Australians at War Film Archive

John O'Callaghan (Irish) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:37 **The overview that we talked about, just take us through from the beginning.**

Right, I was born in Cork in Ireland in 1946. My family moved to England for about 12 months or so in about ’49, and then in

01:00 1950 they immigrated to Australia. We lived in Victoria, I was brought up primarily around Gippsland. My father went into share farming and we moved around Gippsland working on different farms and properties around the place. When I was about 14 we moved to Melbourne and lived at Hampton. I basically went to school at

01:30 Williamstown High and then later on when I left school I joined the navy pretty much and did nine years in the navy. Did my initial training at HMAS Cerberus, down outside Melbourne. Went from there, my first ship was the HMAS Melbourne which was in those days an aircraft carrier. I did twelve months on her. I was on her in ’60, I joined the navy in ’63 and I was on her from the end of

02:00 ’63 to the end of ’64. I was on her when she collided with HMAS Voyager. After that I went back to Flinders, Cerberus for my training as a stoker and on completion of my course here I went to HMAS Sydney which was an ex-carrier they’d converted to a troop transport. I was on her for the end of ’64 to the end of ’65. She was involved in those days in the

02:30 initial troops, transport of troops to Vietnam. Took the army, used to take the army up from Sydney up to drop them off at Vung Tau, off South Vietnam. After 12 months on her I was put on standby to go to the States to, as commissioning crew for HMAS Hobart. I went to the states for nearly 11 months. We went to, I started off in Newport in Rhode Island, commissioned the ship in Boston,

03:00 then we went down through the east coast to, operated out of Boston for a while, then down to Norfolk in Virginia, then down to Jacksonville in Florida, then down through the Panama Canal and went through the various schools up on the west coast at San Diego, San Francisco, Long Beach, up to Seattle and then up to Vancouver and Canada. All the time we were doing training and what have you for the ship, work up for the ship. After nearly 12 months over there we came back to

03:30 Australia which brought us back towards the end of 1966, and then the government in their wisdom decided that they were going to deploy a destroyer to the 7th Fleet operating in Vietnam. HMAS Hobart was worked up and ready to go. The HMAS Perth, which was the ship that preceded us, same ship, she was going in for a refit or fitting of her Ikara missile systems, so the government decided they’d send

04:00 HMAS Hobart up ‘cause they had a fully worked up crew. We’d just gone through the American operational readiness group training, the whole bit. We were ready to go so early in ’67 we were deployed to Vietnam, did a 6 month deployment in ’67, came back towards the end of ’67 and went off HMAS Hobart for a while. Went back to Flinders and worked at the Damage Control Fire Fighting School there for a while, then went back to the HMAS Hobart again,

04:30 was on her in ’69, did a work up again and did a deployment to Vietnam again in 1970. Came back from that, I was posted to Canberra as Chief of Naval Staff’s driver, on his staff there. I did a period on that job and then I went to HMAS Harman, which is a shore base outside Canberra working in the transport section there. I was the transport Petty Officer for my final

05:00 12 months in the navy and I got out in ’72. Left, decided to come to Queensland when I left the navy. We moved to Queensland, I, we lived in Springwood. I worked in a couple of jobs with the Department of Harbours and Marine and boating work and things like that, and then I was employed by State Emergency Service in liaison maintenance training work

05:30 later on. I stayed with them for 20, 28 years all up. I did 20 years in Brisbane and then came up here as District Manager, up to Bundaberg in 1991 and I was District Manager until about January of this year when I retired. These days I live a relatively gentle life. I have some involvement with Legacy in Bundaberg. I do volunteer work with the Turtle Rookery

06:00 at Monrepo in helping look after the turtles and do some volunteer work with the RSPCA [Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals] helping out with the animals out there, and that in a nutshell is my life.

Excellent, very well done. Now that we've reached there we'll go right back to the beginning. What are your, do you have memories of those early post-war days in Ireland?

Not really. I have some very vague,

06:30 I don't know whether they're memories or just imaginings I suppose, of bomb-sites in London. I assume they were in London. I think I was probably a bit too young to remember anything actually in Ireland but I certainly remember as a young kid of probably about four just before, obviously before we came out to Australia, playing in what I imagined had been a bomb site a long long time ago. It's pretty hard to say whether it was or wasn't or just

07:00 a kid's imaginings, but I do remember playing around that area. I have memories of the ship coming out. Came out on the SS Sommersetshire which was a I believe World War II troop transport converted to immigrant. We were £10 tourists coming to Australia.

What's a £10 tourist?

Well basically the Government had a policy in place in those days where people immigrating primarily from Europe, mainly from

07:30 UK and Ireland, came out. They paid £10 which went towards their passage and basically it was, the rest of the cost was borne by the Government as a means of encouraging immigration. So I suppose one of the colloquial terms of the time was the £10 tourist. So my family came to Australia.

Do you know anything about your dad's reasons for deciding to come to Australia?

Not really. I have been back to Ireland and spoken to

08:00 my relatives there and I think Ireland in those days was a very poor country. In fact it was one of the poorest in Europe outside of probably Portugal or somewhere like that, and having gone back to Cork and seen my family and being shown basically where my parents lived and where we lived prior to immigrating I can well imagine it was a fairly poor place with limited opportunities

08:30 and there was a lot of the population probably over a period of 150 odd years in Ireland had basically populated the world. We'd sent people to, vast numbers to England, to Canada, United States, Australia was another popular spot. So a lot of people basically came out of Ireland because I suppose because of poverty or lack of opportunity. Now I think in the last 20 years or so it's probably turned itself around a lot, but certainly up until the 1960s

09:00 I'd say it was, there were just very limited opportunities in Ireland. As a result a lot of people tended to immigrate.

And had your father had an involvement in the Second World War?

Not directly. He was, he served in the Irish Army. Ireland wasn't actually directly involved in the war but he served in the Irish Army but he, to the best of my knowledge he had no operational direct involvement. He just served in the army.

Would he tell you

09:30 **anything about his time in the army?**

No, he very rarely spoke about anything to do with his previous life.

And you mentioned that you had memories of coming over on the ship. What do you remember?

Basically as a young kid I used, I remember sort of being, they used to put us in the cabins, they used to put us in bunks and they had these nets around so kids couldn't fall out when the ship rocked and rolled or

10:00 so you couldn't escape. I have memories of being in that and sort of walking around the deck and wandering around the ship. It all, you know, it all seems like something very surreal or probably wild imaginings as to what it was, but I certainly have those sorts of memories of being around the ship with lots of people and moving around up and down stairs and stairwells and looking at the water and that, and that's pretty much my memories of the ship itself.

10:30 **Do you think that this time on the ship may have contributed to you joining the navy in later life?**

I don't know. I always had an interest in, or developed an interest in the military, you know, army, navy, air force and maybe it had something to do with my ultimately deciding to join the navy but certainly I grew up with I suppose as a young Aussie

11:00 with the Anzac tradition and all that sort of thing and I really was attracted to a life in the military.

Do you have any memories of I guess what your impressions of Australia, what your expectations were? Had your parents told you anything about what Australia was going to be like?

No. I was probably too young to understand that. My earliest memories I suppose of Australia were

11:30 helping out on the farm. You know, we were on various farms and rural pursuits and those sorts of things and I used to get quite often involved in looking after lambs, looking after pigs and sheep and helping with milking cows and cleaning things like pig sties and all those sorts of usual, going out and collecting WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK , the eggs from the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and all that sort of things, all those sorts of rural type things and my, we tended to be a fairly nomadic family

12:00 and we tended to move from place to place.

And how did this, your father was on a share farm?

He was a sharefarmer, basically he, the basic arrangement for most of it was he worked on the farm. He did most, for want of a better term, most of the farm work and a bit of the management and that sort of thing for a share of the profits from the farm. Someone else actually owned the farm, but he sort of looked after the day to day running of the farm

12:30 based on a percentage of the profits off the farm and that was a fairly common way of rural working in those days. I assume it may still even go on. I'm a long way from rural these days.

And being, like you said the £10 tourist, was there ever any sort of, did any kids at school or anything give you a hard time?

13:00 No, not really. I, there was a time, for a time in between farms my father worked for Australian Paper Mills at Derham's Hill outside Morwell in the Latrobe Valley in Victoria, and I think he was only there for a short time but we lived in a place called Derham's Hill which no longer exists. It was I suppose in those days a sort of a company town. The Australian Paper Mills built the town, they provided accommodation for all of their employees.

