and that entailed, as a recruit, that entailed running around a bull ring or a parade ground with a rifle on your shoulder for up to two hours. And sometimes they'd get you on your hunches and put it above your head and you had to bump, bump, bump around the parade ground, and to the point where you couldn't walk. It was a big strain. But I was that good in the end that it didn't bother me. I could do it standing in my head because I had been in a lot of punishment. And I ...
- 09:00 I was into exploring the world. I really wasn't into a navy career. I got caught swimming in the officers swimming pool at midnight, and I jumped ship a few times which meant I got ashore. I used to take a bag ashore with another guy and we would jump ship...after lights out, we'd jump out and we'd go into Fremantle and get some booze and come back. I used to get a free bottle of booze if I got the other kids booze,
- 09:30 so we were drinking at 15 and 16. I got caught doing that on the wire and they gave me 14 days and a month's punishment and whatever. So I ran a lot of WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and got used to it. It was all part of what you did, part of the culture. At Leeuwin unfortunately there was a lot of bastardisation. A lot of it. The only time that it really got to me...I know lots of stories
- 10:00 and I witnessed a lot of things. As it was there was a group of guys...I mean, we came in and there was three other divisions above us who had been there 3 months longer than us, 6 months longer than, 9 months than us, and just leaving. We came in, so all the ones above us would bastardise the ones below. The new recruits copped it. So there'd be young kids and they'd be sitting there and they'd be on their bunk, and a bunch of guys would come in and
- 10:30 say, "Here's my washing, here's my boots, I want them shined and washed by tomorrow." And they intimidated these kids and if they backed off they'd get a good hiding, and a few of them would give them a hiding. So some of these kids knuckled under to it and it really hurt them. I saw kids and I heard kids in bed crying, and you remember that you know. I never ...
- 11:00 I never let them get to me, but I remember laying there listening to one kid that just couldn't handle it,

and ever since that time in my life I just can't stand anyone intimidating anyone. If I see it I snap. It really gets me. But this particular kid went through and eventually was discharged because he just couldn't handle it. Some of them didn't handle the

- 11:30 system. What happened to me, I was going up to the canteen. They let us smoke. We used to roll them. I was the only kid in our division who could roll a cigarette with one hand in my pocket. I can still do it. I was getting a cigarette and I was coming down to the canteen and a guy, one of the elder division guys grabbed me and said, "Give me your cigarettes," and I said, "Get lost," or whatever. And I pushed him away and he took a swing
- 12:00 at me. There was a bit of a scuffle and I bested him, which wasn't a good thing to do because that night seven of them came up to the dormitory, and I was caught alone in the dormitory and they came into the bunk house and surrounded me, and got my dog tags and held me up and they beat me. And my mate Taffy, Chris Williams, we call him Taffy Williams was around and jumped into help me and they
- 12:30 beat him senseless. Then you went to get some medical attention for your injuries but there was a code, you fell down the stairs. No one ever...you know, all that crap. So you got through all those sorts of times. But I didn't let it go at that though. When it happened to me I was so angry about it, I remembered all the ones who did it to me and I go everyone one of them bar for two of them. Two of them were too big for me, I just couldn't get them.
- 13:00 I might be on the footy field and I would drop the ball right up and into them. I got into trouble for doing that but I got my own back, and then they realised they couldn't intimidate me, and they left me alone. So I didn't have that intimidation. Only the once, and then when you showed them that you wouldn't do it... They also ran these things called gauntlets. These guys would line up on either side of a hallway, and they would have pillow cases and they'd put
- 13:30 boots in it or whatever, and they'd run kids through it and they would belt the hell out of them, and all that sort of stuff went on under the noses of the instructors. I don't think the instructors really knew. Some of the instructors I felt...I mean on reflection I look at this and I think some of the instructors were very good people, good instructors. I mean there were some people there I just totally respected. They were so good with the boys, and even though they had to discipline them, and you called them sir, yes sir no sir three bags full sir, you respected them because they
- 14:00 tempered it with a little bit of kindness. There were some great instructors there. And there were some arseholes that felt...who I think felt, and I think this is true in any case in life, they felt a sense of power, and they've got it over somebody and they abuse that power. And I think that happened in a few cases. I know it happened in a few cases. It happened to me a couple of times. One particular incident I've never ever forgotten, and it sticks in my mind, and I can see it today.
- 14:30 It was a long time ago but I can see this. I was duty on the weekend. I had no weekend leave and I was asked to do the petty officer's mess. I wasn't asked, I was told. I was the dodger or the cleaner. And there wasn't many petty officers on board. There may have been half a dozen or 3 or 4 or whatever, who had their duty that weekend. I had a young bloke with me, I can still see his face but I don't know his bloody name, but
- 15:00 he was from another division. I can see his face. And we were to clean up their mess and...they had afternoon scran or afternoon lunch and we had to put out these...I can still see them, these green plates, plastic green plates. And we used to put butter on them, and they had bread, and they had toast and a bit of cake, and some tea and coffee and whatever, for those who were on duty. And we had to put it out and set it up, and then when they had finished with it we had to clean
- 15:30 it up. So we went down there and set it up, and as we were setting it up, my mate got some butter, and I can still see it, Western Star butter. It's incredible how I can still see the plates and that sort of paper that didn't leak, Western Star. Anyway he opened it up and it looked a bit off and he went...to sniff it. And just
- 16:00 as he was sniffing it this petty officer walked in, and he was clearly three parts cut, he was pissed. "Hey you!" And he called him and he said, "You were licking that butter." And he said, "No sir, I wasn't." And he said, "You were licking that butter." And he said, "No sir." And he slapped him. This kid went down really bad, and I yelled and ran at this petty officer...leave him alone. And he turned to have a go at me and I threw a plate
- 16:30 and it caught him right on this guy's head and...and me and this kid ran. We ran, and we thought, "Jesus Christ, they're going to lock us up for this." This guy was laying there and I'd hit him in the head with the plate and I thought no! Anyway he came too...it must have stunned him or knocked him out or whatever, and nothing happened all day. We were sweating and we went back to the mess that night. He wasn't there. We cleaned up.
- 17:00 And he walked in and I can still see the mark on his head. He didn't know a thing about it. He was pissed as a cricket. You know, when you're a kid these things hang on to you. But there was a lot of good times there too. You made a lot of good mates. I've got friends today that I'm in contact with now. The guy I was telling you about...he dropped dead about 18 months ago.
- 17:30 He did it pretty tough in the navy. He did a lot of drugs and boozed himself to death and he dropped

dead at 52. I went to see his grave a while ago. He was a very dear friend of mine. He was a wonderful guy. But unfortunately it is a culture in the navy

18:00 and there was a lot of booze. There was a lot of grog and if you didn't drink you weren't one of the boys. It was a funny sort of culture. It tends to happen to a lot of guys. I came out a bit of a raving lunatic on the grog. I'm an alcoholic and I know that. But I'm very lucky because I've got a very supportive wife and a good family and I got through. But he...it killed him. But I still have so many good friends that I joined the navy with.

18:30 And there's a bond you make with these guys. Only last week I was in Melbourne, and a guy came up to me and he said, "Hey Mo!" They called me Mohawk and the reason for that was, when I joined the navy I had hair on my shoulders and Beatle boots, and I wanted to be tough, and I walked in and said, "Just take a bit off the edge there." And whew...they left me with one little strip in the middle, and someone walked out...I walked out the barber shop...Snips his name was, and they said, "He looks like a bloody

19:00 Mohican." They said he looks like a Mohawk. So, since then all my mates who I joined with called me Hawk or Mo. So when someone yells out to me, "Hey Mo," I know what I'm talking about. So yeah I did...that year, I learned so much. I got physically fit. I was taught how to fight, to box. I enjoyed that.

19:30 I learned that there's a lot of good things about the navy. There's a lot of good things, a lot of positive things about it. But I think what they do is, in the forces, they tend to start from scratch with you. They break you down and rebuild you because you have to be of a certain discipline. You have to do what you do in the navy or the army or whatever. They have to take you to that level where if you're given an order you'll do it.

20:00 You don't think about. As a civilian unfortunately, not unfortunately, but as a civilian you're not trained to do that. Someone once said to me, "It's either fight or flight." That's the human condition. And if you're told to do something...no way! But not in the service. You're told to do it and you do it. You don't think about it. It's not your consequences. That's for the guy who made the decision. So you need to be brought up to that level. And I think that's why when a lot of guys get out they find

20:30 it hard to adjust civilian life. I did. I was institutionalised by the time I got out. I didn't know anything else. It was all my formative years with navy. The disciplines that I have today, the way I am today is because of what I learned in the navy. I owe a lot of good things to the navy. A lot of not so good things too. But that's what I did. I joined and I did my time there. By the time I finished the 12 months I was pretty equipped to

21:00 go to sea. I knew what I was doing. I knew what I could do. The junior recruits as opposed to the senior recruits that joined...the senior recruits had 3 months training, we had 12 months training. So a lot of times you'd go to sea and you'd meet a guy who was a lot older than you but didn't know as much as you, or wasn't more navy. So a lot of good things came out of junior recruits. In 1970 they abandoned

21:30 the junior recruit program because I think it had a lot to do with bastardisation. There was some...I think this was right, there was one guy who was jumped on until his spleen broke. There was a lot of bad crap happening, and I think it happened at Duntroon too in the army. A similar time frame. But it happened certainly in the navy and there was a Judge Rapke who did a big enquiry in 1970...

22:00 I think it was a Royal Commission about bastardisation and whatever. It was rampant and it was there. And I know it was there, I saw it. Isolated incidents but I saw enough to know it was there.

Did that also include Col, sexually molesting...

No I never...isn't that funny. It's your turn in the barrel...no you never really saw that in the navy. Today's navy is different. I've got a nephew who's in the navy, he's a diver.

22:30 He followed on and he's a very highly qualified diver and all the rest of it. It's a different navy today. I know because I went down to their commissioning and I did all that. But in my day...I know that now... I'm not homophobic but my personal belief is that homosexuals shouldn't be in the navy. And my personal preference is that women shouldn't be in the front line in the navy. To me, women are for nurturing. They're not in the front line.

23:00 I don't want them with a gun in their hands. I know it happens and I know...I'm not chauvinistic in any way shape or form. I've got three daughters, I couldn't be. But I have the opinion that it's compromising the fighting ability of a ship. If you've got two guys in love with each other and another guy in love with one of them, there's going to be emotional conflict there. So that takes your eyes off what you've got to do. And what you've got to do

23:30 in an action situation is concentrate totally on that, not worry about your love life. Again with women too. I mean, with men are at sea obviously men are men and whatever. I think they put stuff in our coffee, I'm not sure. Bromide I think it was called. I don't know.

I think they used to...I don't know now.

I don't know either. But...it was funny. We had a reunion not long ago and all the guys were talking about it.

- 24:00 And every guy stood up and said, "Do you remember me, I'm Jeff so and so. I've got two daughters," and this one said I've got three daughters or whatever. And then I stood up and said, "I've got three daughters," and I was comparing and I said, "Listen guys, I think they put something in the coffee. Hands up all those..." and we laughed. But I think today's forces, to me, are compromised because of this, and when they had the sexual harassment, which they did in the navy not so long ago, it didn't happen
- 24:30 in my day because they wouldn't have been there. And I don't say...I mean, women, working for me I'd rather women...women are the best people. They are very clever people, but I don't think most men grow up as quick, as quick as women. Women are mature a lot earlier, and I believe that. I watch my daughters you know. But I don't think there's a place in the front line. That's my opinion for whatever it's worth. There was no sexual harassment
- 25:00 at all in my time. There was only one time at sea that I ever knew there was one homosexual on board, and when it came to light he was moved on because he was harassing some young guys. But it never happened. It's a fallacy and when they say, you're in the navy, your time in the barrel clobber, we laugh. But it didn't happen. It just didn't happen in my service time.
- 25:30 And I think in the old Jack Tar days, way back in the seventeenth century and Nelson's day, I think it did bloody happen and I don't think they were that bloody fussy. And I've heard stories about that stuff, but not in my day.
- Col you said something about your turn in the barrel. What's that mean?**
- That's an old navy gag. Your turn in the barrel means your turn to be the next root. Your turn in the barrel.
- To put it bluntly.**
- Yeah that's right.
- 26:00 And old navy expression. Come on, it's your turn in the barrel. It was very funny. I used to do a gag. I would say I've just had my navy medical and I knew there was going to be a rectal examination. I knew that but I just got a bit worried when I saw both his hands on my shoulders. There was lots of all those gags. I think that...
- 26:30 it was a boys club. It was a men's club. The blokes I were taught by...even when I went to sea when I was 16 and I went to the Sydney, and that was before she was commissioned into service for Vietnam, I learned some lessons. Things that I still do now that have stayed with me all these years. I'll get in the shower and before I get out or before I turn the water on, I'll say 'backs'. Now I can be by myself in
- 27:00 the bathroom and I'll say backs. My wife says it now as she's getting in the shower, backs. Now what that meant was: there was a big long row of showers and if you turned in the shower on next to another bloke who's having a shower and you don't say backs, he won't step back from the water and watch his back, because you can change the temperature in that water in his shower and burn him. So it was a courtesy thing and you said, "Watch your backs," and they knew you were going to turn hot water on,
- 27:30 which would change the temperature because the system alter. If someone was under having a shower and you turned on the next shower you could burn those people. And I learned the biggest lesson I ever learned. I was on the HMAS Sydney having a shower in the morning, like you do every morning, and I got into the shower and I turned it on full belt, and a great big hairy stoker put his hand around the bloody thing
- 28:00 and went bang and hit me, and I fell in a crumpled heap with blood...and he said, "You say watch your back son, you just burnt my arse," and I never ever forgot it. They were tough boys, but I never got into a shower without saying backs...in fact I would just about walk up and down saying backs. And that's the sort of sailor who was around in my day. There were some wonderful blokes I met,
- 28:30 but there were some tough cookies too and they could be really tough and they could be bastards, but there were some really fair blokes. I learnt that lesson very early and to the point that I will still say backs today. I get in a shower in a motel and I'll say backs. I can't help it because I'm thinking if I don't say that then that fist is going to come around the corner and bang.
- 29:00 So it's always stuck with me, and it's funny how you become...and even today, to be on time to me is so important. There is no way in the world I will be late for anything. I am so angry if I'm late for anything. In fact I'm always beforehand and, I'll be sitting in the car saying girls come on...now look, come on. And I'm shitty by the time they get there because I was taught in the navy, find out where you want to go and go there. Don't dilly dally, don't rubber
- 29:30 neck. You go there. You focus and that's how you get there. You focus. And that's the discipline they teach you. So I guess when you've got all this on board and you do all this, you're taught that and it becomes part of your psyche. It becomes part of your new character. They build you and they give you a new character. They give you a new set of rules. They say here's the
- 30:00 rules you've got to work by and if you don't work by these then you're going to fall foul of everything . By you doing that then other people...you're always taught other people's lives are in danger. When I

was doing a diving course, the petty officer used to say, "Pay attention or you'll die. I'll only tell you once. Pay attention or you'll die." And I never forgot it. One time we had to go down with these boots on, these leaded boots,

30:30 and they had a big pin up the middle of them, and there was a way of lacing these boots on that if you got in trouble you could pull the pin out and the boot would fall off you. And if you didn't lace them up properly you'd die because if you lost your air...you were on what they called hooker gear and we were diving in overalls and we just had a thing, a line down to us, we didn't have tanks on our backs. And this petty officer said right, "Pay attention or you'll die." You look. This is how you put these boots on. Pay attention.

31:00 I saw one bloke lace them up like buggery. And the petty officer watched him and when he got down there they turned his air off. And they pulled him. They're not going to kill him obviously. But he couldn't get the boots off. They had a stand by diver underneath and he had to go up and give him some air, and he was trying to get them off and he couldn't get them off. He came up and he said, "Pay attention or you'll die, now get out." And he threw him out because he didn't listen. So you were taught to learn

31:30 to listen straight away because if you didn't listen you would die. I guess that's what happens to you. I think that's part of your navy training. In a lot of ways it's helped me in civilian life because I feel I've got more endurance than what a lot of other people have. I ran a bit too hard at times. I had a heart attack at 37. I've turned into a total workaholic. I

32:00 think that was conditioning and whatever but yeah anyway...I'm getting lost here.

That's all right. Have you relaxed on the time principle, living with four women?

No, they keep me so busy. Yesterday I was down painting my daughter's flat. Normally tonight I'd be taking my young daughter dancing, she dances, she wants to be an actress so she does piano and dancing. My eldest daughter is married

32:30 and she's a very high profile lady in communications and we've got a little grandson. And my wife's an artist. She's a beautiful painter. We've been married since we were kids. I was 23 and she was 20. I just got out of the navy. And we've been married since we were kids. We had to get married. We had a little baby on the way. We were going to get married anyway, but we had a little baby on the way. I was in a lot of trouble.

33:00 I had only just got out of the navy. I was only out of the navy for six weeks and had a really bad car accident. I broke my jaw and had 97 stitches in my head, and I lost a job that I had in South America and Canada with oceanographic survey work. I lost that job, and I thought what am I going to do so I became a comedian.

Hang on, that sounds like a rather big jump...

Okay I'll go back a little bit. In the navy...during the time I was

33:30 in the navy, as I said I went to Vietnam. I went to Vietnam on the HMAS Hobart. I did my ordinary seaman time on HMAS Sydney. I was a head dodger which meant I cleaned the toilets. It was a veritable...it was an honour to go to the toilet in my toilets, they were good. Very clean. Then after Vietnam I did my able seaman's course and I went to sea on the

34:00 Stewart, HMAS Stuart. I was involved when the Frank E. Evans was cut in half by the HMAS Melbourne. I was there in the rescue boats. I was 19. I saw that...74 blokes died.

We'll talk about that later.

So I went through a lot of stuff. When I got out of the navy...while I was on the Stewart a couple of my mates played a bit of guitar and whatever. There was a guy by the name of Russ (UNCLEAR) who played beautiful

34:30 guitar. He taught me a couple of chords and I thought gee that's good. And because there was so much time you had at sea, there was nothing to do unless you played poker and drank beer and sat around, and there wasn't a lot of facilities on board a destroyer. As you know a destroyer is all gun emplacements and they fit the blokes around it. So like 60 blokes in a mess with one mirror, so you've got to learn tolerance. So I started to learn the guitar.

35:00 Mind you I had to learn a lot of songs because one song, they'd kill you, they'd break it over your head. So we formed a little band and we used to go to a place in Singapore called Nee Soon. We formed a band and we called ourselves the New Nee Soon City Ramblers Jug and Jazz Band and we'd get a free dim sim and a free beer and we'd set up in the corner and we'd play songs like 'We can run right through the knees of a pair of brand new DVDs'

35:30 And I used to pen songs like 'Who Put the Sand in the Vaseline' and all the good stuff. 'You'll Never See a Roof Rack on a Hearse'. And I started to write comedy songs and send ups, and amuse my mates. And it amused me. So when I did this, and I'd do a little bit of patter in between and tell gags and whatever.

- 36:00 There were Yanks and Poms there and the deal was they'd buy us a beer. It was wonderful. There was one deal we had going in Hong Kong which was really great. When we were in the bar, the Aussies used to pay one Hong Kong dollar for a beer which I think in those days was about 25 cents. The Yanks used to pay two dollars because they had more money than us. They didn't get paid until they got into port and they always had loads of bread. The Yanks just had so much money and we were on something like 30 bucks a fortnight.
- 36:30 So we were always broke. So what the deal was, we'd get them to buy us a drink and we'd go up to the bar and get two for two bucks. The Yanks thought it was great...no, hang on. They used to pay three bucks for a beer I think it was and we'd pay a buck. So I'd go and pay two and I'd get two beers for two bucks. He was saving a buck and I'm drinking for nothing. It was a good deal and then we'd play in the corner. So we were the New Nee Soon City Ramblers Jug and Jazz Band.
- 37:00 And I had a couple of mates and we had an old base made out of an old tea chest and we had a bloke playing the comb, and the band used to expand depending on who was on punishment. Sometimes you had fifteen members. But the one deal was you had to contribute something to the night. So it was a lot of fun. And I enjoyed those nights so much, and we got a free drink.
- 37:30 And when I got out of the navy in 1971...I had got out. I was out six weeks. I was broke and Karen and I had only just got married. We had a little baby, Kim who's now given us our grandson, it was just so tough. We were living in a one bedroom flat. We were broke. We were in debt from this car accident. I didn't know what I was doing. I had a 1953 Anniversary Ford.
- 38:00 I bought it for a \$100. And I always said in one of the books I wrote, I said that the tyres were so shredded. There were bits of rubber hanging off the tyre, that if I knocked anybody down they would have got 20 lashes as they fell. It was Angry Anderson tyres, bits of wire hanging out. And the air on the inside was wearing out. It was really bad. So I had this car and Karen and I were broke and a copper picked me up. I was working at a glass factory in Dandenong in Victoria. I was a crane dogman
- 38:30 and I thought I can't do this for a living. I thought this was a terrible way to come out of the navy after operating millions of dollars of equipment, and here I am, I'm a bum. But I had a wife and a little baby. And a copper picked me up and he said, "You have to keep this car off the road son". Oh no. And it was painted funny enough. It was painted shipside grey. It must have been some navy paint somewhere fell off a ship
- 39:00 somewhere. The only battleship-grey car in the whole of Australia, but it was easy to spot. So they picked me up. And I said to Karen... There was a show on television in Melbourne at the time called Kevin Dennis New Faces. It was hosted by Frank Wilson. I saw a comedian on it this night and I thought gee...and there was \$500 first prize. Anyway this guy was telling gags and I thought if I can go on there and do some of my
- 39:30 navy stories, clean them up, and do some of my navy stories, then maybe I could win some money, and pay for the tyres and bits and pieces for the baby. So I went on and I won the finals, and 30 years later I've got a garage full of tyres. That started a whole new life because I found I could amuse people. I could make people laugh. A footballer rang up
- 40:00 and said, "We'll give you \$10 a night and you can drink cola." And I thought oh yes. So I did that. One day I was...then I got into recording by accident. My whole career has been an accident. But I realised that here was one thing that I could do. I wasn't trained for anything else. I didn't know anything else. All I knew was how to detect a submarine. I knew a little bit about diving. All I knew was navy. I didn't know anything else that I could apply.
- 40:30 It was 1972. I had a basic knowledge of bingo. I could ask for a beer in 10 different languages and track a submarine. You know where was I going to go in the middle of Melbourne. Excuse me do you track submarines. So I had nowhere to go. So I had to become a labourer and I wasn't trained for anything. So I eventually got into this show business thing and I kept working.

Tape 2

- 00:44 **Okay Col. Can I just take you back to childhood days and what it was like for you growing up in Victoria. You mentioned a bit of a tough dad and stuff, so can you give us a bit of a picture?**
- Yeah. He was...
- 01:00 when I look back, as I said before I think he and my Mum had lived through...my Mum had lived through the Blitz in London and my father was a 20 year navy man. Dunkirk. He was a tough sort of dude. And I think Dad self medicated himself. So there was a lot of booze. In fact the whole area we lived in there was a lot of drugs. A lot of the fathers were drunks. A lot of the kids were poor.
- 01:30 It wasn't a typical suburban sort of area where you had all different levels. They were poor. This was a [Housing] Commission area and I guess just after World War II were doing it really tough. So a lot of those guys...because you never thought about it, you never knew any different. It was funny. Later on when I got into the navy, I went home to someone's place and

- 02:00 I thought, oh look at that, there's a bowl of fruit on the table. Isn't that good. Do you know what I mean. That was the norm for them. I always remember something my brother said which always tickled me. He was lying in the bush. He was in 1 RAR [Royal Australian Regiment] in Vietnam, and he really didn't have to go. They said to him...because I had already been before him. But he didn't want to leave his mates so he went over there. He did it pretty tough. He was at the Battle of Coral. But he was laying in ambush and his mate said to him next to him,
- 02:30 "Won't it be great when we get home and you're in the lounge room or the kitchen and you can just put your hand into a bowl and pull out a banana?" And Ralph looked at him and said, "A bowl of fruit!" He always said to me that he thought a peach was a suede apple. I can never remember seeing fruit as a kid or any of that. We were doing it tough. My Mum did it so tough. My old man was such a bastard. He kept her poor.
- 03:00 He used to charge her a dollar to drive down the street in the car. He had an old beat up Volkswagen and he used to charge her, and she was paying for half of it out of her board. He never changed her money for 20 years. She was poor. And she...I can always remember my Mum...there was a bloke up the road used to sell offal from the abattoirs and we used to have to...I had to go and get in newspaper
- 03:30 a bunch of this offal supposed for the dog. I remember washing it in the sink and she was making a stew out of it. And I said, "What's that Mum?" And she said, "I'm making a lovely stew for tea tonight." And I remember she was so ashamed. She had to wash this offal to feed us. The old man was obviously drinking all the money. So when you come from that background...but you didn't think about that when you were a kid because kids make a life out of anything you know. I used to go up to the stables and
- 04:00 work in the stables and I'd do anything...you can't do that with kids today, but we used to go out for days hiking, and we'd go into the bush and come back in. And there was never any thought about a kid could be molested or...it was a different era I think. Or maybe they just didn't care. So yeah, it...we didn't have a lot of things materially and I had a lot of hand-me-downs or whatever. So
- 04:30 when I got into the navy I just couldn't believe...look some of the stuff...the food to me...I've heard blokes complain about the food....bloody this...burnt bacon. I had never tasted bacon. I had never had a steak in my life before I joined the navy. I never had any of that. But the life itself. I had some great mates when I was a kid.

Can you tell us about some of them and what you got up to?

Some of the mates?

- 05:00 I actually went to school at Lyndale High School and John Farnham went to the same school. He was one below me although he was older than me. A little bit older than me, about 3 or 4 months. We had some of the same mates. Phil Jenner and all those. His big mate was a bloke by the name of Graham Dawes. They used to play cricket. There were kids around there and we formed our own cricket club. We had
- 05:30 we just had blokes you just knocked around with. It's hard to describe. All the blokes were in the same boat. All the guys had their arse out of their pants. So if someone had a football or a cricket ball they were king of the kids. It was cricket in the middle of the road. You'd have an old veggie crate for a thing and if the bus came round the corner and you hit the bus, you were out.
- 06:00 So you made your own fun. My Mum...I was the only one out of all us kids that got a bike. My Mum used to go char as she used to call it. She used to scrub floors and stuff and she actually got this bloke to put together a bike. You know, bits and pieces from other bikes, and he made me a bike. I was so proud of this bloody thing. It was a fixed wheel thing and it used to go round and round, and you couldn't back pedal or anything of that sort of thing.
- 06:30 It just went round and round. I remember coming round the corner on one side of the bike going up and down, up and down and ran over my father. He was a big fat guy and he was laying under the car looking at something and he was poking his legs out on the road. And I ran over him and it caught on his shirt and ripped his shirt off. He chased me up the road and beat the crap out of me. I remember one time, with this bike,
- 07:00 I was so excited about this bike, that I built out of old corrugated tin, a bike shed up against the back shed. And the shed was hanging over the fence and the old drunk came home, the bloke who lived at the back of us, from the pub with his Gladstone bag and his bottles, and walked into it and nearly decapitated himself. Took his hair off. And all I can remember was the door opening and there was blood dripping down his forehead
- 07:30 and half his hair missing, and he said to my old man, "That kid of yours, I want to bloody kill him." And my old man stood there and said, "Colin, you..." and I thought oh no, he's walked into this bike shed which was hanging over the fence. And the old man just back handed me, and this guy watched him give me a hiding and then it was over. But I nearly decapitated him. But I often remember that night. I often look back and laugh at it, but at the time it was bad stuff. My old man was a very bad tempered
- 08:00 man. But as I said, I look at him and I think he was affected by it all. So I can understand him a little bit.

Was he as bad during the day as he was at night time?

My old man started drinking mid morning. He would sit at the table and drink all day. He sat in the one spot. The one spot

- 08:30 looking out the window to anyone who walked past. He just sat there, bottle after bottle. He died at 49 or 50 years old of cirrhosis of the liver. You've got to drink a lot of grog to kill yourself at 50 years old. A lot of grog. So he never exercised. He never did anything. He was the laziest man I ever knew. The place was a wreck. Ralph and I, my brother, we'd have to do the gardening
- 09:00 and stuff. And we had to do it very tough because we didn't have mowers and stuff. He used to go away and come back and we were frightened of him because he'd go away on the Public Works Department, and he'd come back and if things weren't done, he'd....I can't understand how a man could do something like this, but I remember Ralph and I one day got a ping pong bat and ball. You know, that's something very simple
- 09:30 but to us it was the biggest thing. We traded it for a knife off these other kids, and we were playing ping pong back and forth. And it must have been about one or two o'clock in the morning and the old man heard it and woke up. He came in and hit my brother and hit his head and knocked my brother out and I ran out. I got out. But the next morning the old man made us get up and chop it in half, the bat and ball in half at the back door. How can a man do...I still
- 10:00 fail to comprehend that treatment of any sort of kid. But that's the sort of guy he could be. And yet he could be so kind to animals. He loved animals. He could be so kind to a stranger or someone like that. But to his own he wasn't. So we were a bit frightened of him. But in the end when I grew up and came back from the navy...I came back and I was 18 or 20 years old...I came home one time to see my Mum.
- 10:30 I used to send my Mum half my pay when I found out how he was drinking it. I came home and he was selling my mother a cigarette at the table. He said, "Do you want a beer boy?" And I said, "Yeah I'll have a beer." So he poured me a beer and Mum said, "I wouldn't mind one." And he said you owe me...like that was another two cigarettes. And he was selling...I said, "Are you selling your wife cigarettes?"
- 11:00 I was so disgusted and I stood up and poured the bottle of beer over his head and I said, "I'll see you later." I never came back for another 18 months. I found it very hard...I think after that...when my brother was 16, my brother took him on, and we were taught never to hit your father. But he pushed it too far and my brother got him and got him down and said, "I could kill you."
- 11:30 And it frightened the old man, and after that the old man never ever touched us again. It frightened him, and he walked away. And he never touched me again after that either. And he said, "Don't you ever touch him or me or Mum, anybody." He never hit my mother. I'll give him that. He never beat his wife. But he...yeah, he had a lot of issues. You know, when you look back you get through all that stuff.
- 12:00 You move on. I always said after that, that if I ever have children...which I have, I've got three beautiful daughters, they'll never experience anything like that. And I'm very close to my girls. So close. Just unconditional love. Total encouragement. I've never let anything that has affected me get to them. Their mother is just a wonderful girl. Karen
- 12:30 and I have been married 31 years and she's been so good to me. She was 20 years old, I mean she was pregnant with our first baby, and for us to even get through in the condition we were in...with the money, we had nothing. I mean, really nothing. I was in debt. Just out of the navy. I had \$1500 retirement money from the navy. That's what I had. And I had to pay the other guy from the car accident. We were broke. She stuck
- 13:00 through all this business and all the traumas all the way through. So a very special person. So I'm a very blessed man.

That's wonderful to hear. Did you get on with your brother Ralph when you were growing up?

Yes, very close. He protected me. He fought for me. He's still very protective of me. He went through a lot in Vietnam. He

- 13:30 came back...I took him off the plane myself. Unfortunately I think a lot of those guys were put back into civvies street and were never de-programmed. He was in and out of the bush all the time, choppered in and choppered out. And as I said, the Battle of Coral he did. He was involved in a lot of different theatres. He came back a totally different boy. Alcoholic.
- 14:00 I can say that because he'll tell you that. He's got on top of it, but mentally it did a lot to him. And I'm the only one he can talk to. He doesn't...he's got a lovely wife and children, but he doesn't talk about it. He talks about it to me, and I know he keeps a lot to himself. He was great with me. My sister Carol was into rock and roll and I love her dearly.
- 14:30 She's a lovely lady. She's got horses. She was horse mad She's the one who got me up into the stables. She worked as a strapper. She had horses and she was just in to it. She still shows horses today. She's just a lovely natured lady. She did it tough too. She married early too at 18 years of age to get away from the old man. She was married at 18. Unfortunately it didn't...

15:00 it probably didn't do her any good either. So she had it tough. But the three of us are very close.

Did you get much into the new age of rock and roll and I guess the early 60s?

At sea...look at sea...we used to buy records in Taiwan for 25 cents. You'd get a bootleg record. I used to listen to Bill Cosby. Loved Bill Cosby. To 'Russell My

15:30 Brother With Whom I Slept'....'Hey Noah!' All that stuff. I used to listen to...I was a big Bob Dylan fan. I was into all that stuff. Woodstock. All those guys. Even the navy guys. When I was taught to play the guitar, the first thing I was taught was twelve-bar blues. And I used to think it was so cool to be able to play twelve-bar Blues. Every bloody rock and roll song there is, is twelve-bar. So when I learnt how to do a few licks

16:00 I used to think that was so cool. We were different to the civvies. We didn't have long hair and we didn't have the...you weren't...and in somewhere there was an ache inside saying I wish I was part of that. But I wouldn't have given up my life for anything. But I learnt to play a little bit of 'Blue Suede Shoes' and a little bit of Bob Dylan, 'Blowing in the Wind'...a bit of folksy stuff. All that stuff.

16:30 And even today, I love Chicago, I love the Eagles, and the Beatles, I'm a huge fan. I listen to all that...Jim Croce. Steely Dan. I've got a big wide selection. I play a bit of country music. And I write silly songs and whatever. But I also like all that stuff. Play a bit of blues and all that.

What kind of rock and roll were you exposed to before you went into the navy?

Before? Well I was so young.

17:00 As I say 15, 16 years old. I was...the Beatles were just...like '62 I think the Beatles kicked through. But I was listening to...'She Loves You Yeah Yeah Yeah'...all that stuff. They were our heroes. The Beatles were just everything. I can remember coming home on leave and a bunch of guys who I went to school with Mick O'Connor and Mick Rawlings...and we'd be walking down to this coffee lounge singing 'Paperback Writer' and

17:30 all that stuff and it was so cool. Do you know there's a film on television called...it's a classic, 'Stand By Me'. And these kids are walking along singing 'Paladin' and that stuff. And I can relate to that sort of feeling. A bunch of mates and we'd all be doing it. We'd be doing the harmonies. She loves you yeah yeah yeah and then the other ones would...and it was a great innocent time.

18:00 It was a good time. And there were bands around in those days, even when I was home on leave, and people I know today who are friends of mine today, Normie Rowe, Brian Cadd, the John Farnham. They were in bands and I used to go and watch them. And John was 17, the same age as me when 'Sadie' came out. But before that I used to go down to the Havana, or around about that time, we used to go down to the Havana and watch The Group. Brian Cadd was in it, and Axiom,

18:30 and my wife Karen who was in that era too used to go to all the rock and roll dances and she knew all the groups. Her and her girlfriends, and she was even interviewed by one of the rock magazines at one stage there. Yeah, it was a big influence of our lives and when we were at sea, all the guys were doing the same thing. We were Aussies, we were into that. And even with Vietnam,

19:00 'Black is Black'. I remember going to Subic Bay and all the bands playing that sort of stuff. And I used to jump up with them all and sing, 'I Left My Troubles Down in...' That was a great era. Still is a great era for me.

You mentioned your mum washing the offal for a stew, what sort of other things did she have to pull together?

My Mum was very inventive. My Mum's a good cook. A great lady. As I said, she did it very

19:30 very hard, and tried very hard for us kids. She would pull together stews. She makes the best stews. She can make...I can remember when she got a bit smashed one day. She boiled ten bob. She couldn't find this ten bob that she...and she was breaking her heart because she had lost this ten bob. She had cooked it with the bloody stew. And another time we were sitting there and saying, "Mum this tastes like rubber." It was a Christmas dinner. She said, "What are you talking about?"

20:00 We said, "Mum it's something horrible." She had boiled the plug up with...my Mum...she's a funny lady. She's got a great sense of humour. And I think she got through on humour too. She did do it pretty tough. But she would put together lots of stuff like that. Meat those days was a lot easier to get. Not steaks and stuff but that sort of stuff, the stews and minces and things

20:30 like that. I always remember...it was very hard for her...I remember going to high school and jam sandwiches, and cheese sandwiches. There was a guy there I went to school with, I've never forgot him. Robert Baker. And his mother, Mrs Baker, and she's 80 odd now and I still give her a cuddle. She's a darling. She used to make Robert, he was a very fortunate kid, salad sandwiches with actual lettuce and tomato. I couldn't

21:00 believe this. He used to think...his mother would never think of giving him a jam sandwich on big hunks of bread like that, and all the jam was crystallised around the edges, and we used to take this to school. And I used to swap him sandwiches. And he'd say, "Give us one of your jam sandwiches," and I'd say

"Yeah all right." I'd give him the jam sandwich and I'd get a salad sandwich with white bread...this was so cool. It's funny how those things

- 21:30 stick in your mind. But look we never...I can honestly say I never went hungry. My Mum made...in fact my Mum had worked out...she told me this not long ago, it just shows you, she worked out that the big box of Weeties would last us a fortnight if Ralph, Carol and I had a bowl of Weeties for breakfast. And that was all she could afford. And my brother brought home this friend of ours...no names no court martial,
- 22:00 and I saw him not so long ago. His father was a drunk and his mother had cancer. He was only...I mean we're talking like a 13 year old kid. He was looking after his little sisters and little brother, and the father would only come home ever 3 or 4 days and he would have to go around the neighbourhood and...you know. And Ralph brought this guy home and said, "Mum
- 22:30 can he have tea with us?" And my Mum stood there...I can still remember her standing there crying, thinking how am I going to feed this kid, and he had brought...and she thought...and she divided the dinners up more. He brought his little sister in and sat her on his knee and said, "She won't eat much." My Mum says...she didn't eat that night my Mum. She said, "I couldn't eat that night." I couldn't let those kids go away
- 23:00 without any food. And that to me...when you've got to do shit like that, your old man's got to be responsible for that. I've held him responsible for that all my life. He let that happen. And I look back at her and I cherish her. My Mum turns 80 in November. She's one of the funniest ladies and I love her to bits. She taught me so much. She lived through the Blitz in the Land Army.
- 23:30 She'd done it really, really tough, and she married my old man, I think just for something to do. He treated her like a doormat. My Mum had to do stuff like that. We talk about this now and I say, "Mum I'm going to write this down." I'm going to write this down and I've got a tape recorder and I'm going to start recording some of her stories.
- 24:00 And it's one person's life. But her life has been so much harder than mine. So when I left and walked away from that...I wasn't aware of some of those things at that stage. I knew we were doing it tough, but I remember that this guy came with his sister, to one of my shows, and that guy there...this is so wonderful, that guy, I saw him about a month ago. He came to one of
- 24:30 my shows and we talked, and just prior to that Mum rang me and said, "Guess who dropped in and had a beer with me?" He comes and he brings some beer and has a beer with her, and he said, "I love your Mum." He said that to me. Now that guy's still around and brought his son to meet my Mum, and said this is Mrs Elliot, she's the boss. How wonderful is that. So those things are
- 25:00 not forgotten. So there's a lot of things we can be blessed for.

Have you any recollections of her getting through with humour at the time?

Oh yeah. Standing at the sink...I have recollections of my Mum...in the profession that I got into in the end as an entertainer and a comedian. I've told a lot of gags, and I always liked to do accents. All around us were accents. The bloke next door was a Cockney and he talked like that

- 25:30 "...hello mate. You all right then?" And the bloke up the road...who you calling... He was a Scotsman you know. And then there was a bloke down the end ... So I had all these accents all around me. I listened to accents all my life. My Mum used to teach me while we were doing the washing up. She'd teach me Stanley Holloway. She'd teach me because she knew it word perfect. "There's a famous seaside place called Blackpool, it's noted for
- 26:00 fresh air and fun. Mr and Mrs Ramsbottom went there with young Albert their son." And I'd listen to it, and she'd say, "Now you do it." And I'd say, "There's a famous seaside place..." so by the time...I could always do accents. If I got to a point in my career where I needed an accent for a film or a television commercial or a voice over, or just in a gag, I could always do an accent. I could do an Irish accent,
- 26:30 or a German accent. And I found she taught me that. And humour, yeah, my Mum had a great sense of humour. And laugh now...and we sit there and talk about the old man, and she said, "Shall we put him under the hammer again tonight. Will we put him under the hammer again tonight?" And I'd say, "No don't..." and she would say, "No, don't talk about the old bastard," she'd say.
- 27:00 She never realised in 20 years...she was only married to him for about 20 years I would say. I've been married for 31 but my Mum was married to him for 20 years, and in all that time she had one dress. One dress. And she used to throw it out every year and he'd get it back out of the rag bag because...one dress to go out in. And I remember one time I came home on leave and I said "Come on, I'm taking you out for tea." And she put this coat on and I said, "Mum take the bloody coat off. We're in the pub, take it off."
- 27:30 And she said, "I can't love." She had this one dress she was ashamed of. I said to her...I never thought about it, so I took her down and bought her some dresses, and she said, "I haven't got any money. I just haven't got any money." He kept her broke. When he died she didn't realise just how much money...I mean he would drink most of it. She never realised...she got a pension and she went bloody hell! She had all this money.

28:00 You should have seen my Mum. My poor old Mum. I keep saying to her, "Don't you bloody leave this stuff to me." She's got more shoes than Imelda Marcos. She works at the Opportunity Shop, been there for the last 28 years I think. She works at the Opo Shop and she says, "I have the first pick." She's got shoes, she's got dresses she's never even put on. She's got that many dresses...you take her out and you think bloody hell Joaney. She's got that much stuff. Her place is bulging with it.

28:30 She was kept poor for so long. And I understand the psychology of it. But I keep saying, "You bloody leave it to me and I'll be really, really dirty on you Joaney." So I love my Mum very, very much and I'm very close to my Mum. And there she is. She's behind me up there. She was in the Land Army and she was just a very special lady. She drank a bit of grog and I think that was her escape too.

Was that the only thing she would do to cope with what she was going through?

29:00 She had nothing else. When...there was five children but there was only three of us at that stage before I left home. I'd left home and the other ones came along. She only had...there was nowhere to go. She never went anywhere. She never had a holiday in her life. She had lived in this one place all the time. The big outing was when she would get on a bus and go into Dandenong and do her shopping or whatever.

29:30 She didn't go anywhere, she never did anything. He never took us anywhere. I never went on a holiday in my life. I didn't know what it was to go to the beach. Didn't know what it was to even go to the pictures. My brother Ralph used to take me to the pictures, he'd save up. We collected beer bottles and we used to get tenpence a dozen at the time. We would follow the winos around and you would get threepence for the plonk bottle. It was great. Oi he's just about dropped it, quick. So as kids we did that.

30:00 And Ralphy built billy carts for me and I used to go and collect the bottles and we'd stack them up against the back fence and then we'd ring the Bottlo and we might make two pounds. We'd buy all our Christmas presents and we'd take 10 bob of it and we'd go and splurge you know, go to the pictures. I can remember...my memory is so vivid about some of those days, he took me to see the 'River of No Return'. Robert Mitchum and Marilyn Munro.

30:30 It was ...I can remember sitting in the pictures and I just couldn't believe it. I know the tune to it. I saw it on television not long ago. I rang him up and I said, "Guess what's on TV, 'River of No Return'." We reminisce. He would take me to the pictures. He was very kind to me in a lot of ways. He also used to give me a back hander too, but he was a good boy. Yeah, and other thing I used to do, I used to

31:00 collect horse manure and cow manure, and I used to get a shilling a bag, a big bag. I used to go round and say, "What do you want? Medium, rare..." all the old...Mrs Coates up the street. They used to get me to get the manure for their garden. And that's how we made our money. And then my old man ended up buying a lawn mower, an actual motor mower. He used to send my brother out to mow lawns and take the money off him.

31:30 So he was a bit of a lousy bastard. Anyway that's how we got by.

This section of transcript is embargoed until 1 January 2034.

32:30 **Did your mum tell you anything...I did you know anything of World War II?**

No, I didn't. I would listen to the old man at the table with some of his old war mates who would come out and he would sit there and talk a little bit. I knew ...I checked his records and I knew he was at Dunkirk. He was blown off ships. You didn't know with the old man, you didn't know

33:00 much. He wouldn't...we weren't allowed in the kitchen when he was in there drinking. We'd come in and he'd say, "What do you want? Out you go." So we were thrown out all the time. I can still hear him say, "Go on, out you go." He'd piss us off. He wasn't ...no look...I didn't have a relationship with the guy. He was a jerk.

33:30 As far as I'm concerned he was a jerk. It's very hard because I realise he also had a lot of problems himself, but he...you know, he just knackered people's lives. And when he died, quite honestly, I was quite glad he did. Good. And when he died my sister said, "Yes!" So that's unfortunate. How sad is that. But it happens.

34:00 **It does.**

But you have to get past that. You have to go through that. We got through it. We got ourselves through.

What did you know about, I guess, communism at the time before...

Before Vietnam?

Yes.

Really not a lot. It was a word to me as a kid. Even in the navy when I first joined the navy, it was just a word to me. I knew it wasn't our way. I knew that we had a democracy and we could say what we liked and ...

34:30 within reason...there's a line I use in the show and it's true. We have freedom of speech in Australia which is fantastic. I mean they've got freedom of speech in China too but there's no guarantee of freedom after the speech. But that's pretty well true from what I knew about it. I knew you were controlled by the Government. That you didn't own anything. You were given money

35:00 by the government but you didn't own anything. I didn't know a lot about it. I was fairly politically naïve as a kid. On my way to Vietnam I was pretty much believing what they were saying, and that's it.

Why navy? Why not airforce or army?

Because I picked up a Pix magazine, I think it was a Pix magazine and there was an advertisement, 'Join the Navy'. I liked the uniform.

35:30 Could see the world. And it looked like an escape. If I had picked it up and seen an army thing I would have joined. But I had listened to him talk about the navy and all the exotic places he had been, and that was probably in my head as well. But the main reason was, hey I can get away. I can get out of this shit. I can get away from here. And earn money. It's a chance to travel.

36:00 And be earning money and have a roof over my head as well. No...I hadn't grown up thinking I want to be a fireman, I want to be a fireman and then I'm a fireman. I could have been...you could have thrown me a lifeline...if they had let me become a jockey I would have become a jockey I lived in the stables. I had moved away from home and I had been on my own for a while. So join the navy was mainly to get away from him and that's why I...I never took it serious at first.

36:30 I didn't take the navy serious. I was in all sorts of trouble all the time because I thought this is a bit silly. But then eventually I came round and I was taught and I thought, oh this is what it's all about. And I did...there was a lot of good times in the navy, a lot of great times, a lot of very funny times. There was a lot of sad times too and a lot of hard times. That's generally life too you know.

37:00 After watching...it's bloody incredible. After watching my old man drink himself to death, I became an alcoholic myself. I couldn't believe, when I came to the realisation that...what am I doing, and I realised I was self medicating myself and not thinking about things and not facing things that had happened to me in the service and whatever, and I thought I'll just drink. They would medicate you with the grog. They'd let

37:30 you into it. It's a bit sad that they don't supervise, or they didn't in my day. And they let them run rampant. I mean mate, I was 17 years old, I was overseas, I was running hard with men, and drinking hard with men. That was culture so I flew with it. I had to get on top of it.

And before the navy you were in the stables. You had

38:00 **moved away from home?**

Well partly. I was on and off in the stables. I would stay for a few days and do some work and then I'd go back. And then I'd get away from him again. Then I went and got a job as a salesman. I was at home. My brother had moved out. He had the blew with the old man and he had left, and within six months I was gone. So I joined the navy and ...he was a bit boozed and I got him to sign the papers and went in for the exams.

38:30 He never left his seat. My Mum came in on the train with me.

Was he aware of what he was signing at all?

I don't know, I can't remember and I really don't care. I would have forged his signature anyway. When I got the...I think he was a bit surprised when I got the letter back saying I had been accepted into the Australian navy. And all he said, "Was you'll never

39:00 amount to anything." And I walked out. He told my brother when he got called up in the Nashos [National Service soldiers] and he had to go in, he said, "They want to hang a sign around your neck saying 'wet'." No encouragement. He was a prick. So I thought...it didn't bother me. The only time I ever heard from him the whole time I was away, once I was in Hong Kong and on the bottom of one of Mum's letters was a note, would I pick him up some trousers.

39:30 But we sent the allotment home to my Mum out of my pay, right from the start. And I think I was only on...I think I'm right in saying three pound a fortnight and I used to send half of that home to my Mum. The rest I used to buy my smokes and toothpaste and whatever. But he was getting that money and drinking it. We didn't find out until later. I kept it up for about five years. Sent money home to my Mum to help her out. He was

- 40:00 ...yeah...Jesus I shouldn't keep him under the bloody hammer for long, but I mean...when I think about it he wasn't a big part of my life. I was only with him for 14 years, fifteen and a half years maybe. I was two years old before he joined us in Australia, so he maybe only had 12 years of my life. So I don't
- 40:30 ...it wouldn't have mattered if he was there or not. I think he made it worse. But my poor old Mum she had him.

Tape 3

- 00:32 **One thing that came for me when you were talking with Chris [Interviewer], Col, was that you had gone into the navy as a way to escape your home environment, did you suffer seasickness? Were you used to being on a boat?**

My first 12 months I didn't do any sea time. I was on a shore base, the HMAS Leeuwin in Perth. That whole system, I think, I said started in 1960.

- 01:00 The junior recruit scheme was introduced into the navy. I got there by '65 and I think by '70 it was finished because they realised it didn't work. I think it was the bastardisation...if I'm correct in that...I think I am. But no, I didn't do any sea time. My sea time came after that 12 months training and I went on the Sydney. My first ship was the Sydney. It was a floating hotel anyway. I don't know how people got
- 01:30 seasick on it. But I know my brother said, when he was taken to Vietnam on the Sydney, that there were blokes who got seasick. Now, to me it hardly moved. I never suffered seasickness. I'm a very fortunate person because I never suffered any seasickness. In fact I've been in typhoons in the navy when we had to put out to sea from Hong Kong, and we had to ride typhoons out and I've seen
- 02:00 big seas and never ever got sick. A lot of guys did get sick but I was very fortunate, I didn't get sick. What I bitched about was you couldn't get anything to eat.

What, during the typhoon?

Yes, because it was too hard to eat. No, I was very fortunate. Never had a problem with seasickness. The only time I ever had a problem with seasickness...so I am telling a lie. You get out on the grog and you get home three part cut at midnight

- 02:30 and you'd be sailing at seven in the morning and you'd be hung over to buggery and there would be a bit of a swell up and you felt a bit crook. But that was the grog. But not the actual motion seasickness.

Actually can you...just something that occurred to me then, where did you sleep on the destroyer? Did you find a certain part of the ship...

Oh okay. On the Sydney...you finished your training as a junior recruit and then you became an ordinary seaman, an

- 03:00 OD [Ordinary Seaman]. And you had to do, in my day, 9 or 12 months I think it was, sea time before you went back and did a course and became a radar plotter or a mechanical engineer or an underwater controller or a diver, or whatever. Whatever rate you were. Whatever your job was designated as. Until then you had to do general sea time. So my first was on the Sydney and on the Sydney we had hammocks. So you slung a hammock and you slept...a hammock
- 03:30 is something you can really take to or not. And every day you had to lash up and stow and that meant... there's a special way to lash it all up and put it in a big hammock bin. The area you've got to hang it on...you hang them fore and aft which meant the back of the ship and the front of the ship, and you used to hang like that. So when she rocked you wouldn't move. But when she went forward and back you'd feel this inertia there.
- 04:00 You could only really sleep on your back and you had to learn to do that in a hammock. And hammocks weren't...I don't think they were designed...they were left over from World War II. That's the old Sydney, and I think the Sydney if I'm correct was an ex Royal Navy ship. I'm pretty sure it was...a troop carrier and it was pretty antiquated even then. So we slept in hammocks and just got used to it. When I got
- 04:30 on destroyers, when I went onto the Hobart, she was a very modern ship and we had three tiered bunks which you had to put up every day. But it was still...and mattresses that thick, and it was still very close quarters but ...destroyers were built...they've fighting ships, so all the armaments are there, and they say, okay, now we've got all the guns on, the rockets and the torpedoes, where are we going to put the crew. We can put some there and some there. So they fit you
- 05:00 around your fighting capabilities. But having said that the Hobart was a very modern ship. It was even air conditioned which was unbelievable in my day. After that I went on the Stewart which was an older ship and that was fairly in your face sort of living. You had to have a lot of tolerance.

What about when you first started training. Can you tell us about the first day?

The first day!

As part of the junior recruits.

- 05:30 Very clear in my mind. I was taken down to the drill hall at HMAS Leeuwin. We were still in civilian clothes. We hadn't had anything done to us at that stage. They formed us up in a row and tried to instil in us three basic movements. They said...a chief petty officer, I think his name was Wally Owens, and he was a chief gunnery instructor...
- 06:00 like a staff sergeant would be in the army. He just yelled. He would just come up into your face and screamed at you. And called you a shower of shit and told you you were the worst thing he'd ever seen in his life and virtually abused you. That was your introduction into the navy. He said, "I'm going to say to you - Stand at ease! Now there's three basic movements, now pay attention!" He was yelling and I'm thinking, what's wrong with this bloke. This guy's red in the face and he's spitting in my face, and I went to wipe my face
- 06:30 and he said, "What are you doing?" And I said, "I'm wiping..." and he kicked my legs from underneath me. He said, "Stand at ease..." and your feet go so many degrees apart and your arms go behind your back, and you do this and you do that. And I went...and I was too slow so he got his foot in between my feet and he kicked my ankles out. And my legs went up and I went down and hit the deck and he dragged me up and yelled, "You stand at attention!"
- 07:00 And I said, "Oh come on mate." "Don't you call me mate!" And I went, "Oh what's happening here?" So that was your introduction. That happened to a lot of guys. A lot of guys will tell you about this. That same bloke would...if you were on...later on when you got into uniform and you were taught how to iron your uniform...there's a certain way to do it, so many creases in certain places. Every button, every bit of brass on you had to be shined. Your boots had to be spit polished so you could see your face like a mirror in them.
- 07:30 You had to be so well turned out. If there was one speck on your cap, I've seen that guy pull that cap off, pull it off and wack it over a bayonet, straight through your hat because it was dirty. And that would cost you a whole fortnight's pay to get a new one. So you really had to toe the line. So what they had to do with you was to actually tell you that you had left your Mum and now you're mine. And that you're nothing. You're just scum. You're nothing. And they have to break you down
- 08:00 and then they have to build you back up. And that's the way of any recruit training. And as kids, as 15 and 16 year old kids, we were going.....come on! You had never ever experienced anything like that in your life. I mean I'd had a pretty rough old up bringing, but I'd never experienced discipline like that. So the first thing they taught you was that. The first day I got a hair cut and I walked in and they had a guy called Snips and his son,
- 08:30 and I'm sure they were Dutch. I can still see this guy's face. And I walked in and I had pretty long hair because we were all into the Beatles. Beatles Beats. And I walked in with the guys and I said, "Just a little bit off the side." And whoom, he took everything off and left me with a little strip down the middle.

Why did he leave the strip in the centre?

I think he just wanted...he felt sorry for me. There was a little strip in the centre. And I walked out and the guys said, "You look like a Mohican.

- 09:00 You look Mohawk." And I've had that nickname from all my service mates ever since. I still get it today. They either call me Hawk, or Mo. Someone said, "He looks like a Mohawk." So yeah, firstly they make you all the same, and I think this is where the culture is. You've got to look the same. So you had your short back and sides. Then you're taken out of your civilian clothes and you're given a uniform. You're taught how to iron it, how wear it, how to clean it.
- 09:30 They take you back to basics and then you're all in uniform and you're given a number and you become a number and my number is 095102. It's still there, I'll never forget my number. No one in the service will ever forget their number. That's you.

Did you have to say your number all the time?

Yes. You would have to in any quote. "What's your number?" "095102." When you got your pay, you saluted at attention and your last three numbers were your pay.

- 10:00 "102 Sir." I know my number. That's my number for life. It's there. It's still there. Then you're taught that, and then you're inoculated. You go in and they didn't give you one needle and say come back tomorrow and we'll give you another needle. You put your hands on your hips and you got two needles in this arm and two in this one, and there were blokes falling over everywhere. And it would make you a bit ill.

What were the needles do you know?

I guess they were just cholera and whatever.

- 10:30 Inoculation. Like you do a dog. You get a dog and you say, okay we have to get it a distemper shot and whatever. And I think that's what they did. You'd had medicals to get in so they knew your basic medical

history but you had to be inoculated. So you'd go through and they'd give you your inoculation. Then they'd say, "Now by your bunks," and they'd show you...they'd show you how to make your bed. There was a way to make your bed, a navy way to make your bed.