13:30 Now a lot of their employees in those days were immigrants who'd come from Europe. Now this is the late 1940s, early 1950s and a lot of people were people who were refugees and displaced persons from World War II and the town itself was really full of immigrants. There were Irishman, there were Englishmen, there were Scots, there were Poles, there were Russians,

14:00 there were basically everybody from everywhere in Europe lived there, and we used to have I think a lot of fairly troubled people from World War II living there and it was a fairly wild old town at times and they used to have a lot of, what would be politely called these days "domestics" which were fairly serious domestics in that area, and it was really a sort of a mix mash, mish mash of all these people from all over the place

14:30 and it was fairly interesting.

How did this affect you as a kid sort of?

Well I suppose there was a certain amount of ethnic divide because you had people who might come, they might be Balts or Russians or German or Italian or whatever and they often had poor English skills and they tended to stick together so you'd often get the English people, English speaking

15:00 people would tend to be one group and then the Russians or Poles would be another group, and the Italians, but generally speaking they got on across each other's different groups but they did, or certainly had the sort of little group divides and that sort of thing and I suppose for many years it took a long time for people to sort of come together. Now that I think has been the history of Australia for forever and a day with each wave of immigrants have brought their own culture

15:30 and their own way of doing things and over the years I think we've sort of melted it altogether.

And what did your parents maintain within family life of I guess a sense of Irish culture?

Yeah, they by and large they tended to mix with people from the Irish community, Irish English, you know, the UK [United Kingdom] community because in those days not withstanding what might've occurred in Northern Ireland

16:00 over the time, broadly speaking the Anglo Saxon group tended to mix pretty much together, and I suppose in many ways they were a lot closer to the, or a lot more easily integrated into the broader Australian community 'cause at least they had a shared culture, a shared background and common language and a better understanding of each other. Whereas people who came from non-English speaking backgrounds were a little bit behind the eight ball until they at least mastered the understanding of

16:30 the English language and the Australian version thereof.

And were there any particular Irish traditions that you remember as being part of your family life?

Irish traditions I suppose, a lot of, there was quite a bit of drinking. No, there was a lot of sentimental songs and songs about the old IRA [Irish Republican Army] and the English invasion of Ireland and all that sort of thing, you know,

17:00 the traditional lament of people who were a long way from home and not withstanding the fact that they immigrated it was a cultural shock for them to come to a country that was in many ways similar but in other ways so different. Particularly my parents coming largely from a fairly large city like Cork to, and slowly getting into a rural life

17:30 in a lot of cases in fairly small country towns or on relatively isolated country farms.

Did you ever talk to your parents about whether or not they were pleased that they made the decision?

Yeah, generally speaking I think they felt better about it. They certainly felt in many ways they were given more opportunities. They still missed a lot of the old life but by the same token

18:00 they certainly felt they had better opportunities and the certainly felt that myself and my brothers and sister were also in the long run going to be better off in the long run from what they perceived to be life in Ireland.

And how about schooling, your early days at school?

Well I drifted from school to school because we were an itinerant or nomadic family. We sort of moved from

18:30 farm to farm. I'm not totally certain of how many schools I went to but I had a fair percentage of schools around Gippsland that I had some time in. My schooling wasn't ever really too brilliant. I left school at Year 10 and by and large I never really got into tertiary schooling.

19:00 **And how about, what sort of skills do you think it taught you moving schools so much?**

Well it probably didn't help me much in the way, in terms of getting serious about study. It also probably, I tended to be a little bit of a loner in many ways. I think that's probably because of very few, I've had very few sort of friends through my

19:30 life. It's been meet someone, know them for a year, couple of years sort of thing, move on, so on. So it was very, it was very sort of late in life before I could say I sort of settled down into one place. Basically that didn't happen until after I left the navy.

And so socially, that moving around, moving schools and that sort of thing, you'd say that affected you?

Well in some ways it probably made me

20:00 a bit, made me a bit of a loner. Maybe I was already one, who knows? It also probably in some ways made me a bit more independent too, so there were pluses and minuses. I don't think it really encouraged me to become particularly academically inclined. So I've never really been able to stick my head in the books and ever do any real tertiary study and it's just never sort of, it just didn't

20:30 encourage me along that line. Now whether that was my personality anyway or that's just a cop out, who knows?

You mentioned that you can remember things like Anzac Day from your childhood. What are your memories of that?

I always remember the, particularly in country towns, the Anzac Day, the marches, that sort of thing and certainly the schools tended to

21:00 have a lot of emphasis on the Anzac tradition as part of our history, the history of Australia's involvement in World War I and World War II and certainly most of, or much of the school events, places like community halls that you'd go to from school always had plaques of honour to the fallen or those who'd served and those sorts of things, and sort of the lists of the battles, particularly of World War I,

21:30 Somme, Ypres, Menin Gate, all those sorts of evocative things from World War I. Obviously creeping into that was things from the Second World War, Tobruk and Bardia and New Guinea and Kokoda and all those sort of things and I think particularly in the 1950s and early '60s it was a large part of the Australian ethos. For a while I think it went a bit dormant after the Vietnam War and probably

22:00 for 10 or 15 years it might've been sort of not fashionable to be, to look back on Anzac but I think over the last 10 years of so it's started to become much more accepted as a genuine part of our history.

What sort of things, I guess in terms of when you were at school or at least early school, it was still fairly, World War II wasn't that far away. What sort of things would you learn about Australia's involvement in World War II?

22:30 I suppose the spirit of sacrifice, you know, that was demonstrated by, once again the emphasis was primarily I think, my under, or my memory of the emphasis was primarily on things like the battles of the war, the land battles and that sort of thing. But certainly the sacrifice, the mateship, all those sorts of things were very, I think very heavily imbued in I suppose the culture of the country in that

23:00 we were a young country, we were looking at pioneers who in those days went out and cleared the land and created modern Australia and a large part of that modern pioneering thing was the mateship and the adventure of the diggers going off to the war, World War I and World War II. Later on it wasn't quite as well understood, but Korea, and

23:30 by then and the other wars or involvements in the confrontation in Borneo and that sort of thing, but certainly World War I and World War II were very much the emphasis as being the epitome of what created or a large part of what created modern Australia or the attitudes of modern Australia.

Interesting. As a, I guess a young person growing up around that area at the time, what sort of things

24:00 **were generally done for entertainment and social in that era?**

There was usually, there were usually dances and balls and those sorts of things, community get togethers, sport, go to the football. Being brought up in Victoria obviously a fair emphasis on Aussie Rules. In those days there was a much greater divide between the Aussie Rules states the Rugby League states

24:30 and those sorts of things. Some of the European people tended to have that strange game of soccer they used to play. We could never quite fathom that, but you know, Italians and people from Europe tended to have, that seemed to be their favourite sport. Aussie Rules tended to be the more Anglo sort of activity and in Victoria in those days, probably even more so than now, God knows it's bad enough now, it was very much a religion. Melbourne used to close down on a Saturday

25:00 afternoon. Everybody went to the football and if you weren't at the football you were doing something totally un-Australian or un-Victorian.

What are your memories of moving to Melbourne from more country areas?

We moved, I think I was about probably 13 or 14. Might've been a bit younger. Anyway we moved in, at first it seemed a bit strange because we were living in a sort of suburban house when I was more used to in most cases

25:30 to living in rural areas on farms and that sort of thing. It seemed a bit strange. By then I'd sort of developed an interest in military type stuff and very much my interest was in the military, things like ships. I used to, quite interesting, we lived for a short time at Footscray and I have memories there in those days on the Maribyrnong River there was, and also along the front,

26:00 the foreshore at Williamstown there was a lot of old ships. There was a port for the Maritime Services, I think they called themselves Melbourne Metropolitan Services Board but basically they looked after the port of Melbourne. I used to spend a lot of my time wandering around looking at ships and dredges and climbing over all these old things that were tied up to the wharf and hadn't been used for 50 or 60 years. Most of them have gone to scrap yards by now, but I used to be fascinated by ships and just going around, messing

26:30 around on ships and boats and things.

Tell me a bit more about that fascination, where did it..?

I don't know, it's just, these things just, I suppose the imaginings of seeing the world. In those days it was, I suppose Australia was a little bit insular and most people of my age and generation in those days, very few people really got overseas. You know, it was very, very unusual for someone

27:00 who'd actually been overseas because it was only the start of the introduction of jet air travel. Most overseas trips involved, if you went by air, it was very very expensive and everything. Probably took you a week to get to London anyway. If you went by sea it took six or, six to eight weeks to do that. Therefore it was really the province of the rich or people who were actually going overseas and staying there. It wasn't the sort of, you could jump on a plane and go overseas for

27:30 a month and come back. It was really a big deal and very few people did it. So there was always that sort of fascination with, certainly for me, with travel, and I found these ships I suppose. Most of them were long past ever going overseas and a lot of them never ever went overseas, but for a young guy I suppose, young kid, it was just, you know, this was just fascinating. I used to enjoy just

28:00 mucking around. In those days a lot of them were simply tied up to a wharf, very few fences around them so workplace health and safety didn't come into it and public liability. You wouldn't get anywhere near similar sorts of things these days, but in those days on a weekend you could just wander around the wharf. You'd spend all day and there'd be heaps of kids doing it, wandering out looking inside ships, climbing down into engine rooms and crawling around inside. These days most ship operators would probably have the horrors with the thoughts of people doing what we got away with.