11:00 I still make beds like that. There's a way to make your bed. There's a way to polish your shoes. There's a way to iron your clothes. There's a way your locker had to be laid out. Your socks would have to be there, folded on that angle. Your shoes had to be like that. You couldn't just say well I'll...

Paint it pink!

No you couldn't do that. You had to do everything as per navy. There was no choice. We were being retrained. So

11:30 when you did that, that was your first day and you were shell shocked. And then they said right okay... and everyone would say look at me, I'm in my uniform and all that sort of stuff...that's all knocked out of you real quick. The next day you're up at six in the morning for an hour's physical training. It might have been a five mile run, it might have been exercises on the parade ground or whatever. Then you had...you ran...you had to run

12:00 everywhere. You couldn't walk. There was no such thing as walking. You had to run. If you were caught walking your arse would be kicked severely. You would run everywhere. Double. Double march. You would double to classes. You'd double to the parade ground. You'd double here, there. You ran everywhere. You weren't allowed to walk. You were So all that's instilled into you. I remember walking past...my very first couple of days...I walked past an officer. I didn't know what an officer looked like.

12:30 So you had to learn that very quickly. What the ranks were. Who to call sir...and as a junior recruit, everybody, even able seamen were called sir. But you had to learn what was an officer and what was an enlisted man. Up to chief petty officer, and in those days there was no warrant officer, but up to those days, and then there became the officers. So you had to learn that, and I remember walking past an officer and he looked

13:00 at me and I said, "G'day mate," and I kept walking...well! Straight away I was on a week's punishment. For what! I just said hello to the bloke! You couldn't...that sort of thinking just didn't happen.

What about if you just saluted everybody?

You'd get your arse kicked too because you didn't salute chief petty officers and petty officers and able seamen and leading seamen, you saluted officers. And it was the shortest way up and shortest way down and there was a certain way of doing that. If you did it the wrong way you'd

13:30 be severely ...I mean, everything had a punishment you know. I said hello to this officer, "G'day how you going mate?" as I walked past, and he dressed me down and told me to report to the cox's office. And I said, "What's that?" And he said...! And down the gangway and insubordination and I got a week's punishment running with a rifle. Within the first couple of weeks I was running with a rifle on my shoulder and saying what did I do and I thought Jesus, this is bloody hard and I

14:00 ran for two hours. And they wouldn't let you put any padding on your shoulder, so it would knock skin off your shoulders and it used to hurt you, but you got very fit very quickly, and you had to learn that you had to mentally get through it. It's hard to describe, but once you accept the fact that there's no escape from this. I have to toe the line and learn quick or I'm going to suffer. This is what they make you do. You learn quick or you'll suffer for it.

14:30 So you can't buck the system. So you learnt quick. You learnt quick.

How could you ...you made me think of ...being a professional comedian, like Benny Hill doing the wrong salute...I mean how could you do the wrong salute?

We were taught the right salute. We're different to the army. Army do that I think. Like the English. But the navy was shortest way up and shortest way down. The salute was like that, but you only saluted certain ranks or certain people, and they were officers. You didn't salute a chief

15:00 petty officer. I mean you wanted to because they were like gods, but you didn't. And if you did you would get in trouble for that. It was protocol and part of your training is to teach you navy protocol. Navy indoctrination. I taught it later, so I understand it. There are certain things you must learn and you have to be taught that fairly quickly at rapid fire. And when you go into the navy you don't have a chance.

15:30 You can't say, "G'day chief, how you going mate?" Hey, they're gods. They were gods to us. And we were kids and they were frightening people. The chief gunnery officer, I never heard the man talk. In 12 months all I heard was the man yell. I never heard him talk normal. I was never in his company when I could hear his normal voice. I mean that's all I knew and that's how he would address you. "You come here and you come here right now!" And you did it

16:00 real quick. Oh god, I'm dead here. In instructional class...there was a petty officer who taught me...he saw me get a hiding in the ring. He saw me get a good biffin'. I didn't know how to fight well. And he taught me, he took me aside and said, "Do you want to get hurt any more?" And I said, "No sir." And he

said, "Well you come down to the gym tonight and I'll show you how not to get hurt so badly." And he showed me

- 16:30 a few little bits and pieces which stood me in good stead many years later. Showed me some kindness, but again at a distance. But said to me, you're game but you're going to get hurt unless I show you some stuff. He was a physical training instructor. Joe Head his name was, and he was a petty officer. Petty Officer Head and I just had so much respect for him.
- 17:00 He was a tough man but a good man. Joe Head took some lessons and I took the time to go down because I thought I had better do this because the next time I get in the ring I'm going to get hurt again. So the next time when I went in I might have got a hiding but not so bad. So you learnt from those sorts of people. There were other people there who I learnt from. Lofty Thurlow. He was a chief petty officer...a chief petty officer I think, and taught seamanship.
- 17:30 He showed me a little bit of...because I had never had that much encouragement as a kid and never had a real father figure...and not that I was looking for a father figure...I guess I was in a way...but I did a splice one day and he came up and patted me on the back and said, "Well done." And he said, "Col I want you to..."and he called me by my first name and that was unheard of in the navy. You were named Elliot...and he said, "Col, I want you to show this bloke how to do that. You pay attention to Elliot here."
- 18:00 I was so...I was so excited that this man had showed me a little bit of attention. I wanted to please him. So I just studied and studied and studied that seamanship and I ended up at the passing out parade at the end of the year, I won the Seamanship Award for the whole division. And then the admiral presented me with a book. And I was so proud of that and I did it because of that man. So I often thought of that and maybe if someone had patted me on the back
- 18:30 a bit of earlier, maybe I could have done okay. Maybe I could have finished my schooling and become reasonably intelligent.

Definitely. But it doesn't sound like you did too badly.

I taught myself later on. I read a lot and I sort of self educated myself because I had left school so early. But in that first year in the navy they took me through to Intermediate in schooling, maths and English and whatever. But I had enough maths to get into the navy.

- 19:00 My schooling really finished there. The rest of my schooling has been...I'm a 'Road Scholar'. I got my education on the road and that's it.

So it's kind of interesting that you left your home, your father in a sense to join the navy and there you found some really wonderful father figures maybe.

There were some great father...

Did you have one in particular...like a mentor?

Not until later on. When I went to Vietnam and I was on the Hobart which was the...we were the first to go...

- 19:30 a navy unit to go I think since Korea or World War I. But we were the first to go to Vietnam anyway, apart from our diving team. The first navy. And there was a guy on there, Marty Martino, a leading seaman, weapons mechanic...no underwater control, underwater weapons rather, and he showed me some kindness and I was his ...
- 20:00 in port, when we had some leave, I was his bosun's chop...what they called his bosun's mate. I was his assistant. He was security on the gangway. He was the quartermaster, and he treated me with so much kindness. He treated me like a human being. I just thought the world of him. He was just such a wonderful man. And I've since come to see him again. Twenty eight years later we met again and he's just the same man and
- 20:30 he ended up doing over 30 years in the navy. He was a warrant officer and I have so much respect for that sort of guy. And to me he was the sort of man I looked up to, and felt that this man is worthy of my feelings. He was a hard man. He'd been in the navy for 15 years when I met him. But he had so much respect on board the ship.
- 21:00 He treated me with respect and...there were other people in the navy too, but that one particular man, I always looked up, and will always regarding fondness. He is a wonderful guy.

Was there anything in training that you were particularly good at?

Bloody seamanship and running with a rifle. I was pretty good at punishment detail. I was pretty good at that. I lead the pack. In fact

- 21:30 when I got 14 days...me and a couple of guys jumped ship and we got caught drinking up an alley...

Can I stop you there Col. What do you mean by jump ship?

That's an expression sorry. It's hard to explain. Jump ship means...even on a navy base...when you jump

ship... that means your duty...and your not supposed to be going ashore but you sneak ashore.

How did you sneak ashore though?

Well, jumped

22:00 over the fence. Jumped over the fence with a couple of mates after lights out and headed into Fremantle. We got some booze and we got up an alley. We're 15 and 16 year old kids and we were having a ball. And I can tell you now, Green Ginger wine...burns your throat. It's horrible when it's coming back up. Green Ginger wine and Brandivino was only seven and six a bottle. We all pooled together. And we got up this alley.

22:30 In those days you had to be 21 to drink and we were 15 and 16. And there was a bunch of us up this alley drinking and the coppers, the local coppers came down the alley and grabbed us, and we said, "Look they're nearly with us so drink as much as you can." So we did. We were put before the Commodore on the following Monday. We were taken into custody and we were put before the Commodore and charged with jumping ship, drinking ashore, and I got yet

23:00 another 14 days.

What did you do on that punishment?

Okay. That required, in those training days as far as I can remember, you got up an hour before everyone else. You went and scrubbed out the galley. You did all that. You had about 5 minutes to eat your own breakfast. Doubled away to do all your normal day's duties. At lunchtime when everybody stopped and had lunch, you ran for

23:30 an hour with a rifle above your head or around the bull ring or whatever. Or you might have had more detail to do up in the galley or you served the other guys. Then when everybody else knocked off at 1600 or whatever, you didn't. You went down to the parade ground and you ran for another two hours with the 303 on your shoulder, or you bunny hopped or whatever. Weekends came and you were detailed. Or they would give you stuff like running kit musters.

24:00 See, in the navy...I don't know about the other services, you have different numbers for different uniforms. You had Number Ten's which were like white shorts, white top, hat and blue socks and black shoes. Number Ten A's were blue shorts and working shirts like this. Full Blues were a full blue uniform with a collar. The Ice-cream Suit was a full ice-cream suit. And what they used to do was get you down at the gangway,

24:30 at the base of the camp and they would stand you in line and they'd say...they'd say "Right, we're going to have a running kit muster." Which meant they'd say, "Back here, you've got one minute, icecream suits." And you'd run a mile to your barracks ...maybe half a mile...it was a long way. You'd run, change and run back and fall in. Then they'd say, "Ten A's" and you'd run and come back,

25:00 and they'd take you through your whole series of uniforms. I don't know how many there were... Number 8's, and then they'd say...then, to make it...this always made me laugh. They'd say, "Shower outfit," and you'd run back with a toothbrush and a towel. They'd make you run. And that was physically so demanding. Blokes were dropping out on the side of the road.

How did you keep your towel on?

You ran with your hand. And those sorts of things. That was hard

25:30 ...and you had to do it. But when you look back on it now you laugh, but at the time it was bloody tough going. So you did that. And then if you were on punishment over the weekend, guys would be out there and you'd have to go and...some of the instructors were really good blokes. They wouldn't run you so hard. They'd say okay we're going to do something else, or they'd send you over to do litter patrol or something like that. That was really good. But a lot of them were pretty tough cookies. They'd run buggery out of you.

26:00 I remember one particular officer who used to get drunk and come down to the parade ground and...

Sorry Col we've got to stop for a second.

There was one particular officer used to come down to the parade ground when he got a bit of booze into him, and come down in the dog watches when we were running and he'd say to the leading hand who was in charge of us, "Bring those men to attention," to me.

26:30 And he'd say, "You gentlemen are really, really going to cop it." And he'd give us all these terrible things to do. Bunny hop with our rifles above our heads across the ground, and you could hardly walk when you came back and if you dropped it...and guys would break down...there were a few blokes who would cry and he'd berate them. I saw one bloke crack and throw a rifle at him and ... and all hell hit the roof.

27:00 But anyway he was taken away one night. They escorted him off because he was that drunk and he was...things like that happened but not very often. But I can always remember those sorts of things...oh no, look who's coming around the corner. Oh no. I think he was a commander or a lieutenant commander and he got in trouble for it. But those things happened. They can't do those things to you now. And the kids today in the navy don't

27:30 have to put up with that. It just doesn't happen. If you get put on a charge, someone told me, you can have a solicitor with you. Or someone to speak for you. We didn't have that. You got charged with something. I mean I had a lot of charges in the navy. I did some shocking things. Not nasty things, but if we'd go into Hong Kong and we were there for two weeks, and I wanted to stay an extra week, then sometimes I did.

28:00 Stuff like that. I used to bend the rules to suit myself and I paid for it. It wasn't the navy's fault. It was my fault. I was having a good time. Yes, the discipline was hard, but at the same time in a lot of cases it was fair. If you did the wrong thing you got the punished, and you knew the consequences of what you did. One time

28:30 I was under punishment and we went to a place in Terendak I think it was called then, in Malaya...to play the army on the weekend...they were up there. I was on the Stewart and we went up there for the weekend.

What do you mean sorry, to play the army?

Play them sport...

Play against them in a footy game?

Yeah or cricket whatever, rugby, league what ever. And there

29:00 was a big army contingent up there and our ship...they didn't have a wharf but our ship pulled into their bay or whatever, and we went ashore in boats. That particular time we left from Singapore to go up there. When we were in Singapore...I was up in the SCR [Sailor Control Room] which is the sailor control room because that was my leaving port station. I was sitting there, and one of the guys came up to me and said, "Col we've just taken 12 army blokes on board to take them back

29:30 overnight to their post." And there's a guy sitting in the mess and gee he sounds just like you. And it was my brother. I hadn't seen him for three years. He was in the cricket team, the army cricket team, and they knew that as part of the deal they were going to get a ride back on a navy ship to their base. And he knew it was the Stewart and he knew I was on it and he surprised me. So it was a great reunion. So I was under punishment at the time because

30:00 I'd messed up somewhere in Singapore or whatever. I'd did something wrong.

Do you remember what you did wrong?

I can't remember but I know I was confined to ship. I wasn't allowed ashore. I'd done the wrong thing but I don't know what I did. But I went to the Skipper through the right channels. You had to put in an application to see him....through the divisional officer, through the petty officer...to see the captain. And I went before the captain and asked, "Could I please

30:30 go ashore for the weekend and spend it with my brother?" I hadn't seen him for three years. And I felt... the worst thing I've ever done in my life, I felt so bad. Our Skipper, I can't remember his name, he said to me, "Elliot, I'm going to let you ashore, but if you are not back on the beach by five o'clock on Sunday night," and he said, "don't you dare let me down." And I was right on the booze pretty heavy in those days. He said, "Don't you let me down. I'm going to let you ashore with your brother."

31:00 "Thank you sir, yes sir, no sir, three bags full sir." And away I went. I had the weekend off with my brother. Well away we went. We hit town. We hit Malacca with a vengeance. Five o'clock Sunday morning I was sitting in the boozier playing a ukulele to all my mess mates and their wives... 'Knees up Mother Brown' or whatever it was. I was doing all this. And I said, "Mate I've got to be on the wharf...on the beach."

31:30 So I headed back to the beach and said goodbye to my brother. And I was walking and walking and I said, this is a long way, and all of a sudden this land rover pulled up behind me and said, "Hey sailor where you going?" And I said, "I'm heading to the beach." He said, "Well you're heading inland. It's going to take you 2000 miles, you've gone the wrong way." And I thought oh, that's why I can see all these monkeys. So I ended up walking back to the beach and it was ten past five and in my drunken state I thought well,

32:00 they've gone, so I might as well go back to the boozier. So I went back to the boozier and I said, they said I can stay! And they found us a day later. I was the only sailor left on the base. The ship had sailed, and I was in lockup. They found us playing billiards at 3 o'clock in the morning, and the MPs [Military Police] grabbed me and threw me in the cells. When I finally got back to my ship, I think I...the Skipper

32:30 just made me feel so bad. He said, "I don't even want to talk to you." And I thought, oh no! I was busted. I lost my good conduct stripe, and that took me...it takes you four years to get a good conduct stripe. It took me six years to get mine in the first place. So I lost that. I was busted. I lost pay. I was lucky I didn't 'go up the river', which is Holsworthy.

33:00 Hang on, what do you mean 'go up the river'?

'Go up the river' means naval prison. Holsworthy was navy, army, airforce prison. I was lucky I didn't

get court martialled, but I let the Skipper down, and I felt bad because I had let him down. But that booze. I couldn't control it.

How old were you at that time?

I would have been 20 maybe. I don't know. I can't remember.

33:30 **It's a wonderful story.**

They made me ...they gave me the keys to the lockup once at Cerberus and told me to look after six prisoners and I let them out and took them to a party in Dandenong, and one of the prisoners drove back and locked themselves back up and two days later I was in with them. There's a lot of stories. But look, I had a good time, but I was on the booze. I couldn't get off the booze. It was pretty hard in those days.

34:00 But when I worked, probably the most rewarding time I had in the navy...they knew I was a pretty good sailor as far as I knew my job, I knew seamanship, and when I got to Cerberus, that was my last posting, or the one before my last posting and they said, "We want you to teach recruits." And I thought, you don't want me to teach them what I know. But I taught basics in NBCD [Nuclear Biological Chemical Defence] ,

34:30 basic navigation; basic seamanship.

What is seamanship exactly?

Well seamanship is just...basic splicing, how to tie knots, how to row a boat, all the different parts of the ship. You've got to teach them the basics of what they need to know. How to tie up a ship, how things operate on a ship, how the anchor chains work.

35:00 How the capstans works, how to throw a bolo which is to get your lines across to the wharf...they used to have this thing that was like a big monkey fist. It was a weight with a rope and you'd physically throw it to the guy on the wharf and he'd pull it in. And on the end of that are the big manila ropes. So I had to teach the kids, these young people, how all those things operated on board a ship. I had to teach recruits that basic

35:30 stuff. And then other areas, other rates used to come in and teach them about different things. So I had two classes I took through Cerberus. Two sets of recruits and that was probably the most rewarding time I ever had. Probably because I had an audience but I had these people, and I had to teach them how to go to sea. And I had to teach them safety. How to lower a boat,

36:00 how to...all those things. And that was rewarding for me. I enjoyed that because I was able to impart those things...because I did learn all those things well. But I also did learn how to drink and how to party.

What about your first drinking experience, because you must have been only about 14 or 15...

My first booze experience was in the navy. At Leeuwin. I jumped ship with the guys

36:30 and we bought bottles of Red Ned [wine] and Green Ginger wine and we were trying to men, and that's what we did. And then later on I went to sea and you weren't allowed a beer issue...I think in those days until you were 18. Then they'd give you a beer issue at sea.

37:00 But they never really supervised you before that. When you were at sea on a ship...I was into the grog pretty heavy by the time I was overseas at 17. I was into it pretty heavy. We were men, and you were expected to drink, and you did drink. You had to keep up with them. By the time I got out of the navy at 23,

37:30 I was a pretty hardened drinker. And I couldn't understand how people would go out and have one beer, why would you do that. You drank to get drunk, and you drank to run hard. And we ran hard. And when I met my wife, she went....it was a bit of a revelation. We hit it off so well but she knew I was effected by the service and she had never seen anyone like me before, and I had

38:00 never seen...civilians to me were a different breed. They didn't live like me. They didn't live by the same codes that I had. Even today, honestly is just so paramount. On a ship you would come back boozed and throw all your dollars out on the mess table and you'd go to bed and the next day there would be guys sitting around it playing cards and it would never be touched. You never put a lock on your locker.

38:30 You would never ever go near...it was just unheard of. If there was ever anyone who did steal anything in the navy, they were dealt with very quickly. It was just not condoned. You just didn't have that. If I left \$20 sitting on my bunk, it would be there a week later. So I can never understand how someone can steal. When I ran across it in civvies, I thought how could you do that?

39:00 How could it even cross your mind. But that's inherent in us I think, but it's weeded out in the services, well in the navy anyway. There has to be total honesty...because they become your family. The crew become your family. You living in a mess, very, very close, in your face living and they become the people you rely on to survive. They people become people who are there for you as well as you are there

for them. You rely on them.

39:30 So every aspect of your life...that's why the bonding for service men is so great. I have people today who I've know since I was a kid and will know until the day I die. I got an email the other day...we've got to help so and so's wife. She's a widow, and we need to help her get her things sorted out. He was one of the guys we joined with. Still, nearly 40 years later

40:00 and these guys are still doing for each other. It's wonderful.

Yes it is. Relationships that stay for life. Just something that occurred to about having to run back and get changed into another uniform, did those uniforms mean anything...like if you wore your ice-cream suit did that mean...

We called them ice-cream suits...I think they were called Number Sixes. And they were tropical. They were for when you were in the tropics. They were white I was...I remember

40:30 the last time...not very often did you get to wear the full tropical outfit. It was mainly a parade outfit, when you were on parade in the tropics. Penang or whatever. I remember one Anzac Day parade we had to wear our full tropical uniform, and I remember when I was on the Queen's barge in 1970 when she came out....I was the bowman on her barge when she was on...she was taken from the Stewart to the Royal Yacht

41:00 and etcetera. And the reason I was asked to put my ice-cream suit on and become...because at the time I was under punishment, and also because I had Vietnam ribbon medals and they wanted people with medals, and I was asked to...so that was the ice-cream suit, and it was a ceremonial suit in the tropics. Or when we were overseas we'd wear half that uniform

41:30 which was white bell bottom trousers and a white dickie front with your hat and black shoes. They were all different numbered uniforms. They had different numbers on them. So they were Number Sixes. Eights were long jeans and work shirt. Number Ten's were white shorts and dixie front. Number Ten A's were blue shorts...and then Full Blues were the full serge uniform like the traditional navy suit.

Tape 4

00:34 **Okay Col. You were just about to describe for us your average day?**

Okay, the average day on a ship starts at...I'm sure it's six or six thirty but I think it's six o'clock. And the boson's mate on the Bridge will wake you up. And he'll blow a bosun's whistle.

01:00 I won't try and do it for you, but it's an annoying, shocking sound. That will come over the ship's intercom and it'll wake you up. And they'll say stuff like, "Wakey, wakey, wakey, call the hands, call the hands, wakey, wakey, wakey. Dress of the day...Number Ten A's..." or dress of the day, Number 8's, depending on the day and where you are. Then they'll give you some detail of what's happening in the day. So that's your wake up call. So you know

01:30 for a start what the dress of the day is. He's just told you what the dress of the day is. Also it's posted on a bulletin board, dress of day. Part of the daily orders which is what the dress of the day is. So your day starts there. You get out of bed and then everybody ambles off to the showers or whatever. At sea you have a four hour watch system. You'll work a normal day from eight in the morning until four in the afternoon and then you'll knock off. But you've also got a four hour

02:00 watch during that time too. So you might have...or a two hour watch. So you don't get the same watch every night, they have what they call the dog watches and they're split into two, so you have four to six in the afternoon, and then the last dog...that's the first dog, and the last dog which is six to eight. And then

02:30 the first watch starts which is eight to midnight. Then the midnight watch starts, which we call the 'guts', all night in with the guts kicked out you know. That was midnight until four in the morning and then four in the morning until eight in the morning. So what that meant, they would have a body of guys, seaman, would take that watch. In that four hours you would have to do maybe...as an

03:00 able seaman, probably do an hour on the helm, on the steering wheel. And you'd maybe do an hour's lookout. And then you might sit down and have a break. Down the mess for an hour or down by the boat. We'd meet by the boat on the starboard side or the port side, and then you may have another hour of lookout. Then you went to bed. That might be four o'clock in the morning, and you'd get up at eight and start your normal day, working on the quarter deck, chipping pain.

03:30 Or whatever you had to do as a seaman. So you would do this at sea. So you had a four watch system. As an able seaman you'd keep a four hour watch every night. You'd do one of them. And then during the day you might have...if your watch was the four noon watch, eight to midday, and in that four hours you might have to leave where you are working, chipping paint or whatever, and go and steer for an hour,

- 04:00 or whatever. So you were used to doing that sort of system, and that's how your day was. It went from there to there everyday at sea. When you're along side, you didn't have obviously the four watch system. When you were along side you'd work from eight to four, eight in the morning until 16:00. You were woken up at six and you got all your ablutions or whatever done and then you started work at 8 o'clock. Whatever that be, it might be hanging over the side with
- 04:30 the bosun's chair painting the side, or it might be servicing some fire fighting equipment. It might be scrubbing out the toilets or whatever. And I did that a lot of times. So you worked like that as normal. Or it might be storing the ship....re-storing the ship, and you've physically got to put crates of beer on and veggie boxes and...two crates of beer up there, one down the mess. You'd do all that.
- 05:00 So those were sort of your normal days, and at 16:00 hours you knocked off and your first liberty boat for the liberty men, you could go ashore from that time on. And if you weren't required until 8 the next morning, you had to be back on board I think probably an hour before 8 the next morning. Or if you were a young kid, a young recruit, you might have Cinderella leave which meant back by midnight. We used to call it Cinderella leave.
- 05:30 If you were on Cinderella leave you would come back before midnight. And if you were adrift, which meant you were a little bit late, you'd be charged and get punished. And that would cost your leave passes and whatever. So that's how it...and you worked in those systems. It was different in Vietnam. It was different when we were working because we were four hours on, four hours off, four hours on, four hours off, twenty four hours a day at cruising
- 06:00 stations. And then when we went to action stations sometimes you wouldn't get any sleep until 1900 hours. So that's how we did it.

And what were your actions stations on the Sydney before you went to Vietnam?

No, I never went to Vietnam on the Sydney. I went on the Hobart, 1966, to my knowledge, Holt was Prime Minister. I've learnt most of my...I was

- 06:30 fairly politically naïve before I went to Vietnam. I knew we had been in Vietnam since '62 I think, or the Yanks had been there since '62. And I also knew that they were saying stuff like...even [US President John F.] Kennedy said, this will be over really quick. Even as far as [US President Richard] Nixon when he was in, in '68, he was saying we'll win this shortly. Spiro Agnew [US Vice President] said
- 07:00 it was going to be won. So all that stuff. I knew what was vaguely happening but before I was committed to go to Vietnam myself I was on the Sydney. The Sydney wasn't taking troops across in '66. 1967 I think she started taking troops across. Until then, '66 I think we only had our diving team. They were clearing the harbours and we had...before the Yanks got us really involved, we had our advisors in there
- 07:30 and our people training. The navy wasn't committed. We had the Jeparit and the Boonaroo, the ANL [Australian National Line] I think were taking supplies across, but no troops. And then they committed the Sydney. She took the troops across. But that happened after I left the Sydney. I left the Sydney to go home on leave. And it was 1967
- 08:00 and I was going home on leave. They said, "Where are you going Elliott?" and I said, "Home on leave." They said, "No you're not. You're going to Vietnam." So they sent me across to the Hobart. Me and a guy called Rick Anderson, we were...he was four months older than me. We were sent across. They didn't ask us how old we were. We were regular navy and we weren't kids. I had been in the navy for two years by that time. I was seventeen and a half I guess.
- 08:30 We went across to the Hobart. She had been commissioned in Michigan and they had half the original crew from her commissioning. So we were the first contingent...the first...Holt said, "Okay we're going to give you a navy contingent. We're going to give you a unit," so they lent the Hobart to the 7th Fleet. We were under the command of the Americans. So we were under their command and we went across to do gun line duties and later on some action
- 09:00 up north. So we went across to the Sydney. So that was my first...and then I started to think oh, is this for real. I didn't think it was when I first started. It was like, well don't forget the suntan lotion and the beach towel. You know, tropics. I didn't have much of an idea. I wasn't in the work up trials. From what I can remember I wasn't on board during the work up trials.
- 09:30 Because I was a late addition to the crew. It was like they needed two more guys, two ordinary seamen to make up the ship's company.

So can you elaborate on what the work up trials were?

The work up trials...when a ship has got to go into action or go into exercises, they have to do work up trials. They have to get the crew into peak condition. When you go to action stations, it might be four o'clock in the morning and you're dead to the world and you hear

- 10:00 bong, bong, bong, "Hands to action station, hands to action station." You have to be at action stations, closed up, from your bunk, to that action station in a minute, a minute and a half. And that takes a lot of reaction. They have to train a crew to do that. They have to train a crew to be ready to do that. I mean,

you can't amble. From that to that.

10:30 From dead asleep to looking or what ever your action station requires you to do in the shortest amount of time possible. So they train you to do it. When they do it in the train up work up trials they say for exercise for exercise. Always for exercise is prefixed before that so you know it's an exercise but you still have to close up for action stations as quick as you can. And if the Skipper's not happy or the First lieutenant then they'll say, that was sloppy or

11:00 whatever and do it again. And by the time they've finished working you up you're that bloody good at it, that you can get into action stations so quick. So you sleep with half an eye open. And that happened to us quite a lot. We went to action stations...like we got into a lot of action over there which I never thought we would have, but we did. And it was a big eye opener. So, I wasn't in the original work up trials. But when we left Sydney to go to Vietnam

11:30 he practiced us...practiced, that's not a good word. He made us practice our different jobs so much... our action stations so much that by the time we got there, we were fairly good at what we could do. And as time wore on, the actions we were in, made us even better. So I'm very proud to say it was a very tough crew. Very experienced.

12:00 There was a lot more people who were a lot more experienced than I was. I was just a ...I was the lowest of the low. I was in fact the youngest on board, and I was also the bottom rank on board. There was no one lower than me apart from my mate. And a couple of guys who were the same rank as me but we were the lowest. But we had jobs to do, certain jobs to do.

I wanted to ask you whether being the youngest and the lowest rank perhaps on the Sydney whether that effected the kind of

12:30 **duties that you were given?**

Oh yes sure. I'll give you one off the Sydney. This is in my book. I've never forgot it. And I've changed the name of the petty officer, the chief petty officer because I don't want to get into trouble. I was given the job of forward heads dodger. That's really nice and sounds really impressive, but it means toilet cleaner. And I forget how many cans there were. About 20 of them in a row. And every night at sea

13:00 no matter where you are at sea, every night at sea in normal conditions, or in the harbour, you have rounds. Which means an inspection by the officer. Every mess deck and every compartment on the ship is inspected for cleanliness. Everything has to be clean and mopped and sparkling. All the toilets and showers have to be cleaned and there's guys who are sent to do that. And I was a head dodger and that was my job. And my first job at sea. I was 16 years old

13:30 no 17 years old...and I was so proud. If you had come and used my toilet, it was an honour. It was an honour to use my toilet. I was so proud of this job. Well, this is a true story...I hope you haven't been eating, but it's a true story. This is the tough sailor that this bloke was. I stood at attention. I had cleaned this...it was spic and span, but there was one toilet

14:00 that was blocked. Totally blocked with toilet paper and crap and it wouldn't flush, and I thought how am I going to...what am I going to do. I didn't have anything to unblock it. So I quietly put the lid down and I thought if I just ease the door over a bit he'll walk ...he's not going to go near that, there's 20 other bloody toilets. So I snapped to attention...I heard the bosun come past...he used to come blowing the bosun's whistle. I thought, here they come. And the chief petty officer

14:30 who was the chief petty officer on duty had the officer of the day with him. A lieutenant or whatever he was. He would have been a lieutenant. And my job...I had to stand to attention and say, "Ordinary Seaman Elliot, forward heads ready for inspection sir." And he walked over and he must have had a shit sensor on his head. He went straight to the offending bog and I thought how did you do that. And he said, "Take care of this chief," and walked on. Never said nothing

15:00 to me, never looked at me, just walked on. The chief said, "Umm, what's this Elliot?" I said, "It's crap sir." He said, "What's it doing here?" I said, "Just sitting there sir." I mean, I was petrified of this chief. He was an old World War II chief. He said, "So what are you saying, this crap's not supposed to be here? Are you saying this crap's in the wrong place is it?" He said, "It's not supposed to be there

15:30 Elliott is it?" I said, "No sir." He said, "What are you going to do?" I said, "I don't know sir." He said, "Well I'll show you son." He pulled up his sleeve and put his hand down and pulled it out and he put it in my hand and he squashed my hand down and he said, "Do you feel any pain?" "No sir," in between heaves. "No sir, I don't feel pain." "Does it bite?" "No sir." So he said, "Well we've established one thing, shit is basically harmless." "Yes sir." He said, "The only harm it can do is to your leave pass."

16:00 "Yes sir." "Where's the shit supposed to be now Elliot?" "In the sea sir." "So the shit is absent from its place of duty Elliot?" "Yes sir. And he said, "Make sure that shit gets to where it's supposed to be and if it ever happens again it will hurt your leave pass." "Yes sir." And he washed his hands, cleaned himself off and was off. And ever since then I have never been frightened of shit. Never happened to me again. But that's the sort of lesson I learnt.

16:30 I said it in my book. I said, life is like a big shit sandwich, the more bread you've got the less shit you eat. So they're the sort of things that stick in my mind. I could never name him because I wouldn't want

anyone to know who he was. But he taught me that. Shit doesn't hurt. So I've never been frightened. And after that...many years later when I got out of the navy and I was trying to get my family some money, and I had three different jobs.

17:00 I was working in a pub and at the end of the day we'd sit there and have a beer and finish the lines off. And the guys used to argue who was going to clean up the toilets. The spew and that. And I said to them, "If you give me five bucks I'll go and do all that." So they used to have a fish around and give me that because it never bothered me. I would clean up all the sick and stuff and I've never been bothered by any of that. That's why it was always easy to change my babies' bums. I never had any problem.

17:30 It doesn't hurt you.

When you were aboard the Sydney before you left, did they ever do any naval exercises to prepare you for action?

Not on the Sydney. I can't remember very much. It was just general sea time on the Sydney. We travelled around Australia, went to Hobart and things like that. It was no big deal. It was just work and it was like a floating land base I think.

18:00 It was a fairly big...well not compared to the Americans, but it was a fairly big ship. On the Hobart I got into a...yeah, a lot of action station work and I was working in the magazine stations where I had to load shells and stack them up and be ready. When action stations went my job was above the flight deck. I was exposed personnel. I had to spot...I was a lookout, anti aircraft lookout. So I had to spot

18:30 where they were firing at us from. So when I saw a flash when we were in action, and I could see where the guns were firing from, I'd have to say, "Green two zero," and I'd be in touch with the Bridge. I had a helmet on and a flak jacket, and I could spot...so they would know where they were coming from and then they'd line them up and fire. So that was my job, anti aircraft

19:00 lookout. I didn't feel too bad about that. I mean it was frightening enough knowing when they were dropping bombs around us and when we did come under fire...I think I read in a book that we came under fire about ten times. And I was there for all that because that was my job and I had to see that. When we got hit with shrapnel we would just go down

19:30 because it would all just zing around you. We were very lucky in a few of our engagements. We were hit with anti aircraft bombs instead of HE [High Explosive] because maybe they had run out of high explosives, and thank God they did because they had us straddled and we were in dire straits a couple of times, and had they hit us with high explosives I don't think I would be talking to you. So yeah.

20:00 I remember laying down and holding me head and thinking Christ, here we go. That happened a few times. That was my job, and I felt...my mate Rick was down below in the magazines loading the shells in and that freaked him a lot because you could hear the shrapnel hitting the side or you could hear the explosions going in. If it had got holed underneath the water line, there was a chance you'd be locked down there, and that

20:30 played on a lot of bloke's mind. I've come to realise that that was fairly unnerving. So I felt a little bit more relieved that at least I could see what was happening. I didn't like what I was watching but I could see it at least.

Up on top?

Yeah. It sent me deaf. I was right next to the five inch gun.

Did you end up having to leave any good mates behind, getting thrown over onto the Hobart?

Yeah.

21:00 A lot of mates. One guy rings me up, old Giuliani. He rings me and says, "Jesus, G comes after E, I could have gone with you, you know." Yes, I left a lot of my mates. There was only Rick Anderson and myself... we had been together since we were kids and we were the only ones. We didn't know anyone else on the Hobart. So half of my division was sent to the first draft

21:30 which they got which was the Sydney after the first year at Leeuwin. They were sent to the Sydney. So I knew so many of the guys. We were all in together, so our blokes hadn't been separated yet. But when I went to Vietnam it was only Rick and I. And we were sent off and we were thrown into this crew. We didn't know the crew but obviously you got to know the blokes but you really didn't get to know too many because to me they were still gods.

22:00 They were chief petty officers and I wouldn't even lift my eyes up. And if you saw the Skipper he was... he was a wonderful man actually, Guy Griffiths. And I've read so much about him since. A wonderful man and I think he became a vice admiral since. And some of those guys I've met since, that I knew on board, have come up to me and said, "Col I didn't realise it was you as Col

22:30 the Entertainer. But didn't know it was you...that skinny little kid." And I say, "Yeah that was me." I was the youngest on board and I had my arse kicked from pillar to post but I did what I was told and kept working.

How were you and Rick received on the Hobart given that you had missed a lot of the training I guess?

Yeah, I had to get up to scratch quick. I was told...I was given an action station...I was told when action stations go, when the alarm goes,

- 23:00 you go here and you do this, and this is what you put on when you get there and this is your job, this is your position, here's your binoculars. So I was taught to do that real quick. And I was bloody quick because I was the youngest and I was the bottom rank so my arse would be kicked severely if I didn't get there real quick. I was as much afraid of a chief petty officer giving me a kick up the bum as I not getting there. But you wanted to get to action stations anyway because you were going into action and you had to go in there and you had to survive. I had a job to do and it was a pretty important job. If I didn't keep my eyes open and if I didn't report what I was seeing, it could cost lives. So you needed to do it quick. So I knew the importance of what I was doing. I said a joke before about taking a beach towel
- 23:30
- 24:00 What I meant was I didn't realise how much action we were going to be in. I thought we would be up and down patrolling a few places and not doing that much. A bit of a cruise, and certainly for the first two months...we did...I mean it was fairly mundane and boring in the first two months. We fired a lot of rounds. We gave naval support, gun fire to
- 24:30 marines ashore. They were outflanked and they'd call in coordinates and we'd fire. We blew up ammunition dumps, depots, truck convoys. We provided screening patrols for the flying aircraft, MiGs and we had to keep our radars open for those. We searched junks and we did stuff. It was interesting in a lot of ways but it was fairly mundane and boring. We were never fired on for the first two months. Then
- 25:00 there came a part of the...the last four months we were attacked ten times, so we were in operations. For the first two months we were south of Da Nang about 90 miles south of the DMZ [De-Militarized Zone] and we were in that area. The fishing boats had to keep within these certain beacons and if they wandered out they could be blown up and whatever. Some of them certainly were smuggling stuff
- 25:30 but most were just poor fishermen and we'd have to check them out and do whatever. And then we were sent in and asked if we could do this and do that, and fire on different targets. We were given targets and sometimes you saw the smoke but you never saw that much until we got up north, in the Gulf of Tonkin, Operation Sea Dragon, then we...it was pretty heavy going. Then we came under fire quite a bit and
- 26:00 we had to fight our way out of a few shitty bits.

Did you know much about...

What was going on?

Well in civvies street Australia just before you left, were there any disquiet?

Well yes. Everyone has different stories but at the time I think the vast majority of Australia weren't all that interested. It just seemed to me...I mean if you got into

- 26:30 a pub and you said you were off on your way to Vietnam, there would be some dickhead in there who would want to have a go at you. But the vast majority of people that I spoke to before I left...and not that I spoke to a lot...I can remember talking to...ringing my Mum and talking to one of my mate's Dad. And he was a Rat of Tobruk, Mick's Dad, and he said proud of you boy and they had a certain amount of pride. And I think there were a lot of Australians like that.
- 27:00 But there was a rat bag element too. A real rat bag element that not only vilified the government but also the guys who were involved. But I wasn't so aware. I was more aware when I came home because it was more rampant when I got home. The only incident that really stuck in my mind. I was sent up to...I think it was near Kings Cross, Potts Point or somewhere to get the mail with the land rover, the able seaman, and
- 27:30 ...I was an ordinary seaman so I had to wear my uniform because we weren't allowed...it was during the day anyway. I had medal ribbons on so you could see I had been to Vietnam, but that was part of my uniform. You had to sew them on so that was part of your uniform. So we got up there to get the mail and someone yelled something at my mate and said, "Oh you mongrel," or whatever. And he turned around and gave him a mouthful back,
- 28:00 and next minute there was half a dozen around us and hassling us and calling us names and a scuffle started up and we fought our way out of it. The copper actually came and pushed them away and said, "Get back to your ship guys and leave it alone," and you...took these people away. They were yobbos. But we just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Anyway we got back and reported it to some officer, and
- 28:30 this message came down that said, you're not to wear uniform ashore. Now I remember that distinctly.

Don't wear your uniform ashore. Then there was a bulletin put out that said, don't draw attention to yourself. There's only a yobbo element out there that's going to do it. Don't talk about it and let it go, and you'll find it will be fine. As an ordinary seaman I had to wear uniform all the time but because of that they let me wear civilian clothes ashore which I thought was great you know.

- 29:00 Polo neck jumper. And I never after that...I thought oh no I don't want to talk about that. And after I did get home and I did talk to a few mates in the pub, it got into a few shitty bits there too. And I thought I think I had just better not talk about this. I won't tell them. Not too many people are happy about this. But there were a lot of people who were very proud of us and they were very proud of our soldiers and very proud of our sailors and down the RSL [Returned and Services League]...
- 29:30 my mate's Dad took us down the RSL and said, "These boys have just come back from Vietnam," and they said, "Good on ya fellas," and they were really proud of us. And we were proud of that. But a lot of people made us feel bad that we were there, and ashamed. So I took the medals away for a long time and thought I won't think about it. Because there were some things there that I wasn't happy about either, but on reflection I didn't see a lot of that. I know a lot of the boys did see
- 30:00 some bad stuff and were very effected by it. But I think...there's always rat bags. I mean, look at what's happening today. People have different opinions on that too. If you want to argue about it. If you want to bring up an argument there, there will be someone who'll argue with you. But if you don't want to argue about it, don't bring it up, because it doesn't go anywhere. I think I came to the
- 30:30 point, the opinion later on, that to me, Vietnam was a civil war. It was Dien Bien Phu when the French were beaten, and they split it. The French were in there for so long and didn't do any good. We were told at the time that we had to stem the flow of communism. We were told to stop the...what was it?
- 31:00 The domino effect. And I came to realise that gee we live in Asia, we shouldn't be doing this shit. Now when they walked away and we didn't win the war, we didn't win, we felt so...oh, we didn't win our war. I know I felt like that. We didn't win. What did we do? All the crap that we went in, what did we end up doing? People just died, what good did we do?
- 31:30 And the Yanks walked away and we had to follow. I don't say our government was wrong in going in. I don't say that. I think for the politics of the time it was right. We were doing what we were told, but personally I think it was a bit of a lost cause in a lot of ways. And a lot of people died and a lot of Australians died. Five hundred and one guys were killed. And I think really
- 32:00 ...and you can't say...and it wasn't as if we were taking...we weren't taking real estate. If you look at World War II, they went into a country and they invaded a country. We had to take the country back and you took it back and you won it back. We didn't win anything back in Vietnam. We didn't stop them. We didn't take them. We didn't move forward. That didn't happen. So they weren't taking...
- 32:30 So it was a really funny sort of war to be involved. You know, they were chopping the guys in, they were fighting and then they were pulling them out again. We'd go in north of the DMZ. We'd go in to blow up barges and I remember one particular time, they sent us up a river and we were given...and we were very proud I remember because our Skipper, Guy Griffiths, he was wonderful. He would get on the blower, the intercom and say, "Guys...", not guys. He wouldn't say that.
- 33:00 No he would say, "I want everyone on their toes, we've been given a target. And we're going to get some stiff opposition here, be on your toes. Hang in there. We've got some barges up there that we have to go in and get. And they're carrying ammunition and supplies." They were 90-foot barges some of these and maybe ten of them or six of them or whatever. This particular time ...I can't remember exactly what it was, but
- 33:30 he were put in charge of the task unit. It was the first time an Australian had taken charge over the Americans. We were so proud that he was going to be the unit commander. And so he said, "I will be the unit commander." And we had a USS [United States Ship] LT [LST Landing Ship Tank] that was back up to us, and we went in and we got in. And I think this is right...we had
- 34:00 been told of so many gun sites but there were about three times as many, and I think it ended up like about 15 gun sites in there. And we went in. We had a spotter plane flying for us telling us to drop down, come up, whatever. Then they started opening up on us. We blew the barges away, we did that. And then they opened up on us. We were that far in,
- 34:30 and they were straddling us, and at one stage there, the LT signalled to us, we should get out. Our Skipper said...and I know this because a mate of mine was in the ops room listening...and he said..."180 degrees, get out of here," and he said, "no, negative, maintain speed and course." And we were zig zagging that fast. We could do in excess of 30 knots and that was pretty bloody fast, and we were zig zagging and whatever and I
- 35:00 was watching them drop around us and I thought we're going to be hit. I felt we were going to be hit. I can still see it. At one stage there...it was a real shuddering thing and we seemed to lift a little and when we came down the engine stopped, they conked out. Panic. And we were sort of wallowing there with these bombs straddling us.
- 35:30 They'd run out of HE, High Explosives, this is what I was told, and they hit us with anti aircraft which

was great. It wasn't good but it was better, and we just hit the decks and the shrapnel hit us and they did superficial damage to us, but by the time we got the engines going again. We looked back and where we were they were dropping the bombs in. We only just got out.

- 36:00 We ended up fighting our way out of there. The LT got hit but that was only superficial. Our spotter pilot only had enough fuel...this is what I was told afterwards. I wasn't listening to that and I was told afterwards. So he only had enough fuel to get back to his carrier. But we took out all the gun sights and we only got out with a few rounds to spare. And from that...and I'm sure it was from that...
- 36:30 and there were two episodes like that, and I think from that particular episode...it was so intense and such an intense fight, two years later we were given the United States Commendation. It was the first time an Australian unit was given this particular commendation. So I got...all those other medals, and I
- 37:00 got the commendation. Our unit got the commendation and it was because of that. We were all very proud of that, and we were so very proud of Guy Griffiths because he was such a professional and knew what he was doing. He made an announcement afterwards and he said, "We had our moment." But we did it and he congratulated all the men. He was terrific, he would tell us what was going on, so you knew what was going on all the time.
- 37:30 If we were about...if we were given a target, he would tell us what the target was, why we were going in...keep your eyes peeled because I think we're going to come under fire...I can always remember those announcements. So I thought right, and I knew what to expect. Sometimes there was a surprise when we got fired on. But yeah, I remember those times.
- 38:00 I've since read back on some of the incidents and been given information, and I think yeah I can remember that bit. But I can remember being on the flight deck and being thrown around as we were zig zagging and watching these gun emplacements explode as we were firing. And every time we got them, it would be yes! And it was, he made us very proud.
- 38:30 When I talk back and I look at the times I spent in Vietnam, I think of that man and he made us very proud. Very proud men. And a lot of the boys just looked up to him so much. And so we were in there to do a job and so when we got back to the civilians who did oppose us and did call us whatever, we knew we did it to the best of our ability and that makes you very proud because we were there fighting for our nation.
- 39:00 That's what we thought and that's what I will always think. Whether it was politically correct to be there or not, that wasn't my call. My call was to do my job. And I felt that I did it.

Tape 5

00:33 **Col, I was wondering what the strategies were for the Hobart in Vietnam?**

Well obviously when I first went there our skipper briefed us on some of the things we were doing. And down south initially we were on gun line, I think they called it. We used to do anti-infiltration patrols,

- 01:00 search junks. We'd give support fire to sometimes...like marines who were outflanked. We'd give them fire support. We assisted with amphibious landings. There was one I read about later and I remember doing it, it was called Beacon Torch. And they dropped barges down and dropped marines on the beach and we had to give them support fire. It looked deserted
- 01:30 but the North Vietnamese came out of the ground, they came out of bunkers and they wiped out a couple of platoons there, and you really couldn't do a lot about it. They called in some fire support. That was hairy stuff. We watched...we did screenings when they were flying the Phantoms or whatever. We used to have to watch for MiGs with
- 02:00 sonar radar and all the rest of it. A lot of it was boring work, harassment introduction. We just harassed the enemy positions. Like every minute we'd fire a shell at them. Harass them. So some of that work was boring. I remember it but it wasn't intense. We hadn't come under fire then. We hadn't been in any actual fire fights.
- 02:30 We hadn't been in any real battles then. Then there came a point in our service during the six months we were there when we were put on Operation Sea Dragon which was north of the DMZ, and we were up north in the Gulf of Tonkin which is enemy territory where there were big rivers, and they used to hide their logistic craft in there. Sometimes there would be 90-foot barges and junks and whatever.
- 03:00 Ammunition supplies, weaponry...and they'd try and smuggle it down south to their troops, the Viet Cong and whatever, their army down south. We had to stop their supply lines and we were often told to go in and get them which we did. We went in, and they were pretty heavily...I mean they'd resist us. I mean up north they had shore batteries that were there to get us.
- 03:30 So when we came across those shore batteries we would come under fire. I think officially they said ten times. But really when you look at it, ten times in four months...but it wasn't four months because we

had a couple of breaks in that. We went to Taiwan and we went to Subic Bay. So it might have been three months or three and a half months in that time. So once a week we're under attack and that's when you realise you're not playing about.

04:00 So there were quite a few times that I thought, oh...I remember thinking to myself, we've got to be hit, we've got to be hit. We just can't not be hit after being fired on so many times. We only ever got hit with shrapnel twice and it was superficial. We came very close. One time there we followed some...they were huge

04:30 big junks and they were flying the Chinese national flag so they were neutral.

Sorry Col, what is a junk?

A junk is like a sampan, a junk, a big Chinese boat. You haven't seen the statues of Chinese boats?

A fishing trawler?

Yeah but huge. They're quite big and they were flying the Chinese national flag which is neutral.

05:00 But that looked a bit suspicious and our skipper came up and said they look a bit suspicious. We knew they were too far out of their way to be from Taiwan's, Chiang Kai-shek's area, so we thought we'd better follow them so they started acting suspiciously. So we followed them into a bay and we knew there was support there, there were. There was gun fire support and they opened up on us. We ended up, we attacked them

05:30 and took them out, and then we fought the gun battle in there. I think I'm right in saying, we knocked out 11 gun sites and two ammunition dumps. And in the middle of that we were getting straddled pretty heavy and we called in fire support from local phantoms. So they came up and took over and we just got out. A lot of those times were fairly intensive and I remember...

06:00 there were other times we watched fire fights. We watched Phantoms fighting MiGs...I think they were Russian aircraft, MiGs. And they had North Vietnamese pilots. If they had got through to us we would have been dead. But the MiGs took them out. We lost...a couple of pilots went in the drink and a couple of them were knocked out and went over land and they either blew up or were captured.

06:30 We weren't sure. But one particular guy went into the water and we only got part of his location where he was. His radio crackled out but our boys did a grid on him and the Hobart was responsible for finding him and directed the rescue helicopters to pull him out. And it was a real good feat, and we got thanked for that. I remember we were all very

07:00 proud of that. So yeah, we came under fire quite a bit and it was the first time...I think it was the first time since Korea when an Australian war ship had been involved in that sort of work. And it was covert operations and I remember ...it was Ho Chi Minh's birthday, they called a ceasefire and we sat off a river mouth waiting for some barges to come out. We knew they were going to move and all of a sudden we were getting shot at ourselves and

07:30 it was...an American unit was firing at us thinking we were a junk. We flashed away quick saying hey it's us, so it was friendly fire. On the second trip of the Hobart, which was the trip I was on, but the second trip of the Hobart, the Yanks opened up on the Hobart. Had two runs at us and killed two of our boys. So we lost two men on that, and that was friendly fire.

That happened a lot didn't it?

It does happen a fair

08:00 bit. And unfortunately we've heard so much about it in Iraq. Look, it's hard to comment on it. I have a lot of respect for America and I really do have a lot of respect for their fighting men, but at the same time it does seem to happen a lot. And it happened to Hobart. And that's fairly serious stuff. So it's frightening when you think, I

08:30 can be blown up by our own people.

Yes, it happened in the Second World War as well.

Yes it happened in the Second World War and it happened in Vietnam too. And I suppose there would be a lot more horror stories that I wouldn't know about, but I do know that happened. One of the worst things in that war, we knew there were certain times that because of our actions there were civilians killed, and children,

09:00 we knew that and it didn't make you feel real good. But casualties of war happens and you've got to live with that. And although you're not the one directing the fire, you're part of that unit and when something does go wrong like that and you hear about it, it doesn't make you feel real good. And I remember that sort of thing happening. I think

09:30 we fought a different war than the army blokes. It was totally different. My brother who was a grunt, he was in the bush, and he fought a totally different war than what I did, and it affected him a lot. But we had our different way of doing things and we were obviously in a unit at sea, but sometimes you're

vulnerable there too, and when we were in there and we were getting straddled by

10:00 bombs, we had nowhere to go and we were thinking we're going to be in the water in a minute. This can't last too long without getting hit. We were very lucky. At one stage when we were getting straddled, they ran out of high explosives and they hit us with anti aircraft. Had it have been high explosives we wouldn't be here today and we knew that. I think...people have said to me, did you get scared? And I think I got scared after...

10:30 after the action was over, and I thought, oh that was hairy. But when it was happening you were just too busy to think and everybody seems to say the same thing. We were just too busy. I know a friend of mine was down in the magazines when they were dropping bombs around us and we were zig zagging, and they didn't know what was happening. Those guys couldn't hear what was happening. They just had to load the shells and when all that's going on, and

11:00 they're hearing explosions or whatever, that's got to be a terribly frightening way to deal with things, not knowing. And I always said, because I know the training, if we were holed...that possibility of getting hit and being holed, you can't get out and they have to shut you down in there, to save the rest of the ship. That must have been a terrible thing. So I felt very lucky being...okay we might have been drenched

11:30 and we might have laid down and let the shrapnel zing around us but at least I could see where they were firing from, so I felt at least I knew what was happening. So I could see that was happening you know.

Some people may not have wanted to see it though.

Yeah maybe, don't tell me. I think some people do. But I do know I can remember feeling, at least

12:00 I can see what's happening. I can see where they're firing at us from. I can see us zig zagging around it. I can see what we're doing. At least I knew. But my mate, I used to talk to my mate all the time and I said, "How did you go?" And he said, "Oh mate, I don't like it down there." And he always used to say that to me, and I would say, "Hey mate it's no good up top either," but I was thinking don't bloody swap with me. But I felt a little bit more relieved being up top.

12:30 I still got scared, but I got scared afterwards more so, you know.

You said before when you were explaining when the operations were taking place, around once a week...

I don't know.

Where did you go...you said you went to somewhere, was that on leave?

Yes. Rest and recreation which was lovely. They sent us to...now, I'm not sure

13:00 about this, if it was in the middle of it, but I'm sure we went to Subic Bay for a few days. I know we went to Subic Bay...yeah it was in the middle of it because on the 29th July, and I know this date so well because it's my birthday, on my birthday, I turned 18 and that was 2 months before we got home. That same day

13:30 the USS Forrestal exploded and she was a carrier. She used to fly aircraft and we used to screen for her. She got into trouble and we had to race to her assistance, and a 134 guys were killed. What had happened was a bomb had gone off on the deck, or was it a bomb or a missile dropped from a plane and sped into some fuel, or a bomb went off. I can't remember.

14:00 Something like that. It was deemed at the time as accidental. I've heard since then that it wasn't and that it was due to sabotage, but...

What do you mean by sabotage? By our own...

No, the enemy. The VC [Viet Cong]. And I don't know how. I'd have to really go back in...I was told

14:30 this. In one particular report it was confirmed later that it was thought to be sabotage. A bomb was timed to go off at a certain point in the Gulf. The USS Forrestal exploded. I know because I saw it. We went to their rescue. They choppered...they dropped a chopper on us and we flew our doctor over to assist and

15:00 we were there alongside and we hosed and whatever. But you couldn't do anything. I mean, 134 men died. There were planes melting. It was just horrific to watch it.

Col where were you when this...were you ashore when this...

No. We were at sea. We were on patrol.

And you were called in to help?

We were called in to give assistance and ...

I'm sorry, but can you walk us through that? What were you doing

15:30 **at that particular time?**

I don't know exactly what I was doing. I think we might have been on gun line duty. I'm not sure, 29th of July, we might have just been in the area on patrol, I would think. I can't be sure. But I do know, I remember them saying we've got to go to their assistance. The skipper always briefed us on what was happening. We have to go to the assistance of the USS Forrestal, and I remember it was my birthday, the 29th of July.

16:00 We belted down and as we came up to her she was just on fire, she was just a carrier....explosions and she was just engulfed. Listing badly and thick smoke. We found out later that 134 men died in that one incident. We escorted her in...she was escorted...we went back into Subic Bay. She was escorted into Subic Bay in the Philippines. Big navy base there.

16:30 I knew some guys on that and I went over to the Forrestal when she came in to find out if they were around. I couldn't find the guys so I don't know what happened to them. We weren't there long enough. We had a little break and then we went back on operations. So we had a couple of breaks like that. We also went to Taiwan, but... was on the way home?...I can't remember. So we went to Taiwan for 3 days too. And that was about the

17:00 existence of our break in the whole time. We spent 160 days at sea in that time. I know that because I read it. It felt like 560. We expended over 10,000 rounds on...I think this is correct, on 1050 targets we came up against. And we came under fire, under attack 10 times. So in that time we were kept pretty busy.