And what, where

28:30 **had your interest in the military really developed from?**

I really don't know. I can only assume that the military, the Anzac thing was such a part of the general communities' attitude. Australia had paid a terrible terrible price and been very very active for a relatively small country in population wise in World War I and World War II and it was such a large part I suppose of the Australian

29:00 community ethos. I think I must have just picked it up through that and I just sort of, sort of came with the drinking water.

And what were your early impressions I guess of what military life would be like as, you know, sort of a 13, 14 year old?

Well, I'd always been an avid book reader. So I had read a lot of history,

29:30 particularly military history. In fact I've still got a mountain of military history books. I suppose I had a boy's own image of what military life would be like, what war would be like. I suppose to a large extent with red coats and up and at 'em boys, all that sort of thing, which all of us I suppose go through in one way or another, and certainly most of the histories, most of the history books of those days was

30:00 very much Australia, Empire, all that sort of thing, rah team, and I suppose that's the image one collects as you go along, and certainly I had a pretty fair understanding of the broad thrust of history, probably a lot of disillusionment to come and reality, a few reality checks along the way, but

30:30 certainly that's the way I suppose I drifted into it.

It's interesting that you mention the Empire there. What would you say at that time Australia's relationship, I guess in terms of your impressions as a young person, to the British Empire was?

I think there was an acceptance of part of British, of being part of the British Commonwealth.

31:00 The old days of the Empire were, I think were being, by and large, disappearing and certainly there was a lot of change coming over Australia. I certainly know from old diggers you spoke to, a lot of them were less than flattering about some of their involvement with the British Empire and its wars and how by and large they adopted the view that Australians and other Commonwealth troops,

31:30 Canadians, Kiwis, all tended to get caught up in these wars for the so called Empire and tended to be the ones who got involved in some of the worse fighting. That can be some, that can be some I suppose disillusionment there or some, I've lost the word.

How about what was almost becoming like a social or economic

32:00 **allegiance to America at the time?**

Well certainly in my formative years before I joined the navy I don't think there was, there was an understanding of, yes, we'd had a lot of American involvement in World War II in Australia. A lot of American troops were here, out troops served with Americans and there was a changing attitude there. The military itself by and large and I certainly

32:30 experienced this when I joined the navy, was in the probably early '60s, early to mid '60s there was a change in attitude probably where we went from very much the attitude we were almost in some ways an extension of the British military to the fact that we were, our focus or our emphasis or our structure was much more leaning towards an American focus and that's particularly relevant

33:00 to the navy because the navy, the Royal Australian Navy from its inception had largely been seen as a branch office for want of a better word of the Royal Navy. The officer training, most of the training was holus bolus just taken straight out of the British way of doing things. In fact there was pretty much an idea that the Australian navy should almost be seen as a seamless part of the Royal Navy. Most of the naval

33:30 officers, certainly the senior people, did most of their advance training and a lot of their service with the Royal Navy and it was only probably after or during World War II that we started to get more involved outside of that, and it was only by probably the mid '60s that a lot of that started to come home with things like we used to traditionally buy British designed ships and that sort of thing. With the purchase of things like the Charles F Adams class which

34:00 was the HMAS Hobart and those sorts of ships, we started to get much more involvement with American, the American way of doing things.

Did this indicate more of an independence for the Australian navy or was it more of a shifting..?

I think it was a step towards independence. It was recognised that I suppose that we didn't really have the capability, dollars, technology and that sort of thing

34:30 to at that stage to support a military industry. We needed a defence force but building our ships, designing our own ships, those sorts of thing economically, it was very hard for us to do it whereas it was much more practical to buy a foreign design particularly if you wanted something that was world, you know, world's best practice or world standard. So whereas before we tended to go by British design,

35:00 British equipment, methodology, the training was by and large very similar or almost an exact copy of the British way of doing it, we started to get American built ships and we started to train with the Americans more and become more familiar with their way of doing things, and I think we've probably, now I haven't been involved with the military for quite some time, but I think we've now sort of got an amalgam of an Australian way of getting the best out

35:30 of American systems but also based on a lot of British traditions and methodology.

Do you think this sort of shifting to America in terms of the navy has also been reflected in some of the political decisions, I mean speaking again from a naval point of view at the time?

I think politics would drive the whole thing. The navy though was

36:00 I think, was probably a little bit more traditional, more hide bound than the other services. The army for example had been involved in wars from the Boer War basically on Federation and some of the colonial armies or regiments had served in places like Sudan and what have you, but the navy, Victorian Navy for example sent troops to the Boxer Rebellion in China in

36:30 1900 just about the time of Federation. The navy was very much imbued with the British tradition. The army tended to develop more, although it was still a very heavily British, had a lot of British influence it did create a more Australian identity. Whereas the navy certainly for a long long time, probably till after World War II, tended to be much more tradition bound

37:00 and I think it had a lot to do with, well some of it may have been political, but also the way the navy operated. Things like, God help us, naval officers in their training. They became a cadet at 13, went to the Royal Australian Naval College say at Creswell and then shortly after being commissioned generally ended up going for training in England somewhere. So

37:30 there was this sort of carrying on of the Royal Navy traditions whereas the army tended to have less of that. People joined at an older age. By and large they were able to do more of their training as an Australian army as opposed to a branch office of the British Army. So the navy I think was a bit slower at that.

Do you think this is a negative or a positive?

Well I know there were occasions where it drove me absolutely bloody crazy, but

38:00 I suppose there were good and bad parts to it. I certainly think we probably kept some of the good traditions, but there were some of things that were really, I was always a little bit disappointed in my service, I would have like to have seen Australia, the Australian navy develop more as a, well more positive attitude to its own worth. I think it may have happened since I was in, but the individual, many of the

38:30 individuals in the navy saw themselves differently say from the British navy, but certainly the, I think the overall navy attitude was very much more attuned to the British way of doing things, and I do know even in the time I was in there, there used to be when we came back from the States with the HMAS Hobart, HMAS Perth and HMAS Brisbane, there were some of the old and bold who very much sort of saw us being, oh yeah, here comes the Yank navy, as opposed to

39:00 you know, and there was a certain them and us. Those who'd been involved more heavily with the Yanks than those who'd been involved with the traditional Australian Navy.

What are some of the obvious, are there any standoutish differences that you could say between that American and British naval tradition?

Tradition wise probably not. The traditions

39:30 I think by and large are very much British or Australian versions of the British, but things like methods of training, methods of doing things very much changed because the equipment was American, because the training was American. Things like, you know, things like compartment marking on ships, total different methodology the British way of doing it which

40:00 traditionally the Australian navy did, and we had this American way because these ships were American built, marked that way and we just got used to it. So there was all sorts of little changes along those lines and even I suppose things like uniforms and that. The uniforms stayed pretty much the same. I remember coming back from having just done 12 months or so in the States and wearing an American jacket,

40:30 foul weather jacket 'cause I didn't have an Australian one available, plus the Australian one that they had on issue in those days was pretty hopeless anyway, and being down at Flinders and basically being

frowned at and picked on because, why are you wearing that jacket? ‘Cause it’s the only one I’ve got, and they didn’t, you know, I always sort of remember that sort of thing. So these are the, I know they’re often minor things but they’re the sort of things that often niggle with people too.

41:00 **We’ve just reached the end of that tape. We’ll just [(UNCLEAR)] so we’ll just swap over quickly.**

Tape 2

00:38 **Yeah, you were just telling us off camera another thing that was an American kind of adaptation. Tell us about that?**

Yeah, it was always very interesting that in the early ‘60s that the navy had as part of their clothing scale a style of baseball cap.

01:00 Now the US [United States] navy has almost as a daily item of uniform wore a type of baseball cap. In the early ‘60’s, although we actually had one on the books as being part of our clothing, the navy went out of the way, most of the people in the navy, senior people, went out of their way to have you not wear any form of baseball cap. The usual, why are you wearing that? You look like a Yank, it’s an American

01:30 affectation and so on and so forth, and it’s probably only after the late ‘60s, early ‘70s, probably even into the mid ‘70s that all of a sudden baseball caps became an acceptable form of headdress within the Royal Australian Navy, and these days just about every ship has its own much on very similar lines to the US Navy and that’s sort of indicative of a change of culture I suppose. Prior to that, prior to

02:00 the mid ‘60s it was very much, you’ll wear your seaman’s cap, or if you were a petty officer or an officer you wore your peak cap, but that’s something that crept in and yet it was taken, very early in the piece it was seen as being, who are you? What are you, a Yank or something? To becoming every ship’s now got its own baseball cap.