17:30 People say to me, what did the navy do? We did a bloody lot and I think the veterans who went over there, the navy boys, have got to be credited with the work we did there. Because it was long hard tiring work, very tiring. At one time there you were four hours on watch, four hours off, four hours on, four hours off, 24 hours a day, weeks at a time. And if your action station went, if we went to action when you just happened to be off

18:00 by the time the action's over, you're back on. And one time I remember there we were going 19 hours without any sleep. And you were just dead on your feet. And then the skipper, when it got that bad and one watch was getting...he would pull out and let you have a rest for a few hours and then say, "Okay now we're going to go back in." The other time...

Sorry Col, what do you mean he would pull out?

He'd pull out from the coast and go back out to sea. Get as far away from the coast

18:30 as we could. We'd keep on red alert because you would have ...you'd be on alert for MiG attacks and things like that. But we'd get out there and have a bit of a rest and take a breather for a sec, because you had to pull out of it you know. And the other hard part was, you'd go out to sea and you'd have to be resupplied with ammunition, fuel, food, water, and you had to do that by...

19:00 we used to have what they called a 'jackstay' where you'd put a line between the ships, like a pulley system and you had sailors on either end. It would get tight and then slack depending on the roll of the ship you know. It was always dicey and we used to take off the supply ship, we'd take ammunition and fuel and water, and you had to do that as quickly and as efficiently as you could because you were very vulnerable in that position...taking on supplies, in case you were attacked or

19:30 whatever. So that was always a dicey time and the guys worked so hard on that. We used to manhandle every shell that came on board. They were stacked and stacked. I remember the sling one time dropping shells out on the deck, bouncing and going over the side. But they never...they couldn't go off unless they were...I don't know how they work it, but they couldn't go off. But they went over the side and whoa...I can remember that.

20:00 I always remembered that.

When you saw the Forrestal, could you see people actually running around on deck?

Yeah.

Trying to put the fires out?

Yes. They were in big asbestos suits and whatever. Their damage control people were just trying to put it out. It was horrific. I think there's archival footage of the Forrestal burning.

Was she damaged

20:30 **enough that she couldn't go out again?**

Oh yeah, she had to be...I think she was finished. She was probably rebuilt. I don't know what the history of it was after. Yeah, it was terrible. One hundred and thirty four people died that morning. I remember years later...yeah, I got to see a lot of that stuff. I mean, I think for the time I was in the navy I got my fair share of it. I was 19

- 21:00 and...this was after Vietnam, and we were on exercise with the HMAS Melbourne, and the USS Frank E Evans which was a destroyer, it was on the starboard side of the Melbourne going along. And we were behind the Melbourne on the HMAS Stuart. We were rescue destroyer at our position as the Melbourne was going along. The Frank E Evans was there and the Frank E Evans manoeuvre
- 21:30 was supposed to go to starboard, turn right and come round back behind us and we were supposed to take her position. But for some reason the junior officer on board the Frank E Evans turned to port, to the left, and the Melbourne cut the Frank E Evans in half, and the front half of the ship went straight down and there were 74 men died that morning. I was on watch when that happened and
- 22:00 I was very effected by that. I saw...I was on watch when it happened. It was three thirty, four o'clock in the morning It was in the South China Sea. It was flat as a tack. I don't know why it happened, but it was the second ship the Melbourne had cut in half. The first ship of course was the Voyager, which happened in '62 I think. But this was in 1969 and I was 20 years old, and it's the worst
- 22:30 thing I've ever seen. And we were in the rescue boats and we had to mop up. Some very quick thinking sailors on the Melbourne got the back half of the ship...it had started to float alongside the Melbourne and they tied it up and held it and stopped it sinking, the back half...but the front half sank with 74 men asleep in their...it went straight down. I can never ever forget the jetsam and the flotsam...the
- 23:00 jetsam, the rubbish floating around. And it looked like a knife had cut the ship in half. There were guys just screaming and standing their screaming and yelling. Worst thing I've seen in my life. Afterwards, they stood us on the fo'c's'le and
- 23:30 said a prayer, and said go back to work. And no one ever said a word after that. And I found it very hard...and most of my mates, we found it very hard to sleep after that. Every creak we heard we were awake and it worked on our nerves, and I...that's the worst thing I've ever seen. And I've often thought to myself, I joined the navy at the wrong bloody time. I went straight into Vietnam and came out. I watched the Forrestal blow up
- 24:00 I watched all the death there. I watched the Frank E Evans a couple of years later, and I thought come on give me a break. And I've got mates of mine who have been in the navy for 25 years and never seen a days service that wasn't normal. I know that's life, and that's just the breaks, but that works on your nerves a bit. And I just think how precious life is. Your life can be snuffed out by one silly mistake.
- 24:30 One silly thing, one silly action. So I had to sort of deal with that a bit. We didn't have any counselling in those days. It's a bit silly. The services now are much different. If a guy goes to East Timor now, they'll get the guy and they'll counsel him before he goes, they'll counsel him while he's there and they'll counsel him when he gets home. We didn't have any of that.
- 25:00 It was, okay, back to work. So I found that very tough times.
- Col, something that occurred to me. When you...it was your job to tell the captain where the bombs and the shooting were coming from, is that right?**
- Yes, or the staff on the bridge. We were in contact with them...
- 25:30 a connection by radio head set with the staff on the bridge, and you'd say, "Green Two Zero," which is just off the starboard deck, "Green Two Zero" flash. And that's where the gun flash came from. And they'd say, "Righto, we're on to it." They were usually locked onto it anyway, but if there was something like Green Three Five flash at the same time, I would say, "Green Three Five, counter battery, counter battery." You would tell them where the counter battery
- 26:00 fire was coming from. So we had a visual look at it. They would get it on radar. They would lock in on it. The spotter pilot would get it and we'd hone in on it.
- We might just slow that down if that's okay, just for the archives...well you're telling someone who has no clue for a start. Counter battery 35, I could be speaking Chinese.**
- A counter battery, a counter fire is someone firing at us. We were on...if we were doing...as
- 26:30 I said, my job was to have a visual look out. I would physically see where the flash was coming from. Even though I saw it they would probably have it on radar. They would probably have a spotter pilot who flew over it and gave coordinates, but I also gave them a visual coordinate so we could lock into that target. We were there to be lookouts. To look out. Even like, if you were at sea
- 27:00 a normal sea, you have a lookout at night on either side of the bridge. Port and starboard lookout. And their job is to see, physically see anything. You've got to remember too, radar and everything else like that, that's mechanical. That's computers or whatever it is. A mechanical system is manmade and manmade things a fallible. To physically see something and report...if the radar went out
- 27:30 they have to rely on you because you're going to give your visual. So that's our job to be visual. So I would see...I would be scanning the coast as we were going up a river or as we were going into a bay, or as we were going into attack our target, I would be constantly looking in front of the ship and right down the right hand side of the ship. I would have say, that much, say 45, and there would be a guy next

to me

28:00 who had the back half.

Sorry, if you said 35 then. It wasn't quite 45...

That's right. It was...like there's the front of the ship and that's maybe 35 degrees. So I would say Green 35 counter battery or flash. Then they go, okay we roughly know where it is, a few degrees. It might not be spot on because you're going in five degree pieces. And if I say Green Four Five, it's like that. Green Nine Zero is directly aft, and

28:30 then you've got the other side which is red. So it's divided...your lookouts are divided into port and starboard. Fore and aft. So there were two of us forward and looking forward, and the other guys are looking aft, and they had that section to look at, and we had our section to look at. And there were blokes down below who were scanning radar looking above us making sure we weren't going to get attacked from the sky. We were covering that with radar and visual as

29:00 well. So I may say Green Four Five, I'm giving you an example, and they would probably have that already. If they didn't, I'm there and I'm telling you. That was my job. They call it AA Lookout, Anti-Aircraft Lookout but it wasn't just that, you were checking the land.

Very important.

Yeah, you had to keep your eyes peeled.

29:30 **What did you actually see in your binoculars. Was it mostly at night?**

No, it wasn't always at night. We did look at night...we did go in at night.

It was binoculars that you were using?

Yes, high powered binoculars. You could see pretty well...they were camouflaged sure, but you could see the flames and the guns spewing, and you'd see enough.

30:00 And you could watch the dog fights and all the rest. We were in close enough to see all that stuff. I guess in the overall picture of things you would see most of the action that was happening around you. Obviously there were gun emplacements that were firing at us that I didn't see, and on my side. But

30:30 you could certainly see the splashes they were making around you. Enough to know they were in it fair dinkum. They were not just playing about. And if any of those things hit you you're dead. It was very important that everyone did their job. And our guys in the gun systems and the spotter pilots were just...these spotter pilots we worked with were just amazing people. I think they were called

31:00 Sky Raiders. They were World War II converted things, very low flying, and they used to work at low altitudes so if they were hit they could never bail out. And these guys went in so close and God knows how some of them came out. And a lot of them didn't come out. A lot of them got killed. But some of these guys were such brave men. They used to fly in low and give us the coordinates. They'd say, "You're doing good Hobart," or "You're doing good Purple."

31:30 They'd say you're doing good, it's up 100 or you're down 50 or whatever. They would coordinate you and bring you in. Yep you're right on target and then they'd get out. And those poor buggers would be under fire, so they were very brave men. The pilots, we used to work with them all the time. Very brave guys.

Were you ever on the deck when a bullet would just go straight past you and land?

Shrapnel did,

32:00 but when there were air explosions you would hit the deck. No, no one fired a bullet at me. I never got that bloody close. The big guns were close enough. It was a different sort of war. I wasn't one on one.

I guess...I meant bullets but I meant shrapnel.

32:30 **Can you remember your first operation on the Hobart?**

No I can't. I can't remember my first operation. I do remember my first guns being fired. Now I remember that going up there. They fired...they cleared the barrels. I was at action stations and it was a dry run, it was an exercise. And when the gun fired it frightened buggery out of me. I mean

33:00 I had no idea how loud that gun was. It almost literally hit you in the chest. It was so bloody loud. It jarred you and I ended up with a lot of damage to my left ear and I've got tinnitus in this ear, and it was from that gun. I think they said it fired 10,000 rounds, and I was there for every one of them. I wasn't very far away from it. And I remember my head swimming and headaches and

33:30 god knows what else. It was very, very loud and it is physically an assault on you. It's a big bang.

Did you wear ear muffs or anything?

No, because I had to be in radio contact with the bridge so I couldn't wear ear protectors.

What about the gunners?

No, oh, the guys with the guns? Oh yes they would have them...I don't know, but we couldn't because we had to talk, we had to be in communication so you couldn't

34:00 ...you can't block your ears off. We had a big sort of radio thing on, but it wasn't a protection, and when it went off you'd go...but you couldn't...you couldn't turn away because you had to look. You had to keep doing your job, so you did get a lot of...It's funny, a lot of things in those days they wouldn't do today. Like if you have a look on the pictures I was showing before, the guys all standing around

34:30 bare-chested, in a pair of shorts and a pair of sandals. You know, I'm still burning stuff off my face. I've had that cut out of my face, a cancerous growth. I had years up there and no one ever said put some sun screen on. They're still all over me. But no one knew then I guess. They didn't know then. Like they didn't know about the asbestos in the ships, and I lived under the pipes for years and years, and every time it shuddered all the stuff

35:00 would drop. I don't know...I know a lot of sailors who have come down with cancer due to that. Touch wood, I'm okay. But I lived in that and I remember on the ships, especially the Stewart when it was in port and we were in Williamstown and we were refitting it, and me and another guy were given the job of scraping back the pipes and repainting them with spray paint.

35:30 Had we have known because all the sacking...all the heated pipes were sacked with asbestos to stop the heat. And that was above my bed. I had the top bunk and I had all my pictures stuck to the asbestos thing. I think it was in the '70s, I'm not sure that they ripped all the asbestos out of all the ships and it doesn't happen any more because they know about it. But they had it in those days and they didn't know about it.

36:00 They didn't know about skin cancer and the whatever, so... I was black. I was tanned. I had a pair of shorts on and a gun belt and a knife and the thing for splicing and that sort of thing and sandals and that's how we went around. And since then I've had so many cut out. I've had three cut out of my head and some on my face burnt off and I get it all the time.

36:30 So I don't go in the sun because we realise now that no one had a clue then. Same as smoking and they used to give us cigarettes for 15 cents a packet. Ten cents a packet duty free and they would give it to you. And I was smoking. They let me smoke when I joined the navy, and I was only a kid, but yep that's fine you can smoke.

Do you still smoke?

I try not too. It's very hard. It's a very hard thing to do.

37:00 Well you've done it yourself, you know what it's like. Cigarettes are harder than heroin to give away, not that I've tried heroin. It's a tough addition.

I say I just socially smoke now, but even that's bad isn't it?

It is. Smoking is a very tough one to give up. The hardest thing I had to give up...I had to stop the booze you know. I think you self medicate yourself after...

37:30 Look, I've been to counselling and you go through all these things that you have to deal with and you think to yourself and you self medicate, and by the time I was 23 and I got out of the navy I was a raving lunatic. A nut. I was a nut, and I met this lady who took me under her wing and we've been together all these years. But at the same time I worked very hard ...but when I got out of the navy I was running hard. I was running so hard.

38:00 I couldn't stop. I became a total workaholic. In my business at one stage I was away for 10 months. I was on the road touring for 10 months and Karen said to me, Look, look what you're doing to yourself. You can't work like this." I was working three jobs. I was a brickie's labourer on the weekend. I was fitting curtains at night. I was working two double shifts in a glass factory. I was working my arse off and I didn't know how to stop.

38:30 At 37 years old I had a myocardial infarction, a major heart attack. One artery closed down. I've got an enlarged heart now, and I fell over. I was lying in the hospital and she came in and said, "Now will you stop?" You just...I don't know what happened to me, but I couldn't stop. I couldn't stop. I just ran.

Do you know what made you...was it maybe the fear that you

39:00 **would be poor like the way you were brought up?**

I thought about that. That wasn't a problem. If I worked hard I didn't have time to think about too much. I ran and fell hard. Years later I got some counselling and this guy saw a lot of...I was having trouble with my ears. It was really funny, I said, "I'm having terrible trouble with

39:30 my ears. It's driving me nuts." I didn't know what it was. And they said there's been a lot of trauma in this ear. They worked it out that what it was, was the gun line stuff. I got an advocate and he said, "We

want to have a look at you Col," and they said, "Has anything else gone wrong?" And I said, "I've just got over a heart attack.' And he said, "Umm what?

- 40:00 When did you have that?" "Oh I was 37." They said, "That's not normal." And there's been none of it in the family and all that. I had hypertension and terrible guts aches as well. I said, "I don't know what's wrong." I've always tried to keep myself reasonably fit. I was an alcohol and I smoked and all the rest. And I said, "I work very hard." So they put me through some psychs and
- 40:30 I had to delve back into some of the areas in the service, and I didn't want to talk. I wanted to leave. I didn't want to talk about it. I found it very hard to deal with. And they said, "A lot of the reactions you have now are post traumatic stress disorder...a lot of the reactions you have now are what people get and they bury these things and you must deal with them."
- 41:00 And you were never counselled in certain things and these things make you do...and the end result is that people become alcoholics, workaholics, bloody suicide. They become abusive and they become whatever. Or they totally go the other way and curl up. I could never accepted any of that until I had gone...you know.
- 41:30 And then I couldn't work out why I was like I was. And yet I was fighting myself. It was very hard to come to grips with it. But in the end you realise what was physically done to you as well as mentally and the overall effect has a real adverse effect on your life. And I worked...I turned into the absolute worst alcoholic and workaholic you've ever seen and I nearly killed myself. I'm on a plethora of pills now and whatever to keep me going.

Tape 6

- 00:38 **Col, I'd like to go back to the Hobart a bit. You talked to us briefly about battles and action stations where you were just in there and doing your job, but that it would creep up on you after. Can you just talk us through that?**
- 01:00 A think what got a lot of blokes through was black humour. There were some fairly scary action and afterwards when you broke away from action stations and you went away from the fight. The captain pulled out and said, "Okay get back to normal." Then you have to go you know, phew...and that was relief. Oh
- 01:30 Jesus you know. And I would always say, gee we got out of that one. I wonder how long before we actually get hit. So that would be in the back of your mind. But when you were actually doing the action you didn't have that. You had a job to do and you concentrated on that job. When the engine stopped that time, that was oh.....
- 02:00 it wasn't a real good feeling. But we got out of it. We were very lucky. We got out of it. And you ...I think you put all your...as the youngest bloke there I know...I just thought Guy Griffith our skipper was just a god. He was just...he can't let anything happen to us so you ...the lower deck men, I don't know about the other blokes, but that's how I felt. He's not going to let anything happen to us. I just could not imagine him letting anything happen
- 02:30 to us. Obviously it was beyond his control too, but I was that naïve. Yeah, afterwards when you thought about things that were happening...I remember listening to Hanoi Hannah too. It was like a Tokyo Rose type personality they had and she reported us sunk three times. "The imperialist Hobart was sunk with all hands..." and all this stuff.
- 03:00 So there was a bit of humour there too. But sometimes when you thought about what you were doing, and when junks or barges were blown up sometimes, I always felt a touch of sadness about it too. I felt sad and bad about it. You know what I mean...I know we were doing our job and everything else like that but I felt there was actually people here who were dying.
- 03:30 And so when you thought about that...you know, is this right. So that played on your mind a little bit too. But what you do I think in most situations like that, I think what most people do is jolly each other along and you joke about things and there's black humour and all that sort of stuff, and there's all this cursing and swearing. The average bloke got through it like that and that's how
- 04:00 I got through it too. I think afterwards, after my Vietnam service, I came back and I was definitely changed. I looked at the world totally differently. I never ever looked at it before. I thought we take so much for granted. I want to find out why we're there. I find out what I did and then I got into the politics of it. And thought no, we shouldn't have been there.
- 04:30 That's my opinion. I don't knock other people's opinion. I'm not gung-ho or anything but I just felt at the time...our biggest ally is America. Without American we would probably be speaking Japanese now. I believe we need them and they are great allies to have. That's fantastic, but I don't know if we needed to follow them into Vietnam. I don't know that.

05:00 **Were there any times when I guess you were searching for and sometimes doing battle with some of the junks, when you might have thought to yourself that you weren't really sure whether or not there were innocent people involved?**

Yeah that happened. There were a couple of big junks that we took on and they were definitely carrying stuff, but I was told afterwards that there were families on board

05:30 that, and that plays on your mind a lot. There was another time there when we opened up on a truck convoy, or we were told it was a truck convoy, and although we didn't see it, we were given the coordinates and we opened up on it and then there was a report back that they were actually civilian buses and...I couldn't handle that for a long time either. They were casualties of war. Whether those things ...

06:00 whether that was right or not I'm not sure, but at the time that was what I was told and that affected hell out of me because I love children. I love life and I often think these poor buggers who copped this, whether we were there doing our job or not, there were civilian casualties of war, and this is one of the biggest things there was in this type of war, there was.

06:30 And I felt so much for the people...the Vietnamese people themselves who were caught up in this. They were caught up in it with the Viet Cong and they were caught up in it with ourselves and the Americans and all the rest of them. These people were just absolutely totally traumatised and ravaged, and when we pulled out we left them. The South Vietnamese people were just left

07:00 and there was just so much happened to them. What a terrible thing, you know. Look you can philosophise about war all you like. I've read, I've been a bit of a student of war as far as World War II. I looked at it. I watched the series, I read the books. I've got a lot of books on it, my people were involved in it. So I understand what happened. I understand what the Nazi's did and all those things. It was a

07:30 totally different war. But at the same time...it's very hard to justify war of any kind. It's hard to justify and when you're in there doing it...I think you think about it. The problem I think in Australia at the time or even now with a lot of kids now, this is such a great country. It is the last bastion. This is just absolutely wonderful. We still have an innocence, we

08:00 still have...I know we're being influenced by a lot of outside areas now but it's a great country and when you go overseas and you see what I've seen, and you see the poverty, the kids, and you go to places like Taiwan and...I remember there was a kid called Chen, and me and Marty Martino gave him blankets and we gave him food. He was just...he lived on the wharf. He didn't know his mamasan and papasan. He didn't know anything.

08:30 He would take us ashore and tried to steal our wallet while we were ashore with him, little bugger. And he had a beer, they brought him into the bar, and he brought two sailors in so he got a beer. And he lit up a cigarette and I looked at this, and I had a 10 year old brother, and I thought throw that kid out on the bloody wharf and see how long he'd last. We're just so spoilt, and when you come back here and you see this, and you see the opportunity you've got, and you see the life you can lead and you can give your children, it just makes you cherish your life

09:00 even more. And when you come back and you've been through some of the things you've seen and been to those places, and you've seen how those people live, and you come back here and you've been to war and ...I just feel so blessed that I came out, and I came out with a few marbles left, a bit of a whacker, but I came out okay, and my children have an opportunity to grow here and have their children

09:30 and have a good life, a good clean life. I hope to God they don't have to go to war. There will always be war. I mean politicians. You know they'll take us in every time. The soldier and the sailor and the airman, and clean it up. Unfortunately it's always going to be here.

How does a young fella, as you were at that time,

10:00 **when you're hearing about those sorts of things, and all that sort of stuff, getting caught up in it, and you're confined to a ship, how did you deal with it?**

As I said, black humour. I remember a notice being put on the notice board and I'm reading it and some wag had drawn our bombs hitting and bending the monkey bars.

10:30 That was black humour because at that time we were told that the target we had hit was a school bus or...and that's how you dealt with it. Because it wasn't your fault. You were given coordinates or whatever, but those things happened, and I'm not even sure they happened. But these are the reports you're getting back and you have to deal with that. And you think, Jesus I'm part of this shit.

11:00 I'm responsible too, and he dealt with it by drawing a cartoon about bending the monkey bars and people laughed at it and whatever. But the dark side of that, when you thought about that...you think, I don't want to be doing this shit you know. So that makes it a little bit hard. I think, some disinformation comes back and you don't know if that's right,

11:30 a lot of it. I was told, and I don't know if it's right. I didn't see the aftermath of it, but even so, even when you're blowing up barges and junks or you're blowing up ammunition dumps or you're blowing up

gun sights, you're killing people. Those people believe in their...they're like me. They're doing what their government tells them to do.

12:00 And you're killing people and you go, for what? In end for bloody what, come on. What's happened. Communism hasn't spread like that. In fact it's gone backwards. They were being supplied by Russians and we were picking up Russian ammunition and Russian weapons. So all these people fighting for ideals and you think, come on you know. How wonderful it would be if everybody said you believe what you want to believe,

12:30 and I'll believe what I want and let's just get on. Let's just live. But that's not going to happen you know.

And did you find yourself questioning these things even at the time?

I can't remember exactly how I felt at the time. I don't think I felt so much like that. I know I felt sad a lot of the times. It's a funny conflicting thing. I was very proud of the actions we

13:00 had been in and we came away looking good. I was very proud that we walked away, sailed away, looking good. We did our job and when we were given out commendation I was proud that we did what we were told to do. We came up against opposition and we won. We won out every time. Very proud of that. But when I think of at what price, and I think to myself...that's the big picture, when you think of it, gee we killed a lot of people today.

13:30 Our actions and what we did, how many people died today because of what we did. Every time that gun barrel went off, I wonder how many people died because of that gun barrel. And I helped give coordinates to where to fire. That worked on me. I thought, do I have a right to feel proud of that or not. And I don't know. I don't know. Now I don't. I think it's so sad

14:00 that it has to get to that. When we have the United Nations and they can't even stop them from going into Iraq, what use is that. In those days we had ANZUS [Australia New Zealand United States mutual defence treaty, 1951] and all the rest, if they can't negotiate and find a peaceful solution. They've got to go in and they've got to kill, how bad is that. If you were told to do something and you're a regular person,

14:30 a regular soldier, sailor, airman or whatever, and you're told to go and do it, you go and do it because that's what you've been trained to do. That's what I was trained to do. Don't question it, do it. You don't question things and that's why our servicemen are so different now. I'm different now to the civilians, and I've been an entertainer for 28 years, and I'm still a sailor and I'll always be a sailor. I always think the way I was taught to think when I was a kid. That's the way I was taught. They stripped me down and they brought me back up and they said that's how you are. Now we'll

15:00 redefine you. That's what you are. That's who you are. I always did what I was told. I never bucked the system like that. When I was in action I was told to do certain things and I did it. And that's why soldiers come home and they're so strung out like that. They're ready for action because that's what they're conditioned to do. That's them there. There's civilians there, so their boiling point is there. They look the same but don't flip out quicker,

15:30 and they're ready to go quicker because their taught. I remember attending a lecture once that said that most humans have the condition fight or flight. When you're ready to run then you can do it. But you're not taught to run in the forces. You're a coward if you run. You don't run, you do it, and you don't question it. And that's why so many died in Gallipoli. They went over the top and they did it. That's sad. That's

16:00 hard.

Can you Col, because I've been curious about this for a while. What is it, I mean you're kind of talking about it for a while, but what is it about that 2 to 3 year window of your life in the service that has turned you into a sailor for life?

Yeah, well I think mine was six and a half, seven years, because they were all the formative years. They were to me the formative

16:30 years. They were times when I was an adolescent and I went to manhood in that area. From a boy fighting his old man or ducking him. After that, that was defining my character. You can't change who you are essentially, I don't believe, but I think you can change the way you react. I still have a lot of compassion. I

17:00 still feel sorry but maybe the bloke next to me doesn't, or maybe he does more than me, or he's more emotional than me. I still feel compassion and all the rest of it but it's also tempered with a discipline. So when I was told to do whatever I was told to do, I did it, and if my skipper said to do something then you would have done it. And it was described to me once and I don't know if this is right, but it was described to me

17:30 like this - if a bus is coming towards you your reaction is to jump out of the way and run. If you're a soldier and a bus is coming towards you and they said stand still, you would, because they're saying to you fight your human condition. Go against your human condition, because your human conditioning says run away. Get away from this. But they have to retrain you so that you

- 18:00 don't think like that. We don't want you to run away. We want you to do what we tell you to day. And that's how it was described to me and I think that's right to. So when the soldier comes out of the jungle and you put him back in civilian street, if you don't de-program him, he's still like that. He's still ready to fight. He's still there. He's still looking over his shoulder. He's still waiting. They're alert. I mean I can't...even
- 18:30 now, even me and the times I spent overseas in the far east. I can't sit now with my back to the door. I've got to be facing...when I go into a restaurant with my wife, I've got to have my back to the wall. She knows that. She says it's all right love and she'll get my seat ready so I can survey everything in there, because I was in areas where I was on patrol, apart from Vietnam, in unsettled times in the Far East, we knew there was a lot of stuff going down and we had to be
- 19:00 vigilant and alert and we had to guard our ships and check underneath them all the time and whatever. And so it was a second nature thing. You would never turn your back in any of those sorts of places. And even now I like to see what's happening. It's just a second nature thing. And I think that's why I will always be a sailor. I think like that.
- From your view on the bridge can you tell us of your impression of the MiG pilots were?**
- 19:30 No. I didn't see them. They didn't come that close to me. I know they were there. I saw some dog fights but I didn't see them up close. Thank god. But had they have gotten through I would have seen the bloody things. No I didn't see them, I didn't see them.
- No worries. And I know this is a bit of a difficult question but I just have to ask. I was just wondering about how or what an experience it was**
- 20:00 **watching the Frank E Evans get cut in half. I wonder if you could talk us through, I guess your watch and the rescue operations. Because you were on watch that day weren't you?**
- I may have to be corrected but I think it was about 3.30 in the morning. Around about that time. It was the South
- 20:30 China Seas. The Melbourne was going along. The Melbourne, I think they were about to fly aircraft and we were positioned behind her as rescue destroyer, so that meant if any of the planes went in we would be there to rescue. The Frank E Evans was on the starboard side or the right hand side and we were behind them. From what
- 21:00 I can remember of the events. I think the Frank E Evans was supposed to take our position. So they were supposed to turn right, or starboard, come round behind us and then we were supposed to move up into their position on the starboard side. Instead of turning right, for some unknown reason they turned left and when it turned left it went right into the path of the Melbourne. The Melbourne took, going at the knots she was doing and I'm not
- 21:30 sure how fast, but someone told me it usually takes about two mile to bloody stop. A big ship. It was a big ship. So it was ploughing along and the Frank E Evans went like that and the Melbourne just cut the Frank E Evans in half. The report I got back and I'm not sure this is correct either, but the report I got back was that the Signalmen on the top deck of the Frank E Evans landed with broken legs and his lights
- 22:00 still on, on the flight deck of the Melbourne. That's how much of an explosion it was...how much of a collision. The front half of the Frank E Evans virtually went straight down and there was basically the majority of the men, 74 of them, were asleep and they went down with it. Look, it was surreal. It was... you can imagine. It was flat water.
- 22:30 It wasn't rough seas, we're talking flat water. I mean it's not...it was a clear day. It wasn't foggy. There was none of that. We were in the tropics. So the first thing we did...they woke everybody up. Hands to, emergency action stations or whatever, and we lowered our boats and rowed over to
- 23:00 give assistance where we could. You couldn't do anything. You couldn't do anything. You pulled a few blokes out of the water but you couldn't do anything. They threw rope ladders down the side of the Melbourne so the guys could climb up to the Melbourne and get off the back half of the ship because there was only half of the ship left. And some quick thinking guys tied her up so she wouldn't sink, up to the side of the Melbourne and they kept tying it up and lashing it together, and these guys just had to get off that
- 23:30 and these guys were just...it was just pandemonium. Blokes were screaming and yelling and at the same time our blokes were doing their job, just trying to clean up what was left. There wasn't a lot left. Blokes just died. There were 74 blokes just died...for no frigging reason.
- 24:00 Just a naval disaster. The irony of it was, it was the second time the Melbourne had done it. The second time. This is twice. How can that happen. How can that happen. Twice that ship cut another ship in half. The first time in '62, and I never forget, I met one of the guys, I worked with him in the glass factory. His name was Joe Curtis, and Joe Curtis...I went to school with his daughter and Joe was on the
- 24:30 Voyager when it was cut in half. And Joe was there and he was trying to open a hatch, and there was a

chief petty officer underneath it, a cook with some young blokes, and he got them singing and he said, "You get out Joe, you get out, we can't get it. Come on boys sing." And they were singing 'Onward Christian Soldiers' as they went down. The chief petty officer saying, "Come on boys hang on to me." And he died with them, and Joe told me that.

- 25:00 And...I was working with him one day. It was a funny thing, I was working with him in the Glass Factory, years and years later. We were pulling paper down and putting it in between glass. That's what we did in the glass factory. We were putting this paper down and I worked with old Joe Curtis and he said, "Hello Col," and I was talking to him, and he said, "You went to school with my daughter Cathy," and I said, "Well I'll be." And he said, "You were in the navy weren't you?" And I said, "Yeah that's right, I've just got out."
- 25:30 He said, "I was in the navy for a long time." And he was a petty officer, and I said, "What were you on?" And he said he was on the Voyager. He was a mouse that man. And I said, "Oh Joe, Jesus, I was there with the Frank E Evans," and I bonded with him. And he said, "What happened?" And I told him what happened to me and he told me his story. And I said to him...I don't know how people react
- 26:00 to this stuff, but I said, "I still see that today, I can still see it." I said, "It was a terrible, terrible thing," and I said, "So many blokes died," and I think there were 78 blokes died in the Voyager, but I may be corrected. But there were 74 died on the Frank E Evans. And afterwards we were all gathered on the fo'castle and I can remember it, it was surreal, it was
- 26:30 just like I was watching a film. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. They said all right...and they said that prayer about souls go to the deep or whatever, the Navy Prayer. I can remember him mumbling away, the Skipper saying it and then he said, "Righto, hands back to work." And everyone went back to work and no one mentioned the bloody thing again. I thought,
- 27:00 shit. The worst thing I've ever seen in my life. So that was within two years of Vietnam and I sort of thought to myself...I mean I had seen the Forrestall getting blown up and we'd been fired on a lot and I thought, geees I'm having a fairly intensive sort of life here. So I was quite glad to get back to Australia
- 27:30 and pretty much after that I didn't think much about staying in the navy. I thought there had to be a better life than this. I didn't sleep well at sea. I put in for discharge. I asked them to help me. They knocked me back that many times. I eventually got out on compassionate grounds to help my Mum because my old man had died. But I rarely use that as an excuse. I didn't want to do it any more. It wasn't that I was scared, it wasn't that. It was just that I didn't see any point to it any more.
- 28:00 I thought there was going to be a better life than this bullshit. And I mean I loved the navy in a lot of ways. I was going to have a good career in the end, when I started to mature and settle down a bit and didn't run around as much, I thought I would have a good career. But I lost interest pretty much after that. The best times as I said, I went to Subic Bay and I taught recruits.
- 28:30 And I got a lot of satisfaction out of that because I was able to impart my experience, and what I had been taught, and that gave me a lot of satisfaction. But then after I did that and I went back to sea, I was supposed to go back, I think it was the Vendetta, and I walked on the Vendetta...I was trying to get a discharge for so long. I was offered a job overseas. And I was told no...I went on leave and they said after your leave
- 29:00 you go to report to the Vendetta...the Vendetta or the Vampire I can't remember. Anyway I was only on there for about an hour and they said it's going overseas. Anyway I got on board and after my leave my discharge still hadn't come through and I was sort of resigned to the fact that, oh well I'm going back to sea and serve out my 12 years...because I had signed up for 12 years. A kid of 16 and a half, but anyway I had to sign up for 12 years.
- 29:30 And as yet, the Labor Government hadn't come in and brought in that rule where you could get out after 3 months and I thought Jesus, that would be nice. Anyway, I reported to the Vendetta or the Vampire, and I walked on board...I'm sure it was the Vendetta, and down in the mess was an old mate of mate, Alex Sherrin, Stilts we call him. A skinny guy. And he was on the Stewart with me, and I said to Alex, "Well
- 30:00 at least I'm a leading seaman again." And he said, "Well you're the leading hand in the mess and I've organised our bunk in the corner. We're right." And I said, "Right mate we're going up top again." And I said, "I had better go down and see the pay master and tell him I'm on board." And I got down to his office and I had my kit bag there, I left it in the mess. And I walked into the pay office and I'm said, "I'm Leading Seaman Elliot, I'm reporting on board." And he said, "Hang on I've got something for you," and he pushed it across the desk. He said, "See you later Mr Elliot," and there were my
- 30:30 discharge papers from the navy. And I said, "You beauty." So I went down the mess and the last thing I can remember in the navy...I tipped my kit bag upside down and I said to my mate Stilts, "Help yourself." And he was going through. Trying on one of my jackets, and I looked back and that's the last thing I remember. I was in uniform at the time and he's trying on one of my jackets, and he's saying, "See you later Col." And I walked off and I walked into civilian street
- 31:00 and became a civilian. I nearly went back 6 weeks later because I freaked out and I didn't like civvy street very much.

We'll get back to that one later. Can you tell us what it was like for you teaching...given everything you had been through.

Yeah. I had just completed about two and a half years at sea on the Stewart at the time. So I had done that and finished my time on the Stewart

- 31:30 and my next port of call...my first shore draft. I had been at sea all that time apart from doing my able seaman's course. I was underwater control which was sonar detection of submarines. That was fairly hard too because I was bloody deaf in this bloody ear, and I used to only wear one bloody thing to listen. I got through it.
- 32:00 Anyway I went to Cerberus and when I got there and they said...I was due to get my leading seaman rank, but I had been in and out of trouble all the time and it took me six years to get my four years good conduct stripe. Anyway, you're a bit of a boy but you know your stuff, which I did. So the divisional officer said, "Look we'd like you to teach recruits." And I said, "What?"
- 32:30 They said, "Not how to drink." They had a syllabus. They had basic classes, and they said, right here's what you've got to teach them in this class and here's what you've got to teach them in that class. So there was a basic format that I had to run to, and it was fairly comprehensive. And I had to teach them drill which was something I had to...it was really funny.
- 33:00 By the time I had got back to sea they had changed back from 303 rifles to SLR [Self Loading Rifle] and I hardly knew what an SLR was. In fact one time in Penang I was caught on board, under punishment at the time, and they said I was going to be in the Anzac guard in Penang. The sunrise Anzac guard. And that they would be using...they would break out SLRs
- 33:30 from the gunnery department on the ship. And I had never even seen an SLR let alone used one. And they said, the drill is different. It's got a very short bayonet and they said you must...when you're at attention and they say 'shoulder arms', and you've got to throw up, lean it forward a little bit or you'll stab yourself. Yeah, and I wasn't paying attention. So when we finally got to the parade, I went....I stabbed
- 34:00 myself and blood just poured...I stabbed myself. And we had to present arms which is like a salute to the fallen and unfortunately behind me was a bunch of my mates who had been out on the grog the night before. And they're behind me and they're saying, I want to be sick...because the morning sun and ... and one of them was sick all up my back and over my hat and it just dribbled down my face...and I said,
- 34:30 ...that's a true story. So when I got to Cerberus...there's a lot of stories...I had to teach gun drill, rifle drill. Now not being au fait with the new SLR ...you could teach somebody by numbers. You'd say, by numbers shoulder arms. One,
- 35:00 then two...so I'd line them up by the gunnery store and I'd say right by numbers, shoulder...and they'd go...and then I'd race in to the guy behind the counter, the able seaman and say what's the next bit. And he'd tell me. I taught my whole class, my very first class how...all the rifle drill, how to rest on arms reversed, the whole bit, and by the end of it I still didn't know how to do it.
- 35:30 And they were brilliant at it. True story. So apart from the rifle drill which I didn't know much about, I learnt...and by the time I got to my second class I knew what to do. When I got to the seaman part of it, or the NBCD, nuclear, biological, chemical stuff, or the ship's husbandry, or naval law. When I got to that, I knew a lot of that. I had the books,
- 36:00 but I knew a lot of that, and I got a lot of satisfaction out of the period of my navy career. There was another guy who was with me. We had a 100 blokes between us to get through and we had to teach them everything, from ironing to splicing a rope. So once we got these kids through
- 36:30 we ended up with the highest marks that they had had in recruit school for the previous three years... for passing out for exams. So we were very proud of that, you know. That was a wonderful part of my career, I enjoyed that.

For the record, what is ship husbandry?

It's like, virtually how to clean toilets, how to chip paint, how to paint. That sort of thing. Ship's husbandry.

- 37:00 You had to...some of these kids that came in...I say kids, some of them were older than me. I was 23, and they had to call me sir. Some of them were 26. They had wedding rings on their toes and they had hair on their shoulders. Some unbelievable stuff. And the thing was when I started there too, it was only just coming in that they could actually hand in notice. I couldn't
- 37:30 believe it. If they could show just cause why they shouldn't go on, they could take a discharge, or they had an option to get out after three months. Never in a million years in my time. But it all changed from that time.

Tape 7

- 00:33 I was down at recruit school. As I said, I just loved teaching the recruits, and I had...we were in a big dormitory and I had all my class in the dormitory. And I was at the end of the dormitory like in a cabin, and I shared this cabin with a guy called Hazelwood, Speedy Hazelwood who was a leading seaman. I was a leading seaman and he was doing something else on the base or whatever.
- 01:00 Anyway we were going to go to the wet canteen this night and have a couple of beers. And it was just after knock off. And during the day I had been giving the kids, the kids...the guys, a lecture on a form they had to fill in. And what it was...after about 7 or 8 weeks where they would just about be at the point where they had to decide what they wanted to be in the navy.
- 01:30 Whether it was a radar operator, an electrician, a cook, a mechanical engineer, a steward, a diver, a gunnery operator or underwater controller, whatever branch they wanted to go in. And they had a list. I used to give, the Class Captain and I would say, give every member the list. And you have to tick off what you want to be in order, one two three. And then according to your aptitude and the tests you've been through,
- 02:00 I used to tell them this, you'll be chosen. Now if navy wanted three cooks, then there were going to be three cooks somewhere. I think it worked like that. I don't know but I think it did, and so the clever kids got what they wanted but some of them who were just on the edge, might have ended up with something they really didn't want to be, and depended on how many cooks the navy wanted. Whatever. So I did this this day and
- 02:30 they all had a lecture from each branch. During the week a diver would come round and I'd introduce the diver. I would say, "Chief Petty Officer Diver So-and-so is going to talk to you boys about diving and the diving branch. What to expect if you want to be a diver." And then the electrician would come in and whatever. So they knew what each branch was. At the end of this time they had to fill this out and hand it in to me the next day
- 03:00 or give them to the Class Captain and he'd come and give them to me. We'd put them in envelopes and eventually a week later we'd double them down to the administration block and they would have to go before the board. There was a psychologist on the board, the divisional officer, the commanding officer and whatever, and these guys would stand them to attention and say, "You want to be a marine engineer son? What makes you think you'd like to be a marine engineer?"
- 03:30 They'd be quizzed and if they came up to scratch they'd get it. One would come out and say, "I'm going to be a marine engineer," and you'd say, "Right, away you go." Then I'd double them away. Eventually a year down the track they'd do the course of a mechanical engineer or whatever. So this night I'm just about to go ashore and there's a knock on my door. There was this guy there. I won't say his name. We'll call him Collins.
- 04:00 He knocked on my door and he said, "Excuse me leading hand." "Yeah what's up Collins, what's the problem?" He said, "Sir, I've looked at the list and there's nothing I want to be. I would like to take my discharge." Now, we were told by our divisional officer that if any of these kids take their discharge we get a fair kick up the bum because we had to convince them to stay in the navy, because you've spent three months of
- 04:30 tax payers money training them, and if they take their discharge then it's for nothing. And he said there's nothing I want to be. And I said, "Of course Collins, you're my favourite, don't be so silly. Of course there's something you want to be." And he said, "There's nothing." So...something flashed in my head, I don't know what it was...Speedy's around the corner listening to this. I said, "Collins I haven't told anyone about this, but
- 05:00 out of the last 100 recruits I've been chosen to pick one recruit to replace a person in the navy that's not even on this list. It's called chief brew maker." And he said, "What?" I said, "Chief brew maker. What they do, they fly you to Ceylon and you're taught to grade tea, and the job on board the ship is to make the cup of tea for the Skipper, then you go down and make the tea for the chief petty officers, the officers a cup of tea.
- 05:30 The messmen...that's all you do. You don't...there's no duties. You become a leading seaman straight away and when you get to Ceylon it's a six months course." And he said, "Yes sir, I could handle that." And I said, "It's a six months course. You get a house keeper, you're looked after, and you go straight to leading seaman, and there's only four in the navy, one has just died and I've been told to find a replacement. And I've been looking...and I've been watching you for weeks. So put
- 06:00 chief brew maker down as your branch and we'll ..." And he said, "Yes sir." And he snapped and about turn and away he went. Now I thought this guy's taking the mick out of me. He's letting me run with this, and he'll go away and think about it and go away and put down something else. Next day in parade he's standing at attention and he looked at me and went...and I said, "What are you doing Collins?" Three weeks went by or whatever and I had to take him before the board.
- 06:30 I had forgotten all about this and had just got ready for the night because I was going for a beer. So I doubled the class down and I said to the boys outside there and I said, "Okay guys we're going to go

before the board and the drill is, I'll march you in. You'll stand to attention. You'll salute the board. State your name and rank. Recruit Jarvis, ready for selection Sir. And then someone will say stand at ease and

07:00 you'll stand at ease and then they'll question you. And then you come to attention and then you come out." So I gave them the drill and I said, "Good luck, I hope you get what you want guys. And when you come out I want you to double straight back to your barracks and start tidying up your mess," or whatever. So I've gone into the board and I've snapped to attention and said, "Leading Seaman Elliot sir with class so and so ready for selection board sir." They said, "Send your first recruit in." "Yes sir," and I turned around and went out.

07:30 Anderson, he goes in and a couple of minutes later he came out. "I've got it Sir. I've got it." And I said, "Beauty, away you go." The next one Barker. He goes in. This goes on for a while. Then, "Collins in you go." And he winked at me as he went in and I thought what? "Get in there Collins!" So he stood at attention and snapped a salute up. "Collins sir." And what he said...they've got his list and they looked at it and it's all been scrubbed out and what he's written

08:00 is chief brew maker as reported by Leading Seaman Elliot. And they said, "Collins, what is this?" "What sir?" "This chief brew maker, what is this?" He said, "Leading Seaman Elliot said I could be the chief brew maker sir." He thought I was serious. So the next minute I was called in before the board. And they said, "Elliot! Explain yourself!" And I looked at it and said, "Oh you bloody clown." I couldn't

08:30 believe it, and I was watching this commander look at me trying not to smile. He was doing his best not to smile. And I had to explain it without laughing, and I couldn't. And I started to laugh and I was in deep trouble. I was in deep trouble. I forget what they did to me but it wasn't really good. Anyway I doubled him out and I think he was a cook in the end.

We have to stop for a second.

09:00 Yeah, what a dick head. I think he was. I think he was a cook in the end.

You said with the punishment...I mean what would happen if you're in action and you were in punishment, obviously then you would have to get off it?

I don't think that really happened. Not that I can remember. You did the right thing when you were in action. There's a

09:30 difference...no, no one did the wrong thing when we were at action stations. We worked and we did our job. You didn't do anything wrong. I think most of my time was having a good time and at the expense, like sometimes I wouldn't get back on time. I remember one particular time...when my brother came back from Vietnam, he went in 1968, after me...

10:00 In fact they brought him before his divisional commander or whatever and said, "Look you don't have to go, your brother's already been." And he said, "No I don't want to leave my mates," and he went. And he came back and he wasn't...it was at nine o'clock at night. I remember because I had to go and pick him up from the airport. He wrote to me and told me that he was getting shipped back and could I meet him at the airport, and we were in Sydney and we went out on the grog and we went to the Motor Club and

10:30 my ship was sailing the next day at 8 o'clock and I never quite made it. The ship sailed without me. I didn't know what to do, and we had lost my brother's wallet somewhere and we had to get some money for him. We got a plane ticket and we got him back to Melbourne, and then I thought, what am I going to do because my ship has gone. So I got round to my girlfriend's place at the time and I rang HMAS Penguin, the navy base,

11:00 and I just put on an accent. I said, "Look my name Smith and I live next door to a young lady who's boyfriend's in the navy, and I think he's missed his ship because he's crook. I think you might have to send an ambulance for him because he's got very bad stomach cramps and he's missed his ship. He's on the Stewart." And they said, "Do you know what his name is sir?" And he said, "His name's Elliot, yeah Elliot."

11:30 And I hung up after I had given them the address. And they sent an ambulance round for me, and unfortunately the two ambulance drivers were mates of mine and took me to a pub.

They did not!

They did. And by the time we got to the HMAS Penguin I was socially excited. And they booked me into the hospital and put me to bed, and my mate who was in the ward there said, "Now what you've got to do

12:00 is tell them you've got terrible cramps," and everything else like that. "There's two other guys in here who have got gastro-enteritis and we'll organise things with them." They wanted specimens so I borrowed some, and the chief surgeon came around to inspect me and we showed him the specimen, and he said, "This is gastro." So I was getting up at four o'clock in the morning and going in and having a feed for breakfast, and then going back to bed

12:30 and they'd bring the breakfast around and I'd say, "No I couldn't eat that." The lieutenant came around

and we showed him another specimen which I had bought. It didn't cost me much, just a couple of packets of cigarettes from my mate. And then all of a sudden the specimens started to get better and better and by Thursday I was right again and said, "I'm fine, can I go ashore." And they said, "Well yes, but your ship doesn't get back until Monday." So I said, "Is it all right if I go ashore on Friday?" Which I did. I even arranged to have

13:00 \$100 out of my next pay as a bonus and they gave it to me. When I turned up at the wharf at Garden Island and my ship came in all my mates were saying you're dead, you're dead. I'm watching them come in and the chief petty officer is looking at me like that, and I thought oh no...they thought I was dead. I marched up to the gangway and I saluted the Quarter Deck as you do and handed the chief petty officer my medical and he looked at it and said, "I don't know how you did it Elliot, but you did it." And I said,

13:30 "Thank you chief." I never got into trouble. Good story, true story.

It's amazing that you've got a lot of great experiences from those days, despite some bad ones as well, that you decided not to stay in the navy?

Yeah well. I don't know, I guess it was the times too.

14:00 I never ever felt good after those times...after the Frank E Evans I felt pretty bad. But I never felt good again. I could never see myself after that. It just changed. It changed, and I thought there has to be something else in life apart from this. There has to be something else. And I wanted to experience new things

14:30 and I couldn't do that with the restrictions of the navy. And there were a lot of things I did in the navy that I enjoyed...and the way I live now, or the way I think is from what's been taught to me as a kid. Those disciplines are still there. I'm pretty self disciplined in a lot of ways. And when I needed to reassess myself, and I managed to do that. But some of those experiences I

15:00 cherish. They were good times.

What happened...you were on the Hobart when you came home after Vietnam. ..when did you hear...did you hear from the Skipper that you were coming home?

We knew that our deployment was six months. We knew that it was an operational period. So we knew there was an end to it and it was getting closer and closer and we didn't

15:30 get hit. We felt good about that. So we got out of it, but unfortunately the second trip we suffered a couple of casualties, two guys died, from friendly fire. But at the same time we knew we were coming home. And when it was over, it was a good feeling that we had done well and we felt good very proud in a lot of ways because it was the first time we had been on loan to the Americans

16:00 in that capacity. Our Skipper had actually taken charge of missions and came out smiling. We had got a pretty fat citation. So we were able to come home very proud of what we had achieved. On reflection I look at the...there were a lot of people who were proud of us, and a lot of mongrels who weren't too, you know. But

16:30 at the same time we did a good job, and all those guys there...I'm very proud that I was part of that crew, and I now march, and I'm proud to wear my medals and march with my unit...and say, hey yeah I did that. I was there. I did what I was told to do and I did it proudly. So I feel pride now. I feel pride now which is good.

Yeah you should. Was there ever a time when your brother

17:00 **was near you fighting and...**

No, different year. I had come home and he left. As I got back he was going.

Even though he was older than you?

Well back in those days, I think they were 19 years old to be in the call up, and he was. I had been in the navy since I was a kid, 16 and a half. So I was a regular and when I was sent....I don't think I was

17:30 supposed to go. I don't think I was supposed to go, but no one questioned it, they just saw a number and a name and said, "Elliot get over there. We need...there's Anderson and there's Elliot." We were the first two and they said, "We need two more so get them off the Sydney." And you had no choice and we just went. So I don't think I was supposed to go. I don't think, on reflection that I was supposed to be there. But I was told...I have been told, and I don't know if this is right but

18:00 I think it is, but I'm the youngest Vietnam veteran in Australia and that was by four months. Rick Anderson was four months older than me, the old bugger.

So then, when you came home, you went straight to Cerberus?

No, when I came home I had some leave, a few weeks at home, then I went to HMAS Watson. I did an able seaman's course. Then from the Watson

18:30 to the Stewart and spent two and half years at sea. Then I went to Cerberus and spent a year or so

training recruits. And then I got my discharge.

In those two and a half years outside of the Vietnam war, how were you feeling then about...it sounds like you were beginning to feel negative about being in the service. Was it a spiralling effect?

- 19:00 Yes I think it was. It became...I think I just learned how to drink more. I was drinking a lot. I did my job but I pretty well ran full flight in that two and a half years on the Stewart. That was with the Frank E Evans and then after that, Cerberus. And then I was supposed to go back to sea and
- 19:30 I got my discharge the day I joined the new ship. But I think I was...I think I was prepared to get out then. I really wanted to get out. Six weeks after I got out of the navy I was drunk and...I admit that now, I went through three red lights....I went through a red light
- 20:00 and hit another car, and I ended up with a broken jaw and 97 stitches in my head, a fractured skull and I was a mess, and I was laid up in hospital and debts were mounting up and I had no insurance. I had \$1500 dollars left from the navy. That's what they gave me when I left, and I was in real deep trouble. So what I did, and as soon as I woke up...I had
- 20:30 my jaw wired shut, I managed to pull the lines out of my arms and I got a wheel chair and got myself out of the hospital, and put myself in a cab and went to my Mum's place. They sent an ambulance around to get me again but I couldn't afford to go back in. I told them to get lost, so my sister nursed me for a couple of weeks. And I rang, funnily enough, my old sea daddy Marty Martino who was in the recruiting office in Melbourne and I said, "I've got to get back in, can
- 21:00 you take me back?" And he said, "Yeah, come and see me." So within those couple of weeks of nearly going back in, I met Karen my wife...

Okay can you tell us about that?

Yeah, well. Having been...doing a little bit of music in the navy, guitar and whatever, friends of mine... I've got friends in

- 21:30 civvies who were musicians...a mate of mine, Jim Craig had a band, and while I was convalescing at my sister's place, Jim came around and said, "Do you want to come around and listen to the band rehearse Col?" So he took me out...I had a little beanie on...I had one sideboard. That's all I had. I had one side board and I had all my hair shaven and big homeward bounders in my hair, 100 stitches, and I had my moustache. I had to have a moustache. So I had a little beanie
- 22:00 on and a dressing gown and I was sitting on his couch, and in walked the rest of the band, and the bass player walked in with Karen, my wife, who was his girlfriend's girlfriend. She sat next to me and said, "G'day." And I said, "G'day." And she said, "What happened to you?" And I pulled the hat off and she went, oh...She must have felt sorry for me and she went and got me a cup of tea and she's been mothering me ever since. And I felt she was the prettiest thing I had ever met.
- 22:30 She said, "What happened to you?" And I said...I was black and blue still, and I said I was in a car accident. I mumbled that because my jaw was wired shut. Anyway she, a couple of weeks later and I had improved a little bit. I had a little bit more hair and she said she liked my eyes. There was nothing much left. So we started to go out and I postponed going back in the navy because of it. And I said to her, "Look..." I had a job
- 23:00 that I could have gone to, overseas. I was pretty excited about...oceanographic survey work, measuring temperature against depth and doing grids and something like that for an oil company. And I think in those days it was bloody big money. It was probably about \$300 a week. But I had lost the job because of the accident. They needed to fill this position,
- 23:30 so we started to go out and a few months later she said, "We're having a baby," and I said, "Come on." Anyway we got married and her Mum and Dad were absolutely wonderful about it. But I was still running pretty hard. And we had our baby, a little girl, who's now made me a grandfather. Kim was born. We were living in a one bedroom flat in Dandenong,
- 24:00 and we were busted. We were broke. We had about \$100 worth of furniture. The flat wasn't even in my name because I couldn't afford it. It was in a mate's name. Karen's Mum and Dad gave us an old television, a little black and white one, and a little fridge. I was working two shifts in a glass factory. I was picking spuds, I was working in a bottle shop. I was really trying hard, and
- 24:30 I managed to get out...there was \$7000 worth of debt. And I managed to get out of debt in 7 months, and get \$700 in the bank. And in those days you could borrow \$12,000 from War Service...from Vietnam War Service. And I saw a house and believe it or not it was \$14,200. So I managed to borrow the \$12,000 and Karen's Dad organised
- 25:00 a loan for a couple of grand for the extra and we bought our first little house. And I'll never forget it because the payments were for \$44.04 a month. I thought that was just so much money and I thought how am I going to do this. We're talking 1972.

Was it a nice little house? What was it made out of?

It was a little brick house. A little brick house with our own back yard. I put in all the gardens

25:30 myself with a little mattock and I did all that. And I was so proud of this place. We sold it I think about 7 years later for about \$39,000, and we bought our first farm, and our first farm cost us \$67,000. By that time I was in the business, show business. And while we were in this little house...no, just before that, no before, when we were in the flat, I needed tyres for my car as I said. The tyres were really bad.

26:00 So I went on 'Kevin Dennis New Faces' and I won the finals...

Can you tell us about that Col? How did you have the courage to go on National television?

I needed money. I had done a little bit in the navy and I was watching this 'Kevin Dennis New Faces' on a black and white TV. It was black and white in those days,

26:30 and it was well before 'Bert Newton's New Faces'. A bloke by the name of Frank Wilson was the compare. Frank was an actor and he is today. You often see Frank in shows every now and again. He was in 'Crackerjack' not long ago, and Frank Wilson was a compere. I went on there to tell some...I saw a comedian that Sunday night and I was trying to figure out how I was going to get the money to buy

27:00 tyres for the car, and we had bits and pieces for the baby we needed to buy and I said, "I've got to get some money." And I saw this television show and I said to Karen, "Maybe I should go on this show and tell some of my navy stores. Just clean them up a bit and tell some of my navy stories. I might get the 500 bucks." And she said, "Are you serious?" And I said, "Yeah I am." So I went on. I got in touch with an agent that I knew from another guy,

27:30 and they got me...the guy's name was Gary Stewart who was a friend of mine. Gary was a producer and he said, "Yeah, we'll give you a go." And I won the finals...

Hang on, did you have to audition to go on?