Would the people who would hassle someone about wearing a baseball cap, would they be just the peers or would they be commanders?

No, by and large they were

02:30 the senior people, might be senior officers, might be chiefs or petty officers who basically had long service and came out of I suppose the more British focussed RAN [Royal Australian Navy] to people later on who as they got more exposure, we got more exposure to the US way of doing things and so on and so forth it became more acceptable. So some of the old and bold who may not have been involved in going to the States or been involved in the DDGs [Charles F. Adams Class Destroyers],

03:00 there was a sort of a long transition period where you had those who were almost traditional Royal Australian Navy which came out of the Royal RN [Royal Navy] history to people who were much more I think focused on a different navy or a changed navy.

Just talking about joining up, what age were you when you

17 and six days.

03:30 I, at 16 I tried to join as what was then called a junior recruit which was basically 15 and a half to 16 and a half where you did 12 months training normally at HMAS Lewin which was then in those days over at a shore base over in Perth or near Fremantle. I wasn’t selected for that however as soon as I turned 16, basically before I turned 16 I put the paperwork in and

04:00 I joined, my birthday on the 20th of August and I joined on the 26th of August, so 17 and 6 days.

That’s a pretty young,

Yeah,

young age to

and upon reflection it probably was too young but you can’t tell a 17 year old that.

What was it in you that made you so sure about a career of this sort at that age?

Well I don’t know. I’d

04:30 picked up a bug to join the services early in life, probably the only two I considered, one was obviously the navy was probably my first choice and if I hadn’t got into the navy I probably would have tried the army, but having got into the navy that sort of let that slide for a while. So I joined and, I’ve lost the words.

05:00 **That’s alright. I was going to ask you how your parents felt about this?**

They were generally happy for me to join the Defence Force. I don't think they really thought it through in terms of, hey, is there a war? Are we going to go to war? The likelihood of war I suppose didn't really play that much in their consideration. They just saw

05:30 it as a, I suppose a career step or I was obviously not all that particularly academically inclined and this seemed to be my main interest and so they assumed it would be something I would do and grow out of.

Were they concerned about you being so young?

I don't think they were significantly so. They certainly, obviously being at that age they had to sign an agreement that,

06:00 with the navy that I could join and it was certainly, they certainly signed it. I think they were generally, maybe if I'd been going into the army it might've been different because in those days obviously the army was involved in fairly heavily involved in operations in Borneo and the Indonesian Confrontation in Malaya [East Malaysia, Borneo, Sarawak], and it's only later that the, when the Vietnam War became

06:30 the main focus of the Defence Force and so the navy got involved. By then I was already in the service anyway so I don't think there was that much concern.

So tell us about receiving the news that it was all accepted and how you felt?

Well initially when I tried to join as a junior recruit I was somewhat disappointed. I went and spoke to the recruiting people and the recruiting office in Melbourne and they said, well

07:00 OK, you haven't been accepted for this. You can when you're 17 join with general entry recruit which is only six, eight months away. They gave me some advice on, you know, so I did the paperwork. When they processed it and I got word that I'd been accepted. In those days you joined the navy for a minimum of nine years, nine or 12 years. I wanted to join for 12.

07:30 I remember going into the recruiting office and saying to the chief, where do I sign? And the chief said, "how long are you signing for?" And I said, "12 years." He said, "take some advice, sign for nine." It's not going to make any difference to your career in the navy. If you want to stay in after nine years you can simply sign on again but there are a lot of people in the navy who regretted 12 years 'cause it was just too long

08:00 at an early age. So I took the chief's advice and I signed for nine.

Was that unusual to give that advice?

I don't think so. I think a lot of the people involved in recruiting understood. There were a lot of people who were happy in the navy, there were a lot of people who probably weren't as happy and 12 years for someone that, you know, early teens, late teens sort of thing, was probably a big bite to ask them

08:30 and I think more than one chief was not above sort of giving someone some fatherly advice.

And take us through what happened next?

Right, well I joined in Melbourne. In those days the recruiting office was at St Kilda near St Kilda Junction. Basically I received a letter saying you're in. They gave me the date of joining. I had to report to the recruiting office bringing a suitcase

09:00 and change of clothing, that sort of thing, enough clothing for three or four days they said. I turned up at the recruiting office at the prescribed time. We were put on buses and transferred down to Flinders or HMAS Cerberus at the recruit school where we joined up with other people from interstate. The intake from memory I think was probably around about

09:30 60 people all up. I remember arriving there, it was a rainy day, sort of standing there outside the regulating office with the recruit school with all these people with gold braid and chiefs and petty officers and what have you, all lining us up and organising us and getting us sorted out and thinking it was a whole new world.

10:00 **What's the feeling like as a young bloke being in this situation?**

Well it was a feeling of excitement. You know, here's something I always wanted to do. I knew that I'd have three months in recruit school and then I'd probably go to a ship, and God willing a ship would probably take me all over the world. You never really knew where you could end up. Having been brought up on, you know, the military and the naval history

10:30 I knew of people who sort of travelled all over the world in the navy and I sort of was looking forward to that sort of thing. I realised of course that the first three months was going to be probably reasonably rugged with a lot of new things to learn and a lot of attitudes to be adjusted and I think by and large that acceptance that you just had to get on with it, but certainly looking forward to what the world would bring or what the navy would bring.

Do you

11:00 **remember what they were saying to you at that kind of first line up? What kind of things did they tell you?**

I remember there was a Chief Coxswain. From memory his name was, or his nickname was Flippers because he had the most enormous pair of feet. I think he must've had about size 14 shores or something like that, but anyway this chief coxswain standing there with this clue board and he's got various leading

11:30 hands and able seamen to sort of back him up and he's sort of giving the initial welcome to the navy lads, you know, and basically saying, you know, you'll be given more details on where you go from here later on but these are the initial arrangements. You'll be going over to that block over there, which in those days was a place called Waller Block 'cause we were all Waller Division, and basically being given the outline of the next couple of days.

12:00 You'll be given haircuts, you'll be issued with your clothing, you'll be taught how to wear it, how to look after it, how to maintain it. From now on you are here, there will be no leave for the first six weeks and then at the end of six weeks if your progress is satisfactory leave will be considered. Leave is a privilege, not a right and I suppose a little bit like a fatherly version of the old sergeant major in something like the old TV show It Ain't Half Hot Mum. You know, lovely

12:30 boy, and all that sort of thing, and I suppose all those sorts of things you read about in the movies, here he is, or in books or in movies, here he is and he's, righto lads, this is the way we're gonna do things for the next few days, then there'll be more to follow.

Do you reckon they copy that image themselves?

A lot of them. You could see almost a stereotypical this is the way it's done, you know.

13:00 They had very similar delivery, obviously there was their own personality in a lot of it, but there was also a sort of a stereotypical this is the way a chief petty officer deals with a bunch of recruits, righto, righto lads, get fell in three deep on the roadway. All that sort of thing. Now from here on out you'll get breakfast at 6.30, you will get at 10.00 o'clock you will

13:30 receive haircuts, you'll be at the clothing store for issue of your kit at 13.00. For those of you who can't, who don't know what 13.00 is Mickey Mouse's hands will be pointing to, all that sort of thing.

And take us through those first few hours following that initial conversation?

Well initially we, basically we got off the bus, suitcase, put the suitcase down here, get fell in.

14:00 Righto, the chief will give you the initial burst. Righto, over to the building over there, over to a classroom where we were sat down. Our divisional officer who was to be basically the officer in charge of our division while we were in recruit school then came in and gave us a broader outline of where we went from here, you know, the training program over the next three months and then the rules, you know, thou shalt not walk around

14:30 with your hands in your pockets. If you walk around, if you're moving around the depot at any time you will march or preferably you will double. You will not leave your class unless you are given approval. You've got to have a chit if you leave your class because anybody walking around the depot with their hands in their pockets not doubling will be questioned. All those sorts of things. The rules, you know, you will clean

15:00 yourself, you know, you will shave daily, you will bathe daily, you know, and then that's the outline of the basic rules. Then you went on and started to get into the practical stuff. Up to the barber, get a haircut. Initial learning how to march, you know, step off on the left foot, you know, all this sort of thing. Get a haircut, righto, this is your cabin, this is your bunk, this is where you will live, this is how you will make your bed.

15:30 Righto, off to the clothing store, here's one kit bag, boom, now stuff all this gear in it, two caps, three sets of eights working dress, three sets of blues, two sets of boots, one set of shoes, so on and so on. Righto, righto, down to the marking hut which is basically where you went down and every item of clothing had to be marked just so with your name, and hard to be marked just so just there, that way, and God help you if you're seen

16:00 with anyone else's clothing or with clothing with someone else's name on it. Having done that, righto, up to your cabin. Righto, this is how your clothing will be folded, this is how it will be stowed in your locker. You'll be inspected every night and if your locker is not laid out that way you will be in trouble. There will be a kit muster each week and your clothing is to be cleaned, ironed and pressed in the prescribed manner, laid out in the prescribed manner. God help you if it isn't, and then

16:30 from there it went on to, in the initial training was largely things like drill and discipline. You spent a lot of time on the parade ground, how to march. Once you got, started to get how to salute, how to do this, that and the other. Once you started to get that under your belt, then OK, how to do it with a rifle, how to do it under arms. Things like history and tradition of the navy, you know, this is the RAN, this is the tradition that came out of the Royal Navy. These are, we do this this way, you know, how

17:00 a ship is organised, the divisions and what branches there are in the navy and so on and so forth. What

jobs are done by different people. Who you salute, who you don't salute, circumstances for all sorts of ceremonial occasions, all those sorts of day to day routine things.

How did you feel about all these rules and regulations and discipline suddenly?

By and large they were water off a duck's back. It was certainly, I found that it's pretty much what I expected.

17:30 There were, I know of a few people who joined in my intake who very quickly decided it wasn't their scene. The unfortunate part about it in those days, having signed on the dotted line it was very very hard to get out again. In fact a mate of mine in my cabin, after about six weeks he decided to, that he wanted a discharge. He put in for a discharge and they refused him and he appealed,

18:00 and he was still going through the appeal process later on when we went to ships. He went to HMAS Voyager and he died on the HMAS Voyager.

That's a pretty sad story.

Yeah, it was the way it was. Later on in my enlistment, a few years later they changed the rules and you could give 18 months notice and there was a bit more leniency about things, but certainly,

18:30 and this is the sort of transition I suppose I was talking to you about before, you very much, there was, it was very much you signed for nine years, you're here for nine years. Now you better come up with a damn good reason if you want out, and they really weren't all that flexible. Well that certainly, my experience was they weren't all that flexible. As I said this guy, he, when we finished recruit

19:00 school, we did three moths at recruit school, went to our first ships, about half of my intake went to the Melbourne and the other half went to Voyager and about three months later we ran over Voyager and about 82 guys died on board Voyager and this guy was one of them. Always remember the poor bugger.

How could you get out then?

19:30 Basically the main, the main ways would be I suppose do something which was basically criminal or you really had to come up with some good personal family reason why you needed to get out, but in all probability you wouldn't have got in in the first place unless you came up with a reason that had arisen since you

20:00 joined, you wouldn't, you shouldn't have been in in the first place was the attitude, and very much there was a, unless they came up with either a, do something criminal or some medical condition that they were unaware of at the time of enlistment or something of that nature, it was very very difficult to get out or even if you could get out it was a very lengthy process.

Would this encourage some to

20:30 **commit a criminal act?**

I don't think so. I don't think many people were out there to commit criminal acts but certainly some people basically went on I suppose a course of civil disobedience in the hope that in the long run the navy would get sick of them and throw them out, and that did work on some people but it still was the sort of thing that could take months. It's not you could sort of say, well I went out next week. It just wasn't

21:00 they way things were done. Basically if you wanted out next week you better come up with some medical reason that says you shouldn't have been there in the first place or come up with something the navy didn't know about before you joined?

What about going AWL [Absent Without Leave]?

AWL was, you know, the navy basically called it going adrift or jumping ship. It's still a long process, you could disappear. The civvy,

21:30 civilian police would come looking for you. The shore patrol would come look for you, the navy would look for you, the military police would come look for you and if you could keep in front of them, but basically they'd get you back. You'd probably do time in one military corrective establishment at Holsworthy for 60 or 60 days and then go back to, you'd probably have to do it repeatedly and that could take you a couple of years before the finally said, alright, you win.

You mentioned a couple of things earlier.

22:00 **Hands in the pocket, what's wrong with putting your hands in your pocket?**

It was considered somewhat untidy and un-seaman like and all the rest of it. No, basically when you moved around the depot they wanted you to march. If you part of a form group you marched. If you were on your own unless you had a good medical reason not to, you basically doubled. In most cases even as a from group as a recruit you doubled everywhere,

22:30 and, but for example if you had to go, leave your class somewhere and go to see somebody, you might have a medical appointment, whatever, unless you had medical grounds for not doubling, in other words

saying, you can't run at the moment, you were required to double if you were on your own, and if there was more than three of you basically someone had to be in charge and go through a formal

23:00 moving as a group in a formal way. If you were moving as an individual even if you had medical grounds you had to basically to march, stand upright and swing your arms and all that sort of thing and that was just a requirement, anyone moving around the depot. That applied even to people who were no longer recruits in those days. It was very much you move around the depot, you move around smartly, you don't make the place look untidy.

And the haircut, what kind of haircut did you

23:30 **receive?**

Well it wasn't the, it was a short back and sides. It certainly wasn't the bowler zero that you get these days. There was none of the sort of chop it all off, but certainly it was short back and sides and it was meant to be kept tidy at all times. It wasn't a significant hacking off of hair. Though if you, though I suppose I was a little bit before the long Beatle haircuts of the day so it didn't, but certainly people who came in with Beatle type

24:00 haircuts shortly thereafter certainly felt as though they'd lost every blade of hair on the head.

So take us through those first few weeks after you joined up. Like, you talked us through the first day, take us through what kind of things you were learning after that first day.

OK, you started off basically, you started off with individual training, which is how you fit into

24:30 the broader navy. Now, and they didn't make too many assumptions. They had people who joined from a wide range of backgrounds, people who'd come off farms, people who'd come from cities, people who were used to living in large homogenous groups and people who lived very individually. There were no particular assumptions made about you knew how to wash your clothes, you knew, basically you were told the rules are, you will shower

25:00 daily, you will wear, basically they took you up to a cabin, here's the clothing you've got, and a full set of blues or whatever. This is how you wear them and basically take everything off, now this is how you put it on. Now given the blues in those days were a fairly complex or a strange thing to put on for most people who hadn't been in the navy, it did take a little bit of learning but basically how to put them on,

25:30 the circumstances, and given that there are probably 20 different orders of dress from working dress, right through to ceremonial stuff and variations thereof, the circumstances under which different orders of dress are worn. So this is basically telling you this is the clothing you've got, this is how it's worn. You'll polish your shoes everyday and I mean basically spit polish, shoes or boots. You will, your clothing will be

26:00 clean, it will be pressed, it will be ironed this, creases here. This is worn like that, this goes with this, this goes with that. The cap is worn this way, you know, flat on the head, the brim two fingers above the eyebrow, none of this cap sitting on the back of your head of cap sitting at a right angle or whatever way you fancy you want to wear it. This is how it's worn. So there was a lot of that initially, very much how to dress, how to make your bed, even things like how to wash

26:30 your clothing. The assumption was made that a lot of people, mummy did all the clothing, washing before they came, now this is how you wash clothing, this is how you iron clothing. This is, things like, this is a white front, they are ironed this way, creases this way that far apart and so on. The bell bottom trousers in those days, seven creases. The way you iron them inside out and how you actually, and you had them the correct distances apart, the correct number of creases.

27:00 This is how you roll the whole thing up and this is how it fits into your locker and it will be on that shelf and your pocket knife will be there and your boots will be there and your cleaning kit will be there and your toothbrush will be somewhere else. This is how you look after your cabin, this is, there's your bunk, this is how it will be made, how the thing, how the counterpane is turned down, how the sheets are turned down and those sorts of things. How the floor is to be kept clean. The windows, on a sunny

27:30 day the windows are to be opened but you don't just open the window, it will be open this far at the bottom and this far at the top. They had double sliding windows. This is how it's done, so every window was open the same space. You didn't have one window wide open and the other window half closed or, everything, the floor of your cabin, the deck of your cabin had to be polished. It was polished each day.

28:00 You had a full inspection by your divisional officer every Friday and depending on how you went with that determined whether, certainly after your first six weeks, determined whether you got ashore or not, got on leave or not, and if you didn't clean it, if it wasn't up to standard you did it again, and you had rounds every night. The duty officer would come through and if your cabin wasn't clean enough, you'd have to stand by your bed

28:30 and if your cabin wasn't clean enough you'd do it again and someone would come back in a couple of hours time and inspect it again, and they did it until you got it right.

So what did you think of all these kind of little rules?

Well by and large I accepted them. This was the navy, it wasn't daddy's yacht, and like everybody there were times it annoyed you, but by and large I think I certainly accepted most of it

29:00 and I think the other guys did. Some people found it just rankled too much and didn't like it. In fact to give you an example, your initial, you had three months in the recruit school, your initial six weeks there was no leave. You weren't allowed outside the recruit school area except as a part of a class somewhere or group going somewhere. You certainly weren't allowed out of the base and you were not allowed to go ashore until such time that they were satisfied that you could dress yourself properly and

29:30 not look like what they called a scran bag which was a heap of junk, and bring discredit upon the navy. So basically in the first six weeks there was no leave. So at the end of six weeks we were granted a weekend leave. Basically in those days, most of the guys in those days didn't have cars. You caught a train from Flinders up to Melbourne, up from the base up to Melbourne every Friday night. Up until

30:00 I suppose the mid '60s the used to have a train, a special naval leave train used to run from HMAS Cerberus up to Flinders Street Station in Melbourne. It used to leave I think about 4.30 or something like that, get you up to Melbourne by about 6.00 and it would be full of sailors all going on leave. My first, my initial leave, because our cabins weren't up to scratch our weekend leave was simply cancelled. So and then you, once the initial six weeks

30:30 was over one half got leave on six weeks and the following weekend the other half got leave. We missed out our first weekend simply because, and we were up all damn night cleaning the cabin to be inspected on Saturday morning instead of being ashore on Friday night and being allowed to come back on Friday, sorry, Sunday evening. So we spent the weekend cleaning our cabin to a satisfactory standard and there went the weekend leave.

How was the cabin feeling about this?

Oh dear, how sad, never

31:00 mind. It was all mind over matter, we don't mind and you don't matter. No, we were, obviously we weren't very happy about it and there was the usual whingeing and bitching but we were still down on our hands and bloody knees scraping all the polish off the deck and starting again.

What was the purpose of some things like seven creases this so far apart?

It was a tradition. The uniform

31:30 itself was designed in such a way that it could be rolled up into a very small bundle and stored in a very small space because on ships generally there is very limited storage space for personal items and the design of the uniforms was such that the whole thing could be folded up into a bundle about that long and about that high, and you could take it off or unroll it and you could put it on and it wouldn't be creased and wrinkled because it all had these pre-set

32:00 creases in it. Allegedly the traditional reason given was seven creases for the seven seas and on the collar you had three white stripes and that was supposed to have been for the three great battles of what's his name, Admiral Nelson's three great battles, Trafalgar, the Nile and Copenhagen and so on and so forth. They usually tried to tie some of these sorts of things into the,

32:30 into some great big airy fairy tradition, but basically the uniform was designed that way. So it could be folded up, rolled up and stored in a minimum space and still be wearable.

Was there something more than traditions they were trying to instil by making you do these things?

They were instilling discipline. Don't argue about it, don't, you know, do what you're told,

33:00 don't argue, accept discipline and even put a certain amount of pressure on people to see if they could cope with pressure. You know, there's no reason for it, it's just the way it is and you've got to learn to cope with that, and I suppose in a war time situation it mightn't, what's happening may not necessarily be to your liking but you're hear and you've got to function and you've got to learn to cope with pressure that in many cases

33:30 would probably be considered unacceptable in outside life, and that's the sort of thing they were trying to instil in you and try to encourage in you, is an acceptance of the vicissitudes of life as being something you've got to rise above and roll with the punches.

So it was a way of reinforcing that commands

It reinforced commands, yes, you know, get something that to most people would appear total,

34:00 get people to do something that to a lot of other people would seem somewhat silly. Why would you worry about that? You know, who cares? But it, obviously it reinforces the navy's command or hold on the individual, but also it encouraged people I think to sort of accept some of the unreasonableness of life and just grow,

34:30 steam through it and a lot of what they gave you was based along those lines. You used to have a lot of ceremonial. Every morning in recruit school they had colours 8.00 o'clock, a formal ceremony, people had to double down to the parade ground, they'd have a formal ceremony of colours. You'd be inspected, people would be on, and everybody, you had to have some 300 people or more

35:00 on the parade ground ready at 8.00 o'clock when the formal ceremony of colours occurred ready to go. So people simply were encouraged to think as part of a group and feel that if they weren't performing they were letting the group down. So it was inculcating that in you too, being part of a group. Hey, my performance or the performance of the group is also dependent

35:30 on my performance.

And tell us about some of the specific skills you were learning apart from the discipline?

Well recruit school was largely about learning basic generic skills across the navy. Things like Morse code, things, which was still in vogue in those days, in those days, things like knots, handling small boats,

36:00 marching, use of weapons, rifles and personal weapons, those sort of things. A lot of the skill of understanding of ships' routine, you know, what occurs under certain circumstances. Also tied in with that was some introduction to particular branches of the navy so you had some understanding of what different people did. What the engineers did, what the electricians did, what the seamen did, what the divers

36:30 did, what the gunnery people did. You'd go along, you'd go along say to the gunnery school and they'd take you through, this is a four inch gun and this is how it's loaded, bla bla bla, and they'd take you through the, those sorts of, so that later on because at the end of three months basically you were then given a chance to basically opt for the branch you wanted to go into. Now some people joined the navy with

37:00 the intention of going into a particular branch anyway, but a lot of people just simply joined and had no particular skill or area that they were particularly interested in and it's only at the end of three months they said, the navy would say, righto, what do you want to be? Now you basically, they basically said, you've got three options and where possible depending on the needs of the navy they'd fit you into one of them and also your own capabilities. They would try to give you one of those three options and if all else failed they would find one for you.

37:30 **What were they?**

Oh well, the sorts of things, there was engineering, working in engine rooms and boiler rooms and those sorts of things. Seamen, which had a number of sub categories, they provided people who operated the guns, anti-submarine people, torpedo people, you had electricians, you had signalmen, radio operators, cooks, stewards, survey recorders, clearance divers, all sorts of different trades and people would be taken

38:00 from school to school at Flinders. They'd show you a movie, someone from that particular branch would tell you, this is what we do, and they'd have something that sort of said, you know, for example if you were at the engineering school they would show you these are the sorts of jobs you do in engineering. You run main engines, you run boilers, look after distilling plants to produce water, you ran generators, you did maintenance and repairs and so on and so forth and all those sorts of things. Now the cookery school, they might, you know, this is,

38:30 you know, mass feeding and all that sort of thing. This is what the cooks do and all that sort of thing. Clearance diver, they might show you a film of people swimming around underwater and particularly in those days diving was a relatively unusual thing. Scuba was only just really starting to happen for most of the world. Those sorts of things were relatively rare, little understood by the average bear in the street, and they took you through and from there you got an idea

39:00 of what different branches did and what sort of a field might you be attracted to. Now some people just took whatever they, whatever they wanted, whatever they selected. Other people had, you know, might've had career interests. If you wanted to go into electronics obviously you were attracted to the electronics world and that's what you opted for and God willing that's what they made you, got involved in electronics. Some people thought about, hey if I get a skill, this skill

39:30 here I can use outside the navy in nine years time when I get out. Some people just sort of said, well, I'll take what life offers. So there were all sorts of opportunities.

We're gonna just stop for a bit now because we've come to the end of the tape.

Tape 3

00:37 **So in terms of the sort of the mustering or deciding what branch you went into, did this happen at recruit training?**

Yeah, basically at the end of your three month recruit training you were given the opportunity to nominate for three particular specialisations you might want to go into. In my case I put down for radio

01:00 operator, stoker or engineering mechanic they called them in seamen. I initially was going to be a radio operator but then later they changed it and I ended up becoming a stoker.

Why?

Well funnily enough I ran into a bit of security bureaucracy because I was born in Ireland I wasn't an Australian citizen. Therefore

01:30 they decided I wasn't allowed to become a radio operator. Anyway the funny part of coming out of that was I then had to do a special security check. When they finally decided, part of that security check was I decided to take out Australian citizenship and in fact I got my Australian citizenship certificate while I was in Vietnam 'cause I was on Sydney unloading the troops in Vietnam and the mail came in and there's my Australian citizenship

02:00 certificate. Anyway, but after a long and fairly exhaustive security check they decided I could become a radio operator. By then I'd done my training as a stoker and this had dragged on for over 12 months and I just decided to keep on in the engine room branch.

And what, aside from wanting to be the radio operator, what had attracted you to being a stoker or an engineer?

I thought it

02:30 would probably give me some skills that I could use outside of the navy and it certainly seemed like a job that offered a fairly wide range of activities. Also given of course I had a limited real knowledge as to how some it worked, but I think it seemed to operate, offer a fairly wide range of activities. At the end of the day when I joined the navy I had no particular area I was interested in going,

03:00 particularly wanted to go into. I just wanted to go in the navy and that's where fate decreed.

And in the recruit training did they take you through the basics of the three different branches in terms of giving you an overview of what they might be like?

Yeah. Every branch in the navy, every basic specialisation was explained to you, you were shown what the basics of what the work

03:30 was about. Where possible they got you involved. For example people were given the opportunity to do a bit of diving if they wanted to in the hope that they might decide they wanted to become something like a clearance diver which were basically the specialist underwater divers. You did some gunnery, time at the gunnery school. Everybody had to do basic weapons, you know, rifle, light machine gun and submachine gun, that sort of thing, which was just basic for everybody. See basic

04:00 military skills were still part of it. It was all about learning some very basic military skills, learning how to live and work in a naval environment and in a ship, and any of those skills, if you were something like a boarding party or landing party from a ship you might be required to use weapons now. Most people didn't have a great deal of involvement with it but it was still just considered one of the basic skills in the navy that everybody needed to have.

And during the recruit training did you spend any time

04:30 **at sea?**

Not at sea. We did boat work, you used to do sailing. They had boats down at the inlet where we used to go down and do day, sort of day trips and you get turns on the wheel operating the boat, operating the controls and those sorts of things, learning how to tie knots, how to anchor boats, how to, some basic sailing skills. All very basic background information for anybody

05:00 who I suppose that's going to work in a boat or a ship's environment.

And at the end of the recruit training was there any sort of leaving thing?

There wasn't a formal, there was a final parade and families were invited to come down and we did a big march passed and they had a, you know, you could go and have a couple of beers and all that sort of thing, but it wasn't

05:30 a huge thing but there was a sort of passing out parade. You'd finished your exams and then a big parade and we marched passed and the commodore or whatever took the salute and all that sort of thing and we were basically given a weekend off and came back and then waited for whatever postings, well we already knew what postings we had but basically those of us who had, might have a few days to fill in before going on to wherever we were posted to came back.

How are postings decided?

06:00 Basically on the needs of the navy. Most of the people coming out of recruit school, they had a number

of ships that were sort of designated as being training ships. They were just ordinary operational ships by and large but they were the sort of ships that were not going to be deployed in most cases to a war zone, not that we necessarily had any real wars going at the time, but where people could go and learn

06:30 basic ship living skills and also do some on the job training in whatever their specialised area was going to be. I went to HMAS Melbourne, a large number of people from my intake went to HMAS Melbourne. A lot went to HMAS Voyager and others went to, depending on their specialisation went to other ships. If for example, if you were going to be a survey recorder working in the survey world in most probability you'd go to something like a survey ship, but HMAS Voyager was a destroyer which had a

07:00 trading capability and HMAS Melbourne was an aircraft carrier and a fair number of us went to that.

Was there any sort of like a posting that was particularly coveted, that everyone would be like oh yeah, I'd like to?

Not at that stage. As recruits I think just going to a ship was the big thing and what ship they sort of pulled, pulled your name

07:30 out on was the ship you went to. So I wouldn't say that there was necessarily any ship that you could say was a coveted posting, but I think most people were just glad to be going to a ship at long last, just getting off land.

And what did you do for your final leave weekend?

I went home for the weekend, saw a few people I knew, had a couple of beers and then went back.

And were your parents like

08:00 **accepting of the navy at this stage?**

Oh yeah. They were quite happy with it. They, neither of them knew too much about the navy. They'd never had much exposure to the navy so to them it was probably all very foreign, but I think they were quite happy that I seemed to be settling down into it and I seemed to be getting on with it.

Was there any sort of a change going home in that weekend after having been

08:30 **away and innocent maybe grown up a bit?**

Yeah, it was strange being at home and certainly I was only too happy to go, to continue on in the navy at that stage.

And so tell me about the first sort of like getting to the HMAS Melbourne, the first posting?

Well we were basically put on buses and taken up to HMAS Melbourne. In those days the trains used to operate out

09:00 off Spencer Street Station. We were thrown on the trains overnight, the Spirit of Progress I think it was, and taken up to Sydney. Met by buses at Central Station in Sydney and then taken down to HMAS Melbourne which was alongside at Garden Island. We all had our kit bags and all the paraphernalia of life and we dragged them on board and they had a whole group of the crew there to sort of take us through onto the ship and show us what mess decks we were going to be living in, where out bunks were.

09:30 Generally the structure was each mess deck had a leading seaman who was in charge of that mess deck and himself and a couple of senior able seamen were basically, their job was to get us on board, get us settled in and from there we would then go on and be actually sent onto whatever part of ship we would be working in to do whatever jobs we were going to do for the next 12 months.

10:00 The ship was alongside in Garden Island and stayed there for probably a month before we started to go to sea.

And what are your first impressions of seeing the Melbourne when it was there at Garden Point?

It was fairly old, it was very crowded. We used to live in bunks which were a bit of an improvement on the old hammocks I suppose in some ways,

10:30 but mess decks were very very, well fairly small and they certainly packed everybody in. You could have a mess deck which was probably not much bigger than this room and you'd have 50 people living in there.

When you say living in there,

Everything, basically everything they owned themselves and everything was in there.

What sort of things did you take with you?

Well in those days there was very little in the way of personal equipment. You didn't have, very little

11:00 in the way of personal, civilian clothing because in those days weren't permitted to wear civilian clothing off the ship. Most people didn't have much in the way, they were probably simpler times too. Most of the guys didn't own cars and all that sort of thing. I think there'd be a bit more trauma with possessions these days, but in those days certainly I and most of the blokes I knew, everything you owned basically in the world sort of fitted into a kit bag and you threw it over your shoulder and you walked on board. Now once you got on board you got a locker, which was probably

11:30 about the size of a TV and everything you owned sort of fitted into this locker or you stuck it under your mattress on your bunks, and the bunks were a single mattress about that wide and stacked four or five high in most cases.

Which bunk were you on?

It varied from time to time. Occasionally you got changed around but generally I went for something in the middle. Nothing too high, I used to get a blood nose if I went too high.

12:00 **And what was, you said that people met you to show you which mess deck you were on and stuff. How did they behave towards you?**

Generally they were quite friendly. They, the navy, you know, they had a hierarchy, most of them were petty officers or leading seamen and they were generally friendly but by the same token they were still fairly formal. They basically welcomed you to the ship, showed you where you lived. Once you

12:30 got that squared away, right, this'll be your bunk, this'll be your locker, get all your gear unpacked in there. "Lock that up, OK." Now we'll take you down and we start doing the actual what we call the drafting on the ship which is going around to the various departments on the ship and sort of booking in with them so that people like the pay office knew you were there and the captain's office and if, you know, if for example you were in engineering you'd go to the engineers office so you were booked in there so they knew you were on board and that sort of thing.

13:00 **What's the feeling like of being, like in those first few hours?**

Rather weird because although we'd sort of learnt in recruit school things like how a ship was compartmented and where different compartments were and how to identify your way around a ship, you really weren't all that practised at it. Most ships you get inside, their just like a rabbit warren and unless you know how to read the

13:30 compartment markings, trying to find your way around the ship whether you're going, you know, all you've got is bulkheads and deckheads and ladders up and down and passageways going all over the place and you've got no idea which way is up. To a large extent you wouldn't even know if it was daylight or dark or whatever. So you've got to get used to finding your way around. See, you've got to start getting used to things like what deck am I on, what compartment am I in, what section am in?

14:00 And so on, and by doing that you can work out, someone might say, "Go to the captain's officer, it's on a 6 Papa." Well you've got to work your way from where am I now down to 6 Papa, you know, and by that you can work out where to go from there.

What does that mean?

Well basically using the British system in those days, the ship was divided into sections from A Alpha,

14:30 Bravo and every so often. So if it was, say someone said it was 4 Alpha, that told you it was on 4 deck, Alpha section. If it was 6 Papa it was 6 deck, Papa section. So you could look at the bulkhead and you could say, righto, I'm in 6 Delta, that means I've got to go aft and it tells me whether I've got to go up a deck, down a deck or along this deck and so on and so forth. It becomes second, a bit like reading a street map after a while, you just don't even think about

15:00 it, but at least initially those sorts of things, you'd have people somewhat bemused and the same thing occurred later on when I was on HMAS Sydney carrying the army who had absolutely no idea. Most of the diggers for the first week were almost lost and were always asking people, hey, how do I get out of here or how do I get back, I'm in, they'd have a piece of paper which said they were in 4 Hotel mess, where's 4 Hotel? You'd have to show them how to get here but most of them, well the army basically had no

15:30 training in that sort of thing whatsoever.

Were there any feelings of claustrophobia in those first few hours?

No. I never really had any particular problems with it. There were I suppose a few people may have suffered a little but I think most people got over it pretty quickly. I really never had any major dramas with it and some of the jobs I did later on inside boilers and inside bilges and what and fuel tanks and that, if you had claustrophobia it was not career enhancing.

16:00 **And how about the way that the already established people on the ship treated you? Was there any sort of rituals for the new recruits?**

No, generally speaking they were fairly formal, they were friendly. You could always ask them a question and very few questions were treated as being dumb.

16:30 The navy of course was very formal in terms of rank structure so certainly until you got to know people for some length of time there was generally an awareness that they were senior to you and that sort of thing, and there was always the underlying, I'm a petty officer, you're an ordinary seaman sort of thing, but generally speaking most people were quite reasonable about it. There were very few raving egos that that sort of really wanted to

17:00 us their rank to any enormous extent or their seniority.

And so when you were based at Garden Point for

Garden Island.

I'm sorry, Garden Island, for the first month what was the day to day activity?

Well initial, my initial job was, I was working with the, what was called the hold party which was working with the stores people and my job was basically

17:30 working with the stores assistants in looking after stores, issuing, you know, everything from food stuffs to clothing, whatever. I'd work with them, storage, they had food stuffs and what have you scattered right throughout the ship and our job was basically, the galley needed food, they put in a requisition each day for what they needed based on the number of people on board and so on and so forth and my initial job was working with the stores people on getting all that stuff together and

18:00 that was basically my job. Now every so often you'd do a watch. You might be up on the gangway in blues or something like that where you'd be bosun's mate and your job was to run messages on the gangway and check people on the ship and off the ship, those sorts of things, and it rotated. You know, you might do three months on that and then you might go to another job and every so often interspersed with that was some time where you'd go and do something in your area,

18:30 so they, I'd go down with the, down to the engine room or the boiler rooms and I'd work with, do some on the job training with people running generators, running boilers, doing maintenance on equipment, those types of things.

Can you describe to me what an engine room is like on a ship like the Melbourne?

Well there are probably two different types. One is, there's what on the Melbourne was called a machinery space where the engine rooms or the engines and the boilers

19:00 are, were combined as one big space. Now when I say big space it was a fairly big space but it had a lot of machinery stuck inside it and then on the smaller ships quite often they had an engine room where the engine was off by itself and the boiler was a separate room again. The end result was pretty immaterial from a practical point of view, but the engine room on Melbourne, you'd go down about seven decks into it. You had a,

19:30 you had two boilers which basically produced steam and steam was used to run steam turbine engines, run steam generators, run evaporating plants to produced distilled water and all the ships ancillary equipment. So the machinery space itself was probably about the size of say of five or six storey building in height. It was probably 60

20:00 or 70 feet wide, maybe about the same depth but it had these two great enormous boilers and big steam turbine and a propeller shaft and generators and all the, fuel pumps, lubricating pumps, all sorts of ancillary equipment. When the boilers were up and running it was a very very noisy place and also extremely hot.

What kind of temperature was it?

60 to 70

20:30 degrees most of the time.

How do you deal with that?

You get very hot. You get used to extremely noisy conditions, you get used to very hot conditions. In, most of the time you simply spent in a lather of sweat while you were down there. Mind you the rest of the ship itself was very hot because Melbourne was designed as an aircraft carrier in England for North Atlantic work primarily and she had, she

21:00 didn't really have a great air conditioning system to cope with the tropical climate where we spent most of our time. So the whole ship was very hot, it's just that the boiler rooms and engine room were hotter. Most of the machinery spaces were extremely hot.

Is it hard to work in that sort of heat?

Very. You used to, more than one person sort of collapsed in the heat. You used to continually be drinking water and salt tablets and those sorts of things. These day a lot of the machinery spaces and have control,

21:30 control rooms where you sit in the control room in relative comfort, but in those days you just stuck out there with the machinery. They didn't really have that sort of, you know, the control area but it was just in the middle of the boilers and the engines.

And in terms of, I guess technology in those days, how did the Melbourne's sort of boilers and engines..?

By the, she was somewhat antiquated but steam,

22:00 steam power, the navy until, has only in the last couple of years really got out of steam. Most of the new ships these days are either diesel or have got jet propulsion, basically the same engines that go into aircraft, jet aircraft.

And on the Melbourne were there any particular, say if you were working on the boiler was there one particular thing that would go wrong? Like any particular repairs that kept on?

22:30 There were, the machinery, the ship herself was fairly old and she continued on in service for about another 25 years after I left her. There were always things going wrong. The ships themselves, the ship was built at the end of World War II and there was always old, everything was fairly old and she was very very prone to things going wrong, you know, boilers going off the line, sprayers not working, generators occasionally

23:00 would trip. Generally speaking it worked quite well but there were always little things going wrong.

So what would a typical days repairs have been like?

Well the repairs might be replacing valves in the steam system perhaps. You'd have to isolate a steam valve or something like that, but most of the maintenance would be things like boiler cleaning, maintain, putting on lagging on steam pipes, watch keeping on a boiler, very little of the

23:30 machinery, the boilers, the engines had, they didn't have much in the way of automatic control so a lot of it was simply done by opening and closing valves and someone basically had to be there minding the machine all the time. It's only relatively recent times things, a lot of the stuff is now computer controlled or run by some other means, so it's not, but in those days a lot of the stuff was very much, you were there, open a valve, close a valve,

24:00 start a fan, start a blower, shut it down, those sorts of things.

So, in my ignorance here, if the captain wanted the ship to go really fast did this then signify like a flurry of activity in the

Yeah. Basically you'd have a control position, which had the throttles, they were the two main valves. There would be the head throttle and there'd be astern throttle. Now there would be a signal come in like you'd get a telegraph, somewhat

24:30 like you see on the movies where they go half ahead, slow ahead and all that sort of thing.

A telegraph?

Basically it's a mechanical means of transmitting a signal from the bridge where the captain makes a decision down to the engine room that says I want this, go half ahead, slow ahead or they could call down a voice pipe and say we want two sevens, two two zero revolutions. So you'd open up the throttle until you got two two zero revolutions. You might,

25:00 and if you were manoeuvring, like coming alongside a wharf or something like that, you might be going from ahead to astern, to ahead to astern and that meant people were opening the opening and closing the forward or ahead valves all the time to maintain or move the ship forward or back and port to starboard, whichever way they wanted to go.

So there are different valves that control

You've got the throttle valve which was a valve which

25:30 was probably 750 mls across, big metal valve, and you just stood, they're like a big wheel really and you opened or closed it according to the steam pressure and the speed, the number of revolutions of the propeller that was asked for. Now it could be either ahead to go, for the ship to go ahead or it could be astern in which case, say you were going ahead and they wanted to go astern, you would shut

26:00 the forward valve and open the astern valve and that would then reverse the propeller or reverse the turbine which would in turn reverse the propeller and make the ship slow down and then go astern. Now all of this required thought ahead, it didn't happen immediately. You know, the captain would probably be thinking a couple of minutes, in a couple of minutes time I want to go there, therefore I've got to start the ball rolling now, and this was transmitted down into the engine

26:30 room where we basically put it on, and of course the people on the boilers, they had to then anticipate the pressure on the boiler that was needed to produce the steam to run the engine. So it was a sort of a ballet in many ways, a very noisy and sweaty one, but a sort of a ballet to get it all together.

And was there in a sense, this is totally the wrong word, but like a foreman or someone who was keeping an eye on the whole

Yeah, you had what was called a watch

27:00 and that was basically all the people, the way they used to normally run things, you worked in three watches at say at sea, three watches at sea. You'd have one watch on, two watches off and a watch was generally four hours and the people on watch would do four hours on, eight hours off and that went around the clock pretty much. Some people were day workers and simply worked basically 9.00 to 5.00. Other people were watch keepers and depending on the job you had and that sort of thing

27:30 depended on whether you were working. What we used to do, if you, typically in an engine room or a boiler room you'd have a petty officer who was in charge of the watch and he was basically responsible for the running of that boiler room or that engine room. You'd probably have a leading hand who either, depending on whether it was, it varied from ship to ship but basically he was the second in charge

28:00 and looked after a particular function or series of functions in that room. It might be, typically on a DDG, the Hobart or something like that, in the boiler room you had a petty officer steaming the boiler and he was responsible for both boilers that were operating in the room or one if they were only on one boiler. You had a leading hand who was the water tender and he ran the feed pumps that supply water into the boiler to keep the steam up and you had a couple of engineers and there job was to look after the sprayers and that sort of thing, actually

28:30 keep the boiler running and the petty officer actually ran the controls, ran the steam up, ran the steam down and kept up with the demand on the boiler. So that's four people to run a boiler room at sea. Now if you, if they expected a lot of manoeuvring, coming alongside, going into harbour or at harbour or going alongside a ship at sea they might have what they call special sea duty men