No I didn't have to audition. I had to tell them what I was going to do and they had to watch me for a minute, but it wasn't really an audition. And so they said, "Okay, you're on." And I did the semi finals and won that, and

28:00 I then went onto the finals and won that. And I got \$500 and that paid for my tyres, and I've always said that 28 years later I've got a garage full of tyres, but that was the start of it. So I thought this is great. I managed to pay for the tyres, bought a barrel of beer for my mates and have some change left over. And that was the start of it for us. And from that point a couple of people saw me and said, "Can you come down and tell some gags at our football club, and bring your banjo and pick us a song."

28:30 And I stood on beer barrels and I did that. And then it just escalated and over a long period...we're talking a long, long time, I got to a point where I was getting a lot of work in and around Melbourne, around the wharves down in Port Melbourne. I was working at the Port Melbourne Footy Club and someone taped what I was doing and took a photo of me, unbeknown to me, and a few months later someone came up to me and said, "Would you sign your album?" "What album?"

29:00 And they showed me. They had bootlegged an album and they were selling, and they were selling them for 20 bucks or something and they were doing big business. And because in Australia at the time there were no real comedy albums. They had a bloke called Johnny Garfield was bringing out tapes in Sydney. And there was nobody else. There were Derrick and Clive albums and that was all there was. Anyway I brought out this thing called...

29:30 I thought well if you can't beat them join them, so I tracked them down and I said, "You can't do this," and they were the Melbourne mafia and they said, "Well you can't stop us." And they had guns under there, you know. So I backed off and I thought well if you can't beat them join them, so I ended up making a tape myself and I called it, 'You Can't Help Laughing With Col. Vol 1.' About two albums later

30:00 I was going really good. Bert Newton saw me doing a charity show and asked me to come on board his show. He was doing a show for 3UZ in Melbourne and he was celebrating his 1000th radio show in Melbourne, and he asked me to come on board and do a song, he heard me do, called, 'I've Got to Give the Grog Away,' which was a little self penned thing I did about giving the grog up. And it was funny about coppers and ...why do they call it the Mirada Breath Test? They always pick

30:30 the driver you know. And a whole lot of stupid stuff and I went on his show to do that, and his show was syndicated around Australia. When that got to Nambour in Queensland, the disc jockey there heard my version of 'Got to Give the Grog Away' and cut it out of the show, and played it every day. And it became a little cult hit and while he was doing that, a bloke from Sydney came along and said, "I like that song, let me take it back to 2UE in Sydney."

31:00 So he took it back and the next minute they rang me up and said, "We love your hit single." I said, "What hit single?" And they said, "We've got this thing that's going crazy." And so we raced into the studio and made a decent version of it and we put it on an album. And we titled the album, 'Hey You Bloody Mug', because there was a track on this album about an Italian describing a game of Aussie Rules. And he thought the Umpire's name was 'Hey You Bloody Mug'. He's the bloke who owns the ball. So I wrote this

- 31:30 crazy thing, and it took off nationally. EMI [recording company] got in touch with me. We ended up signing a deal with EMI. In the next eight years I put out...I think...I'm guessing now, but I think about 12 albums with them. I managed to get over that time, over all the years I've been doing it do about 13 gold albums, and platinum album. I did
- 32:00 a lot of touring and that, and I started to work. And it just took a long time to get like...I mean it didn't happen just like that. In the mean time I sold carpets in between. I was a brickie's labourer. I put out St Vincent's de Paul's bags in letter boxes. I used to get \$1 per hundred and I could get the first pick of the litter, so I could have any shoes or jeans that came out of the bag that were any good, which I did. I got a couple of good suits.
- 32:30 I did all that, and I was a barman. I worked in bottle shops and that stuff for a few years until I had enough work to take off. And I've been working ever since, and I got to a point unfortunately I just worked so hard...
- Yes, that's what I actually wanted to talk to you about Col because...yeah, you said you had left the navy**
- 33:00 **and were running hard and you were just go, go, go. Can you tell us...I mean, was the social stigma of not being married and having a baby just a huge issue in 1971...**
- Okay. No it wasn't. To me it wasn't. Karen and I were going to get married anyway. We thought we could make it. She got pregnant and we said we only did it once,
- 33:30 and I went...but there was no thought in my mind or her mind that we would not get married. Or that we would do anything but have this baby. So it never ever entered our minds. So I said, "Well I had better come and face your Dad and tell your Dad." She was only 20 and I went to them. And Karen's Mum went oh...
- 34:00 and hung onto the table. I always re-enact it when I go there. I say, "Who am I Joan?" And she goes "Oh....oh stop it you bastard." But she's lovely, and they were absolutely beautiful people. Her Dad said, "You're bugged. What are you going to do? You've got no money. You're just out of the navy. You were going to go to Canada. What do you want to do?" And I said, "Well we want to get married." And they said, "Look we'll get behind you." And I said, "All I can say is I'll give it my best shot and I won't let you down. I'll look after this baby."
- 34:30 And I did. But I ran like buggery. I ran so hard I couldn't stop. And as soon as I saw that baby I thought no, this isn't for me. I've got to knuckle under here. I'm responsible for this little thing. And I ran so hard, over those years when I did get my breaks, I took everything. I couldn't say no to anything. And Karen said, "You don't have to work that hard." I said, "I've got to do this."
- 35:00 I had other issues that were nagging at me but I couldn't recognise them. I was running hard and I knew I was different to everybody else. I knew because...not because of what I did for a living, but I just knew that I was different. I knew I wasn't like my mates, the civilian mates of mine. I couldn't justify having a weekend off. I couldn't do that.
- Because you felt guilty?**
- Yes. Very guilty if I stopped. I don't know why. So I
- 35:30 worked three different pubs at one stage. I worked Thursday night in one pub, Friday in another pub and Saturday night in another pub. And then Sunday I would go brickies labouring for extra money, then I'd start Monday again. And Monday's I would get up very early and put out St Vincent de Paul bags before I had to be at work before 9 o'clock as a sales rep. And I did that, did those sorts of things. And then at night I would go out curtain fitting. I just worked very hard. And then when I got into
- 36:00 business, when this business came and I had an opportunity to work and make money, I couldn't say no. And the fortunate thing about my business is that when you do get popular it's very good money, so I managed to make a lot of money. But then, enough is not enough. I couldn't stop. I was working so hard that Karen came
- 36:30 threw...I can still remember, she threw my diary in front of me and said, "Look the last 12 months, you've been home 2 months. In 12 months, this is ridiculous. If you don't stop you're going to die." And it was pretty prophetic because at 37 years old I had a major heart attack. I fell over in the middle of a radio interview. The right side of my heart died. It was
- 37:00 cut off from oxygen from the blood because the major artery just closed over. There was no other arteriosclerosis in the system, just the one artery. It just stopped. And the pain of it is the heart muscle actually dying so it's like a bit of boot leather actually on that side. And the heart enlarged. But I had an enlarged heart. They don't know if that was before or after. But that pulled me up in my tracks pretty heavy.
- 37:30 And she came in and all I wanted to see...I had two daughters then, and I kept saying, "I want to see the girls before I die." And Karen got to me pretty quick. She was down here on the Gold Coast. I was up north, and she got there within four hours and they put me to sleep. I was watching the little monitor and I was saying I don't want to go to sleep. I want to be awake when I die. That was very funny. But the thing I hung on to

- 38:00 when I was having that heart attack was...a doctor came in and said to me, "Tomorrow I'm going to bring my album in, 'Hey You Bloody Mug' and I want you to sign it for me." And I thought, this guy thinks I'm going to be here tomorrow. That's a good sign. So I hung onto that. So I eventually...I spent a few days in intensive care and then a couple of weeks in hospital, and within 3 months I was back on the road. Back into it.
- 38:30 **Can I just ask you something Col. Do you know now why you pushed yourself so hard?**
- Yeah. I felt responsible for my children and I knew that once I made enough money then I could die. Don't know why I thought like that. As soon as I make enough money so they can live, and be okay, then if I die it's okay. Now that's a little bit silly. But that's how I thought and I didn't know why I thought like that.
- 39:00 I felt that I didn't deserve a lot of things and obviously I was fooling everybody, and I didn't deserve this. I don't know why. The mind is crazy. But it took me a long, long time to realise that I deserve a couple of bits and pieces too. And I need to give more of me to them than just be a work horse. So I've always been so close
- 39:30 to all my girls. We just love each other to death. But I just couldn't justify...if I was on the road I couldn't justify having one day off. I would feel guilty. What am I doing here having a day off. What am I doing. You're a bloody idiot. You're here to work. You're here to make money. That's what I was supposed to do. I had to make amends for things that happened to me. I had to make amends all the time. And it's a crazy thing but I think a lot of it is to do with post traumatic
- 40:00 stress, and I've come to believe that now. And I had to come to terms with all these things. And I couldn't work out why I had irritable bowel syndrome so bad, I couldn't understand. I was eating well. I was doing my best. But it's all psychiatric. I was a nut. I understood why my hearing was bad. I knew about that and I knew about tinnitus. I understood that because they explain that to me. And I said, "Could you fix it?"
- 40:30 And they said, "No we can't fix it," they said, "it's damaged and it's irreparably damaged."

Tape 8

- 00:35 **Col, I just want to clarify for the record about your tour in the Vietnam in the navy. How long were you actually there?**
- Six months. March...I forget the date in March, but I think mid March to September. We were deployed there and the first few months as I said we were on the gun line south of the ...
- 01:00 around about the DMZ or south of Da Nang, about 90 miles south of Da Nang, and then after that up north where the fireworks there. So yeah, that was our spot.
- What was it like getting the news that you were heading back home?**
- It was great. We knew when we were going back home. We had our little break and we were heading back. It was always exciting. I remember coming
- 01:30 back from every trip that I did overseas on the Stewart and all the rest. It was always a great feeling to come back home...even though I enjoyed my travels in the far east. But it was always nice to get back home and come in. And I always remember the people on the wharf. Unfortunately I never had anyone come to see me, but there was a lot of people that I used to watch, my mates
- 02:00 and their parents. And they'd be there and there would be bloody placards and people waiting for them. It was a wonderful feeling for those guys. I was one of those who didn't ever get that. I didn't have people on the wharf waiting for me but I do remember the crowds and how good it was. And on the Stewart we used to have our own bag piper playing the pipes on the top of the gun turret as we came in. That was...I guess they adopted the old Stewart tartan and
- 02:30 and he used to play...Jock, he used to play the bagpipes and I used to hate the bloody things, but he used to play them and it was always stirring. But on the Hobart, it was a good feeling because it was the first time we had been to war since Korea and we had done such a bloody good job, and Guy Griffiths was a top man. It was good to be under his command.
- 03:00 **I don't think we've talking much about the leave you had when you were in ...**
- Subic Bay? That was a pretty rough old time those places. Subic Bay was...it was huge...it's not there now, the Americans have pulled out since. But in the Philippines in Subic Bay there was a huge base. Two night clubs in the base. They had everything a sailor could want, except girls
- 03:30 I think. But they used to have hostesses in the San Pagita club, and all this. As you went in there they used to give you a little lecture about going ashore and they'd show you all the diseases you could get,

and god knows what else. You weren't allowed ashore in Subic Bay by yourself. You had to be in twos. If you were caught by yourself the MPs would grab you and lock you up. They used to have hard hats. They called them hard hats which were American

04:00 military police. And if you were caught by yourself you would be locked up.

What was the reason for that?

It was a very rough town. It was vice ridden. It was an incredibly shocking place to be. A rough place to be. Me and my mates bought a gun. As silly young kids we bought a gun off a policeman to fire at cans in the river,

04:30 for 20 pesos. So right. So we did. It was just one big, long street. Bars next door to each other, bars. And every bar had a band and a whole bunch of bar girls and it was just there for the sailors. Prostitution was rife. You could get robbed

05:00 easy, you could get mugged easy. You never ever...you learnt so many tricks...you never got in a jeepney. Now a jeepney was a Second World War jeep all brightly coloured. And you would never drive along in it with your arm hanging out or your watch. You would never wear a watch because they used to go past on a motorbike with hooks and just take your watch. You never wore jewellery. You never carried a wallet in your back pocket. You learned all those tricks. I remember in Hong Kong

05:30 there was an English sailor came out of an alley with no finger. They cut the finger off to get the ring. Drunk up an alley. You had to learn all those...to be street wise, and you learnt that pretty quick in the navy. One particular visit I went to in Subic Bay, they had a report where they had dropped,

06:00 it sounds terrible but it happened, a young navy lieutenant had been messing around with a Philippino girl. Her boyfriends had got him and they cut his business off and sewed it inside his mouth and he bled to death, and they dropped him at the main gates and they sped off again. That could happen there. So you weren't safe to go by yourself. So if you went ashore you went in pairs. You didn't leave your mate. If you were caught by yourself you

06:30 were easy prey. So yeah, I was a kid over there and experienced all those things.

What did your mate or mates get up to let off steam?

That's why...do you want to keep this show? Yeah...I did everything that every red blooded, young bloke would do, pretty much.

07:00 I thought I was pretty special too. I believed they really loved me too. Yeah. It's an eye opening but it's something you learn. But the sad part about those ports is that these people have to do that to survive. They have to become bar girls.

07:30 I remember one time I met this girl and she was a bar girl and she was studying English. She was studying. She was a very clever girl. I'd go in there and have a drink and she would sit there and I would teach her English. She ended up...she was going through school but she was supplementing her studies by prostitution.

08:00 And it always struck me as really sad that she had to do that. But she was so pretty and she was studying English, and she would practice her English on me, and we became friends. One time I came back and she was gone and I asked about her, and they said she got through and she went to America. And she studied and made it. So I was really pleased about that. But there weren't a lot who got through and I guess that the Philippines, because it's such a populated

08:30 place, there was less opportunity than we have. And that's why it's always been amazing to me that these kids here don't realise how lucky we are. So I went there, and Singapore and places like that... Boogie Street and I ran with the best of them and had a great time. But we were young and sowing our wild oats and we were having a good time. So yeah, I experienced all those things.

09:00 Would the Australians as a group get into any mischief...

Terrible stuff. Yeah, there was rivalry between the forces, but there was a great camaraderie too. And I...one of the funniest things that I will never ever forget...at the time,

09:30 I don't know what year it was, but at the time there was a lot of civil unrest in America with the blacks and the whites and they actually got into Olongapo which is ...Subic Bay was the area we went to and the town was called Olongapo which was the town outside the base. And they actually sectioned it off, black and white at one stage when we were there. And being Aussies we didn't know what that meant, black and white.

10:00 We didn't have that sort of racism. A mate of mine and I went into a bar and it was all black. We didn't know, and the place was just all black guys, all American guys, sailors. And the bar girls and everything. And the band stopped as we walked in. The band stopped and we looked across and all these guys were looking at us. And we were in white ice-cream uniforms,

10:30 but we were Australians. They were in white uniforms too but...my mate said, "Let's go." And I said,

"No I want a beer." And he walked up to the bar and said, "Give us a beer mate." And he said, "You go, you go quick." And my mate said, "No give us a bloody beer." And a guy, one of the Negro guys sitting there stood up and said, "It's okay guys they ain't white, they is Australians." And the band started playing and I never forgot that. I spent the night with these guys at that bar,

11:00 singing and dancing, and we had the most wonderful time with these guys. But they reckoned we weren't white, we were Australian. And that was just a great thing. I remember that very well. I had another guy come up to me in the street which really surprised me because I think a lot of American people at that time, especially service people, knew about their own country but didn't know about anyone else's. Anyway, this American guys came up to

11:30 me and he said, "Are you Australian?" And I said, "Yeah that's right mate." He said, "Come on man, you aren't Australian, how come you ain't black?" He couldn't believe it. True story.

Can you tell us about your impressions of the US Navy I guess on a personal basis?

I had

12:00 some great mates ...the American navy blokes. Often we'd go...especially in Hong Kong, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Bangkok, where the Yanks were...we would have to come along side them. They'd be against the wharf and we would come alongside them and we would have to go over their ship to get to our ship and whatever. And that's often what happens. And I will always remember...the American navy so much looked after their boys. You'd come back and there would be

12:30 cooks on, cooking hamburgers for them, and we'd think this is so good. So we used to get involved with their ship. And we met so many guys who just wanted to trade..."Hey man you want to trade hats?" And they'd open their lockers and you'd end up with zippo lighters and hats and belts and...I had a big pea jacket a Yank gave me...I don't know what I gave him, but they were such good blokes. And they loved Australians and I think they enjoyed our larrikinism.

13:00 I had a lot of good mates who were Yanks. They were good blokes, and very generous blokes. Terrific blokes. I remember one time, we were in Penang and the City Ramblers, my mates and I in the band decided to play in a bar because we were broke and we needed a beer. So we set up in a bar and we were playing away, and an American guy came in, in civilian clothes,

13:30 and sat there and tapped along and bought us a beer, and I said, "What's your name?" And he told me his name. And I said, "What do you do?" And he said, "I'm a teacher." And I said, "Oh a teacher." And he said, "Yeah, I'm on holidays, I'm having a couple of weeks off. I teach in Thailand." And I said, "Fantastic" So he tagged along with us all night, drinking and laughing and swearing and really having a big night you know.

14:00 Anyway he gave us his card and he said when you get to Bangkok, look us up. We were heading to Bangkok in a few months. His name was Dick Beck. I've never forgot his name. Dick Beck. And when we got up there we went to find him and we went around to the address and there he was, Father Dick Beck, the whole outfit with his orphanage around him. I couldn't believe it. This guy was a priest,

14:30 and he was over in Thailand. A teacher at a school and he was a priest. And my mate who was a devout Catholic had a fit because he was just so ashamed, because we took this guy every with us. I mean we visited some really nice places, and Dick Beck went with us. And we wondered why he was hanging back. But he was a wonderful guy. And he never judges. He just thought we were nice guys

15:00 having fun. But he was there and he was a priest. So it was near Christmas, so we organised all the ship's company, all the different guys. And we rounded up a lot of money and we ploughed it into these kids in the orphanage and we've got photos of Dick Beck. A great bloke. I think he lived in Philadelphia and I wrote to him for quite a few years and then I lost contact with him. But I met some interesting people in the navy.

15:30 How was it working with the 7th Fleet in general?

They were great guys. All the ones...when we did have a break and we got away, those guys were good boys and they did their job the same thing. We worked with all different ships but mainly ships our size. And when we did the screening stuff, the Forrestall and all the rest,

16:00 and sometimes you find yourself having a break the same time they did, and you'd see them ashore and we'd all compare notes and catch up. But they were all the same sort of dudes. I liked the Americans. I enjoyed their company and it was funny. Many, many...and I could always talk like 'em, you know. How doin' boy. Very, very funny.

16:30 Many years later when I was on tour with Tom Jones, there I'm dropping a name. I was on tour with Tom Jones and all his band were ex Elvis Presley boys. Tom Jones watched me work one night and was laughing on the side of the stage at one of the big concerts and the boys came up to me after and they said, "Hey man we saw you doing that stuff and we were laughing our arses off and we don't know what the hell you're talking about." And I said, "I don't know what I'm talking about!" And they said, "We can understand

17:00 you now man. But we don't know what you're talking about. Tom, he's laughing. We don't know what

you're talking about but you look so god damn funny." They couldn't understand our accent and when I was in the navy and I was working with these guys, I used to have to talk like them half the time so they could understand me. They would say, "Hey boy, what you doin' boy?" And I would say, "I'm doin' well." And they could understand me. But if you spoke like an Australian, it would be, "What you say Col?"

17:30 And they couldn't say Col, they would say Cul. That's why they say C- o- lin Powell [US Secretary of State]. If you say Col, they'd say, "Oh Carl," C.A.R.L. And you say, "No, it's Col." So it's our vocal sounds and they have trouble with it and a lot of Americans do. So especially the Southern guys and a lot of the crews I was working with would all be southern. They were talking like that. They were good ol boys.

18:00 "Hey what you doin' boy? You want a Budweiser?" And I would listen to them and I would imitate them and it would amuse the guys. It kept me amused too.

Can you tell us about the formation and makeup of your band?

The New Nee Soon City Ramblers...that varied depending who was on punishment at the time. We had a soup box bass. We had a ...for a while there

18:30 we had a ukulele. A harmonica. A guitar. A comb. Tin whistles and about ten blokes singing drunk. It was a great band. We did everything yeah, it was a lot of fun.

And how did it come about, like originally?

It came about because one of the guys said look there has to be a way we can get a beer, because we're broke. We got paid fortnightly and if you got paid fortnightly there was a way to get rid

19:00 of your money real quick. I was a pay day baron. A pay day baron was a guy who got his pay and lived like a king for two days, and then was broke for the rest of the ten days, you know. I was always like that. A lot of the guys would bet so you would gamble your money before you even got into port. Played tombola, cards, whatever. And it wasn't a big pay we used to get anyway, and we were drinking pretty heavy so. So a couple of guys got talking and said, what we should do is form a band

19:30 and go into a bar and maybe set up and ask them for free beer and that. So we put this ramshackle, the New Nee Soon City Ramblers Jug and Jazz Band together, and we fronted into a bar and the mamma said, "Oh yes you can set up in the corner and you can get free drinks from whoever comes in." So we would be playing and a guy would say, "Hey man do you know, 'I Left My Heart In San Francisco'?" Of course we can do that...'I Left My Heart In San Francisco'...and we'd make it up as we went.

20:00 Then I'd tell gags or whatever and someone would buy us a beer, and we'd cadge a few beers and it was a lot of fun.

Can you give us an impression or introduction to some of the navy jokes that you came up with at the time that later on...?

No I couldn't remember, but I talked about everything from my first sexual experience to my first job when I had trouble with boats. So that was the sort of stuff that was covered over the years.

20:30 I think at the time we used to do some stand up...I remember many years ago, in the navy, Bill Cosby was a big influence on us, and we used to listen to Bill Cosby with all his old records. I remember there was one there...a mate of mine, Dougie Shell and I used to perform in the bars and it was about two boxers...or the manager and the boxer. Groggy Splateraria or whatever.

21:00 And he would say, "And Groggy what do you do after the fight?" "Mostly I bleed." And all these terrible things you know. It was just a lot of fun you know. So I used to do the interview and I would interview him and he'd pull his pants up and wear these big boxing gloves. And I would say, "Ladies and gentlemen, we're about to interview the next contender for the next Heavy Weight Champion of the World, Splateraria Groggy. Groggy hey!"

21:30 And this guy would come out and we'd do all these crazy answers. A lot of performers...a lot of players like to play guitars and sing or meditate after a fight. "Groggy what do you do mainly?" "Mostly I bleed." And it was just this inane interview went on. And it was great. And then we used to do this other stuff. We'd do a duo and...I forget the name of the song, but...

22:00 "From there a road from out of the West, with a Daniel Boone medal pinned upon his chest. He was mean and nasty right clear through, but kind of funny 'coz he was yella too. They called him Irving, big fat Irving. The hundred and forty second fastest gun...pop...in the west." And then we would put our guns away. "Irving was the 142nd fastest gun. 101 was faster than he, so Irving was gunning for 143." And we'd do this.

22:30 We'd act this whole thing out with a pair of guns and these stupid cowboy hats and it was just a lot of fun and the Yanks used to love it and they'd buy beer.

That Irving number...

It's a very old number.

Was that one you picked up along the way?

Yeah, somewhere. And, "He always obeys his mother's wishes, even on the range he used two sets of dishes...." and Dougie Shell used to do it. Doug was a mate

23:00 of mine, an able seaman on board. In fact he's in that book I wrote. And he used to do that and we used to do it together. We used to do all these crazy little songs and stuff we would make up and tell gags and characters in between songs. And we would sing these stupid songs and the Yanks and Poms or whatever would buy us a beer and it used to get us through. So someone would come down the mess and say,

23:30 "I think we need to put the New Nee Soon out on the road again." And that meant everyone was broke so we'd say come on and we'd hit a bar again. It was a lot of fun.

Fantastic. Would you do any gigs on the ship?

There was not a lot of chance to do that really. There was one particular time when we had pulled into a port somewhere, some island...I think it might have been Brampton Island,

24:00 and the guys went ashore and Russ Locquin got his guitar out and we wrote this song. It was a send up of 'Folsom Prison Blues', and it was about the ship. The Jimmy was the second in command and it went, "I hear the Jimmy coming, he's coming down the flat. Well he won't be catching me lying on my back." So we did this whole song about the ship.

24:30 "And if I owned this navy and this great big ship was mine, I'd fill it full of mines and I'd send it to the bottom, that's where it ought to stay. And I would let that lonesome ripple wash the blues away." We wrote up send ups and all that to amuse our mates, and that kept us all sane. I can still remember verses years later. So that's funny.

Good. I've got to ask just on the off chance, are there any that stick out

25:00 **in your mind...that you could actually call up and you could recite for us?**

Well there is one but you'd never ever get it on...it's horrible. No, you couldn't do it.

Why not?

No, no. Because some of the stuff that I did in the navy was...some of the stuff I did was very raunchy and it's not fit for anybody's ears.

Oh Col come on.

25:30 "She was just sixteen, little Angeline. She was always dancing on the village green. She was a virgin still, never had a thrill. Poor little Angeline. Now the local Squire was of low design, he was the dirtiest bastard in the whole damn shire. And he had set his heart on the vital part of poor little Angeline. It was the day of the fair and the Squire was there masturbating in the public square, when he chanced to see the dimpled knee of poor little Angeline. She had raised her skirt to avoid the dirt, she was skipping around the puddles of the Squire's last squirt.

26:00 And his knob went raw at the sight he saw, poor little Angeline." I won't go on, it just goes on and on.

I implore you.

Okay, okay. "She had raised her skirt to avoid the dirt, she was skipping around the puddles of the Squire's last squirt. And his knob went raw at the sight he saw, poor little Angeline. So he tipped his hat and said, "Your cat has been run over..." Shall I get my guitar, and I'll give you one?"

Yes please.

26:30 I talked about life...how life starts. Seven thousand, million, trillion sperms. A bloke makes it every day and a woman makes one egg a month. It's not fair, we're holding up a big thing here. So I tell what happens and how the sperm gets up to the egg and to the uterus. So I felt very proud about this and wrote a little song. It goes like this.

27:00 Hang on, hang on... "I started out on the starting block with a billion other sperm. I swam like Kieran Perkins through all those twists and turns. But I banged my head on that little egg and the result is what you see, my Mum just thought she had a guts ache but they sent her home with me. So I guess it was a long shot that I got born at all, God didn't make me handsome and he didn't make me tall.

27:30 But the fact that I got here at all is a blessing, not a curse. And I'm satisfied how I turned out, I mean it could have been much worse. Of course, I wish my dick was bigger. It would be a source of pride. But three inches is three inches...not long, we're talking wide. They say it's not the size that counts, they say it's technique. Just ask the wife she went off last night and nearly dropped the TV Week. But I'm making the best of what I've got. So long as I've got some of it mate,

28:00 I don't need a lot. Life is what you make it, you've got to give it your best shot, and I'm making the best of what I've got. Of course, I wish my dick was bigger. Hey did I mention that? Hey look, nothing too outrageous, just somewhere to hang my hat. I pray each night for a miracle, I don't think that's a sin. It would be nice to hear, gee that's big dear instead of is it in? Of course I wish my dick was bigger. Hey didn't I just say that? Oh, one that requires both my hands so I won't strain my back.

28:30 One that I won't be embarrassed by when I go to the men's, because if I used four fingers there I piss on three of them." Now, I'd better not do the next verse....okay. Hang on, will I do the next verse or not? Better not.

You've got to give us the full song.

Okay.

29:00 "Anthropology books will tell you that negroes have the edge on dongs, so I rang up Michael Jackson to see if I could get mine long. He said, "What we do is tie a brick on the end and jog around the track." Well it half worked, it didn't get long but it was definitely turning black. Of course I wish my dick was bigger...hey did I say that before? Nothing too outrageous..." No, I'm getting all ballsed up.

29:30 "I wish my dick was bigger...did I say that before...I only want four inches, yeah, four inches off the floor. I can see myself in the men's room just standing in that line. They'd be shaking theirs, and Jesus, I'd be kicking mine." So I did all that sort of shit yeah. So that's the sort of shit I do. But it all started from the New Nee Soon stuff.

30:00 So that's the sort of stuff I write. You'll have to edit around that a bit. But yeah, that sort of writing and that sort of stuff kept me sane. It kept me moving you know. There was a lot of good times doing that.

You were actively writing...

I've been actively writing for a long, long time. I've written a lot of songs. A lot of funny songs

30:30 and a lot of straight songs.

But you were writing in the service?

Yeah, I was writing in the service. It had started before I got out of the navy but I leaned on it to make a living when I got out of a navy. So I was forced into a corner where I had to get some money. And so there was maybe a chance that maybe I could make some money doing it. And it just fell into place and when it did fall into place and when it did take off, I ran with the ball and kept running, and running hard.

31:00 It's turned out, it's been a very good career that way...to a point where there's still a demand there. They'll fly me around the country and I can put an ad in, and go and do a club and come out again. But I can pick and choose now which is wonderful.

Excellent. Col you were mentioning earlier during one of the breaks, telling a story about

31:30 **welcoming your brother off ship...**

Getting him home? Yeah he got off the plane, I think it was about 9 o'clock...

This is on his return from Vietnam?

Yeah from Vietnam. He was different. He was different. He had changed. I could relate to him, but he wasn't the same bloke who had left. Again, I think it had a profound affect

32:00 on him. As it did on all of us. I think we all realised that the world was a different place to what we thought.

What was different about him, and I guess you..?

His experience was different to mine. Here was a guy who was in the Battle of Coral. This guy was... shooting people. This guy could see them. He went up and watched the dead bodies.

32:30 He had to move them and put them into pictures and do a lot of things like that, that I didn't have to do. A different war. And again, even the guys who didn't see a lot, they were sitting in the jungle there, waiting, listening, on edge for weeks at a time. And then they came out, and that plays a hell of a lot on your nerves. But they saw enough. They had enough contact as well.

33:00 But at the same time they saw enough and it worked on them. And you take them...they're very highly strung and then you're taken out of that environment and sent back home. And they said, see you later, thank you. And that's virtually what they did. And they're left...oh! And after my seven years in the navy, they said, "Okay you're out now. See ya." And...oh. What do you do.

33:30 You can't think like a civilian. You don't think like a civilian, you think like a military man. I couldn't work it out. I wanted to go back in. I found it very hard. I wanted to be back with my mates. I was institutionalised by then and he was too. He didn't last very long in civvies street at all. He didn't last, Ralph, no.

What happened?

I had to send him back in. I virtually drove him back in and said take him back in for Christ sake. He spent fourteen years in the army.

34:00 He couldn't get out. Spent 14 years in there. He was called up as a Nasho, and came back out of Vietnam and couldn't adjust. So I had to put him back in, really. That's basically what happened to him. I said, "Mate you've got to go back in. You're no good out here. You're no good out here." He said, "Yeah you're right." And he went back in and he spent 14 years in the army.

What was it about him, in your observation that had

34:30 **changed when he came back off the plane, in terms of his behaviour I guess?**

Yeah. He couldn't relate to the people that we grew up with any more. He didn't have anything in common. You really do lose that. You don't have anything in common with those people. They hadn't had the life experience you had. They hadn't seen it the way you had seen it. They had experienced it. They hadn't felt ever threatened.

35:00 There were guys there who we grew up with, who are still there now. They haven't moved. We go back there and they're still there. They haven't been anywhere, they haven't done anything. They haven't seen anything. And I'm knocking that. I'm just saying, how can I relate to them? I mean I can say, hey g'day, how's your Mum? End of story. Nice day. I mean there's not a lot left to say. But you put me next to another sailor...even today, you put me next to one of Ralph's mates or whatever and

35:30 oh...you're straight into it because you're on the same level. You shared an experienced and you shared...I know how they feel. My ex-tour manager did 12 years in the navy and he's a great bloke. And I know exactly how he is. I know where he comes from and I know the code he lives by. And I trust him with my life because I know him. I know where he's come from. I know the system he's come out. And that's really important.

36:00 And I think any military person, it becomes very important. The rest of it becomes superficial. The business I'm in today...I'm not show business...I'm really not a show business person. I don't have any pretensions about show business. I've had great success. It's been fantastic. I've sold a lot of records and filled a lot of houses and worked with some huge names over the years and I'm...it's wonderful. But I can't get a buzz out of it.

36:30 Can't get a buzz out of it.

The whole time?

No. Not...I can't ...I know there's something wrong with me because I can't be overawed. I just can't. When I was first on tour with Tom Jones, my manager said, "What's he like? Is he a good bloke?" And I said, "I suppose." He said, "Hello. I haven't got time to be messing around." And then I finally

37:00 met the guy and he was a nice man, and he put me in his private jet and flew me everywhere, and I had a lovely time, and all the rest of it. But he's a coal miner who could sing. I mean really...he's a lovely guy and a great, big sensational act and all the rest of it, but he's a man. Bottom line, he's a bloke. And anybody I've ever met of importance like that, I had the same feeling. I've never felt...oh guess what I did?

37:30 I don't know what's wrong with me. Something's wrong with me because I don't feel that at all.

I actually think that's a healthy thing to be honest.

Good, because I feel that too. Bernie often said to me, my manager, a great bloke. And I often say, "We're going to celebrate the opening of his wallet after the next tour." Bernie and I are great mates but he would often say, "Look I want you to go and do this pro golf classic because so and so will be there, and the press will be there," and it was said to me...without boasting,

38:00 I managed to get two Mo awards for my work, and I went to an award one year and I was talking to Kevin Jacobs, Col Joy's brother, and Kevin is a wonderful guy and a big promoter in Australia. He brought the Bee Gees out. And I never forget what he said to me. He said, "You should have more than two Mo Awards." I said, "Really?"

38:30 "Oh yes," he said. "You know why you don't have eight of them?" I said, "Why?" He said, "Because you don't go to enough barbeques." And he was right. I don't. No thanks. I don't want to know about that stuff. My job...I go out, my important...I love my public. I love the people I'm playing to. I love them listening to that and laughing their arses off and having a good time. And when I've done that I walk away from it and I come back here, to my family and my girls.

39:00 And my grandson and my life here. And very rarely...I mean I picked up the guitar for you today and started to do some of the stuff, but I never work unless I'm on stage. I never do that. It's just not in me. I just don't want to do it. I don't want to do. I do it for a living and I enjoy it and I do love it. And I do love writing it, and saying, hey gee, that worked. Or if I wrote a line...

39:30 I was talking about...I was writing a routine about some friends that came to visit us and they brought their little child, two little boys, and they were wrecking my house. And I told them about...I'm saying, "Mary...little Tommy's....Mary...Tommy's over by the goldfish bowl....that's a little fresh water turtle over there...he doesn't come out of his shell...oh yes he does!"

- 40:00 You know...you talk about things you can relate to, and when I wrote that piece and I did it for them, and everybody laughed, but I walk away from it. So that's my life on stage. I loved to write the book. I enjoyed that. It was a good release I guess to start writing. But I'm not a show bizzy person as such. There's some wonderful friends in this business who are lovely
- 40:30 people and who are very show bizzy. Glitter, glitter, glitter and I feel if that's ever taken away from them they'll shrivel up. I want more than that in my life. I've got to have that. That's great. I'll do one next week. That's great. But I have to be able to walk away and go out in my boat, or play with my grandson, or take my daughter dancing, or go and see my other daughter and help her paint her bathroom. That's my life.
- 41:00 It's a balancing act.

Tape 9

- 00:33 **Col, we were just talking about being, well inside your head as well as your body. And with your career, that's got a lot of ups and down. You mentioned before PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder]. Did PTSD come in as a result of your work, but from the navy if you know what I mean?**
- It affected my work but it came in from...definitely from what I can
- 01:00 understand, Vietnam. From the Frank E Evans and all those areas...there was PTS there. And it's a funny thing because...when I turned into an alcoholic, workaholic and whatever...and whatever the conditioning I had that made me run like that. When I had the heart attack, then it was twice as bad because after that you realise all of a sudden, hey I'm not bullet proof.
- 01:30 I thought I was Superman. I was bullet proof. Nothing could touch me because I had seen it all. I had seen it and I had stared at it. And I had been shot at and they couldn't get me, ha ha ha. And I came back and then I watched the other thing with the Frank E Evans and I was so...if I had been there instead of there...all of those things came through. And the car accident...and I was able to think, see they haven't killed me. They hadn't killed me.
- 02:00 And I hadn't been hurt. When I had the heart attack...at 37 to have a fully fledged, full on heart attack, I realised I'm not bullet proof. I'm vulnerable. Jesus, this is not right. Then what that does...that compounds because that works on you and that makes you
- 02:30 anxious and then you get anxiety attacks. I would have panic attacks. I was in the middle of Sydney in a car, I didn't know where I was, I couldn't work out which was left and which was right, which was north, which was south. I had a total panic attack and I just walked away from the car. I just walked away and got a cab. I walked away from the hire car. I said, "I don't know where it is. I don't know where it is. Take me to the airport. Get me home."
- 03:00 I panicked, and I don't why I had to get out of that town. Don't know why. And I thought, what's wrong with me. So I started to seek a bit of help.
- Did Karen say, hey listen you've got to go and see someone or was it off your own bat?**
- I always had trouble sleeping and I'd wake up with...I'd wake up and...what I know now is I was having a flash back and I'd get them and I'd wake up and sit up and then I'd be awake, and
- 03:30 I'd have a guts ache and I'd prowl the house, and she said, "Look we should see somebody about it." And I would say, "Hey look, I'm all right. I'm just a bit overtired," or whatever. And what I was doing then was self medicating with grog and work. And I just threw myself back into work. And I would think if I just work so hard I will be able to sleep and I'll be all right. But it never worked and...so the more of that you do to yourself, the more anxious you get and the panic
- 04:00 attacks. Then I started to have trouble with memory. I couldn't remember simple things that I had known all my life. People's names and stuff that I had written. I couldn't remember the words to stuff that was just so embedded in my head. And it was bloody ridiculous. And then I had trouble... I was having a lot of trouble with my hearing,
- 04:30 and I knew I had problems with that because they had tested for it and they told me that tinnitus couldn't be fixed. And that broke my heart because I couldn't work with bands, because I couldn't hear what they were doing and so I had to rely on what I was playing. So that made me more depressed and all these things started to cave in on me, and I thought I'm going crazy here you know, what am I going to do. Then when I had the heart attack it made it twice as bad because,
- 05:00 I thought, physically I'm knackered now. So they put me on a lot of pills and different things and they told me I couldn't do this and I couldn't do that and I couldn't do the other. But within 3 months I was back at it...working it up again.

Did you have fights with Karen about this in terms of...

Yeah it was...and Bernie and his wife, we'd been together on a hand shake for 27 years. He's a wonderful bloke, and he and his

- 05:30 wife, she came to me and stood by the bed and cried and said, "It's my fault." And I said, "It's not your fault." I didn't say no either...like to all the work. And I said to Bernie, "Mate I've come to learn one thing. I've got to try and balance my life. I've got to give some back to my family now." When it came to Karen...they used to argue who was going to tell Karen where the next run was and how many gigs there were. And they'd say, "Your turn to talk to Karen,"
- 06:00 because she would say, "Look this is bloody ridiculous," because I would never say no. So I would say to them, "Look you talk to Karen," because I was frightened to tell her how much work I was doing. And sure it was different...you can be the richest bloke in the graveyard...then I was told I needed some counselling. I needed some counselling, and I thought no I don't. There's nothing wrong with me. But I went into a real deep depression and I couldn't kick myself out. And I had never been able to do that because I had always been so self motivated.
- 06:30 I could always kick myself out. And I got into this terrible depression. I was finding myself...I was crying at the drop of a hat...I was like a baby. I would just cry and didn't know what I was crying about. And I went to a doctor and said, "Something's bloody wrong with me, I need some help. I've got to stop this bullshit you know." And he said, "I think you've got to see somebody." So I got in touch with an
- 07:00 advocate, and said, "Look I was told I could get some counselling." And I said, "Look I've had trouble with my ears?" And he said, "What trouble?" And so I told him. And he said, "Jesus we had better check this out." So they checked the whole thing out. They did some tests and they said there's damage there, dar dar dar. Then he said, "Is there anything else?" And I said, "Well I had a heart attack." And he said, "What! A heart attack! When did you have that?"
- 07:30 And he said, "What else?" And I said, "I tend to chew a few Mylanta's. I have trouble with my stomach," and dar dar dar. And I said, "Look I don't know what's wrong with me because I've always been pretty fit." And it worked out that there was a thing called Irritable Bowel Syndrome, and there were ulcers that I had and all these things. And it all stemmed from psychiatric stuff. It's all stemmed from
- 08:00 alcoholism and being a workaholic and all that, and I was falling apart, and yet I was very, very successful. I was going a million miles an hour...you can be the richest bloke in the grave yard. So I went to a fair bit of counselling and they said, "Look you've got to learn to balance...there's ways around this. You're intelligent enough to understand this. This is a mental problem." And I found out that
- 08:30 irritable bowel syndrome is a psychiatric problem. And I said, "Come on, I've got a guts ache for Christ sake."

It's nerves isn't it?

It's a nerve thing and they said you've got this and you've got this. So they sent me to a psych...I went to see a psych and he turned me inside out and within an hour I had to get out of there. I said, "Let me out of here." It upset me so much...my brother came with me, and he pushed me back in...and I said, "Let's go, let's just get out of here, this guy's a nut.

- 09:00 I can't handle this shit, you know." He put me through the wringer and made me go back to stuff, face some stuff, and I realised then that I was affected pretty well by all the things that had happened. I tried very hard. I said I've got to get on top of this and fix this. Some things you just can't fix. I can't fix my ears, I can't fix my heart.
- 09:30 I still get sore guts. But I'm on a whole lot of pills. I don't smoke cigarettes at the minute. Touch wood. I've got a check on the grog. I've never been...I'm a very lucky man because I've got a very supportive wife who is there for me, and my daughters who I love dearly, and my grandson. I've got a lot of love from them. And they understand that I
- 10:00 can't...I have to sit facing the door in the restaurant, and they understand that they don't creep up on me. My daughter said the other night, "Dad we always knew we weren't to creep up on you." So I think over the years I've come to realise, and I think I must have a little bit of intelligence, because I've come to realise that I need to address certain things. If I feel something like a panic attack coming
- 10:30 on, I talk myself down, talk myself out of it. Sometimes I can't. Sometimes I have to let it happen. And I will nearly go into a panic attack if I'm going to be late. If I've got to meet you and I said I'll be there for lunch with you at two, and it's five past two, I will have a severe panic attack. I've done the wrong thing here and I can't do that.

Gee you're so hard on yourself.

Yeah, I don't let myself do that.

- 11:00 It's all to do with the system I came through. I got a lot of good positive things from the system. I'm fairly self disciplined. But the physical things have taken their toll, but at the same time, having said

that I'm aware of it, my limitations. I've pulled my work back...I've pulled my work so back, whereas at one time I would be gone and it would be, see you next month. Home, I'm back

11:30 ...then out again. Yeah shit loads of money, but where's Dad. But not any more. I don't do that any more. Bernie rings me and says...and I say, no I don't think we'll do that. I'll be home for a couple of weeks. Might do something next month. Would you come and give a talk or a lecture. Sometimes I do personal appearances now...charity stuff where I can...where I can and where it's not too hard. And I help the kids with cancer out. I help the Leukaemia Foundation. I help the Blue Nuns. I help the local fire

12:00 brigade. I've helped the Naval Association last month, and the Police Association. Rotary. I've done the kids...they take these kids through and I've done that sort of stuff. I've managed to be able to give back a bit which is good. But I'm still writing and I think the best is yet to come. I still write I'm a prolific writer and it's a good...what's the word?

12:30 **Therapy?**

Yeah, therapy for me to write. I feel I'm going to write a biography. I'm going to write a big book. I wrote a funny one, and I always use the line... "I always wanted to be an author, I was going to write a book, but I saw one down the shop for three bucks and I thought buggered it I'll buy one." So I've decided I'm going to write a book.

Can I just ask you, what's your opinion now of the counselling that you had?

I think it's

13:00 so worth while. I met a guy, Zeke Cocharian. He was an American fighter pilot and he turned into a psychologist when he cracked up in Vietnam in his plane. And we became great mates, and unfortunately Zig's not working at the moment because from his injuries, he's got terrible pain in his back and they can't fix it. But I had a good couple of years counselling with that guy and

13:30 he taught me to...it took me a year to get me past 15 but he was a man who I learned to trust and be able to talk to because...the school that I come from...that wasn't done. You didn't do that shit. You copped that shit and you copped it and you couldn't

14:00 do that. But I learned to talk about it. And I learned to talk about a lot of issues that I was having trouble with, and understanding why most of these things happened. And I understand other people now and I have a better tolerance of other people. When I see people who are hurting and I see people who are doing it hard...People who are involved in robberies and God knows what else...traumatised. And I can say, hey I know, I know what you mean.

14:30 I know why you're feeling like you are and what effect it does have on you. And I see these people and I have more tolerance and I have more compassion. I can understand because I've had a certain amount of that sort of stuff happen to me. My girls...I was very aware that my girls shouldn't see this. See me at my worst, and I kept out of their way when it was bad. The nicest thing my eldest daughter said to me on her wedding day.

15:00 She made a speech and she said, "I had such a great childhood. The best childhood, and my Dad gave me the best time. I used to absolutely love it when my Dad was home." That meant the world to me. They never ever saw violence. We're not violent. They never saw me like that. I was never violent. I hurt but I was never violent. And I was very fortunate that I didn't go

15:30 that way. It's not in my nature anyway. Those kids didn't have that and they didn't see that side of it. I was so fortunate that I've had a family that were supportive. There's a lot of guys out there who don't have that. They have to deal with it on their own and that must be bloody tough. So I'm a pretty fortunate bloke.

You can tell, we were saying it before, there's a lot of love in this house.

16:00 **A close family.**

Yeah, we're good mates.

Can I ask you what your advice would be today for those young people who would like to join the navy?

It's different from mine...but, for someone who wants to join the navy...it's a wonderful outfit, it is. It's a wonderful profession. A different profession to when I was in. It's nothing like the navy that I saw.

16:30 My nephew's a diver and as I say, he's been in 10 years now. The opportunities are still there and it's still a very viable force, and it will teach people how to live and how to live decently, and how to be decent. As I said to him, "You stay in the navy, don't get out." Because as I said, he can make a good career out of it and make good money and make a good decent living. It's not...it's hard because he's married and has a little girl,

17:00 so it's hard for a married bloke, but it's still a viable profession and I have a lot of respect for our sailors today and the people who are in the navy, and I do know it's a different outfit, a different kettle of fish than it was. They wouldn't put up with bloody idiots like me.

Have your daughters been interested in your war experiences?

I never talked about it for a long time. Never ever did. And when it came up and when my eldest daughter was at school and she started to learn about it,

- 17:30 she came to me and ask me about Vietnam, then I was able to sit and talk to her about it. They understand now what I did, where I was, but I think children now...even though maybe a lot of kids aren't aware of how lucky we are to be living here, I think they're aware of what's happening in the world and that it's a pretty tough place out there. When you see
- 18:00 Iraq and you see what's happening in Indonesia and all around the world. All the pockets, Rhodesia, Mugabe's regime. They see this and I often say to Cassie when we're driving to school, "Listen to the news love," and I put the news on the radio, because I want to be aware of what else is happening. And she'll say, "Dad what's that?" And I say, "I'll tell you what's happening there." And I'll say, "So aren't we
- 18:30 lucky that we're here." If she's aware of that then she's going to be a happier person to be knowing that she's living in a great place like this, and it might make them think a little bit before they commit our young people to...they're the next generation. And maybe if there's a way to negotiate peace instead of going in with armed conflict where so many innocent people are dying. I look at Iraq and I think sure, a bad heavy regime,
- 19:00 but gee look at the collateral damage. How many lives are lost. How many innocent lives are lost with conflicts like this, and if we can do it with negotiation, rather than...and it's not always possible. And I don't vilify the Americans for going in there or our Prime Minister for letting us go in there too. I don't knock that at all. I think decisions were made on the merits that they were made on.
- 19:30 I'm not a fence sitter either, but I do think wouldn't it be wonderful if we could negotiate our way into peace, like we are doing with North Korea and stuff. Say, hey look guys. Let's talk about this. You don't want this and nor do we. There's a way round this. So if we can do this then maybe these kids get to understand it. It's a tough one though isn't it.
- 20:00 **You said something before about...I'm sorry, I just lost my train of thought...about the fact that when you were in the navy you just had enough of the things you had seen on the Frank E Evans and everything else. And your philosophy was that war will continue and will always be there. But obviously you're against it?**

Yeah, I don't ...

- 20:30 it's not a matter of condoning it. It's not a matter of vilifying those people who send us in either. Every conflict has its own reasons why it escalates into war or peace, or whatever. For the six and a half, seven years that I as in the navy, I think it was six and a half, I'll check it...it felt like 20. I saw a lot of things
- 21:00 and as I say...a lot of major things, and it was fairly intense. And I thought oh, I need another seven years of that like buggery. And I said I had a lot of my mates who were in the navy and had 25 years of beautiful peace and good times, and still did a great job patrolling and doing all that stuff, but weren't involved in any of those areas. But I had had enough. I sort of thought okay, I've done enough. I've seen enough. I've been
- 21:30 around the world. I've seen enough. I wasn't using the navy. I gave it my best shot. I did my job and I felt sure that the recruits that I sent to sea after their training, went to sea armed with good knowledge. They knew what they were doing and I had given that knowledge. So I felt that I had paid my dues. Now I needed to move on. I felt that I needed to move on with my life, and my life now would need to be pushed...I didn't feel that I needed to be an admiral any more.
- 22:00 So I moved out.

Col, do you belong to any Vietnam Veterans Associations?

Vietnam Veterans Federation. I've done charity work for the vets. In fact next month I'm doing a charity night for the vets to raise money. I raise money also for the Veterans Association in Melbourne. I've done it in every state. I've done it in Tasmania.

- 22:30 I appeared on the Long Tan Reunion. I'll always stand up for the boys and I understand where they're coming from...especially when they're helping charities themselves. The Half Way House in Melbourne, I did a night for that. Yeah, I'll always do something for the boys
- 23:00 because I feel that there's a lot of guys out there who really did get affected badly by that war...and every war. Gee if you go back to Gallipoli...you want to read A Fortunate Life by A.B. Facey.

I have, it's fantastic.

Have you read that...by A.B. Facey?

And he feels he had a fortunate life!

And he said...how good a man is that. I met his grandson. I'll tell you a quick story.

Yeah do.

I read the Australian book by AB. Facey, A Fortunate Life,

- 23:30 and it was so inspiring for me to read that book, and here's a man who went through so much trauma and so much heartache and hardship in his life, and ended up in Gallipoli and shot, and came back. And one of the...and I've got a beautiful story to tell you...one of the incidents in the book was where he actually met his wife. His wife had actually sent some socks over to Gallipoli, and a soldier picked them up who actually happened to be this guy A.B. Facey.
- 24:00 So Albert Facey picked up the socks and wore them. When he came home...when he was repatriated after he had been wounded, he was at a bus stop in Perth. He and his mate had a day off out of the hospital. They had a day out, and he had these socks on and a girl came up and said, "Hello," and said "oh you've been to Gallipoli." And she said, "I sent some socks over to Gallipoli," and he said, "These ones?" And he married her. Sixty years they were married. It was a wonderful story. Well many years later,
- 24:30 I had read this book and I had met his grandson over in Wickham in Perth. I was doing a concert. And these guys...as I went out to this bush area, one of the guys said, "Col I bet you don't know where you are?" I said, "Yes I do, in fact I know all about this place. I read a book once and it was called," 'A Funny Way...' 'A Funny Way to Make a Living', that's my book. "It was called A Fortunate Life," and I said, "This was one of the areas where they settled
- 25:00 those soldiers. And there's a book...you should read this book, 'A Fortunate Life'. It's written by a man named A.B. Facey." And this guy looked at me and said, "I'm his grandson." And I met his grandson and his grandson owned the rights to the book, and made the movie and went to Gallipoli, and we became great mates. Anyway, I was talking to...this has got nothing to do with it, but I was at a barbeque, and a mate of mine and his wife had broken up, and they said to...and they had paired off with
- 25:30 different people. They said to Karen and I, "Would we come to the barbeque?" Because his children were coming to the barbeque, and his father was coming to the barbeque, and her children were coming to the barbeque, and they wanted a buffer zone because the father wasn't real happy that the son had moved on. And his name was Frank, and I liked old Frank because he was an old digger and he fought in New Guinea
- 26:00 against the Japanese when he was a young man. So I sat down with old Frank and kept his mind off the family problems, and I said to Frank, "How you been old mate?" And he said, "Yeah, good Col." And he always talked to me because he knew I was military, and he was military. And I said, "Gee I've just read a bloody good book by A.B. Facey, called A Fortunate Life." And I said, "Gee there was a good coincidence in it," and I told him about the sock coincidence, and he said, "Well I'll tell you another coincidence." He said to me...and this is a true story.
- 26:30 So he said, "I'll tell you another coincidence." He said, "I went to New Guinea with two other blokes," and he said, "we made a pact if any of us got hurt, the others would look after the family of the other one. And one of the bloke's we were with was 24 years old and had just got married. And he had two little children, and he had a little girl and a little boy."
- 27:00 And he said, "He was machine gunned in half in front of us. And my mate Doug went back and married her and brought those kids up," and Karen and I looked at each other, and said, "Do you want to talk to that little girl?" And he looked at me and I said, "Because that little girl is my sister-in-law." I've heard that story before and the guy that married her is Doug Hocking, and that's Pa. So
- 27:30 I ...this man, a 78 year old man, he couldn't believe it. So I rang Shirley up who was 60 then, and I said, "Shirley, I'm sitting with Frank who was with your biological Dad when he got killed." And she said, "Who? Frank, the Frank in the story?" And I said, "Yes," and I put them together, and Doug had just left her place. They hadn't seen each other for 50 years. I connected them up the next day. They spoke for two hours, and the old bloke
- 28:00 flew down to Melbourne and spent two weeks with Doug, then Doug came up, flew, and spent two weeks with him, and they came down to my boat when I was working on the wharf and they said, "You're the bugger that got us together again." Isn't that a beautiful story.

You've given me goose bumps.

Now, I want you to listen to this because when you go away from here I'm going to give you a tape. On the tape is a video clip I made for the blokes with PTSD, and it's called 'What Have you Done for Australia?' I might show it to you because I want to show you something.

- 28:30 On that you'll see three blokes marching to war. On the end of the tape is my brother, a photo of my brother squatting down near a tunnel, a Vietnamese tunnel. That's my brother, and I wanted to use one of his photos in it. At the front of it. I needed some old footage, army footage and they had a Movietone piece, and it's these blokes marching to war. The three blokes who are marching to war are Frank, Doug and this other guy.

29:00 The father. Now when I finished the film clip, I sent it to my brother and said, "I've just finished this film clip. I said, "I know you're going to like it mate and I did it for the boys,"...and I did, 'What Have You Done For Australia?' And he rang me back and he said, "Col, you won't believe this, but Shirley's sitting here crying because I'm in the film clip at one end and her father's in the front of the film clip." Oh!! It's weird.

29:30 I'll show you this film clip. I'll show you before you leave.

Oh do. That's when you believe that nothing is circumstantial. That...

I couldn't believe this so I've got this film clip, and when you see these blokes marching. The three blokes, and one of them is my brother's father-in-law, one of them is Shirley's biological father, and then there's old Frank and then down the other end of the thing is 50 years later, my brother. And that's

30:00 an unbelievable story, and I've got the local Bulletin paper and they took photos of the old guys, and I've got the film clip of them...two old blokes.

Fantastic. Well I've only got one more question for you. And that is, you seem to have kept your work and your family quite separate, did Karen or the girls ever come to any of your shows?

Oh yes. They love it. My daughters...if I do Twin Towns [club, Tweed Heads]

30:30 or anything, I've got to stop because I'm giving away too many free tickets to their friends...because all their friends relate, and they're pretty proud of what I do, and they laugh. Karen comes along and she's seen it a million times and she still enjoys it. And a lot of our friends come, but then I walk away from it and then I'm Dad again.

And what about Cassie, or is she too little?

Oh no, Cassie...I took her to the last...the last concert at Twin Towns that I did. I took her on stage and I said, "Do you want to have a talk into the mic?"

31:00 So she thought that was great and she sat in the audience and she said, "I can't believe that's you up there Dad." It's full on.

But do you swear and all that?

Oh yeah, I do all that. I say poo and all that. Yeah they're quite used to me performing, and they get a buzz out of it. I'm a bit outrageous and when you listen to the albums and you see the videos you'll see how

31:30 outrageous I am. When I'm off stage I'm not like that. But I always say it's like orange juice. When it's on stage it's concentrated, and when it's off it's just watered down.

Well you've been an absolute gem today. Thank you very much for all your time and energy.

Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS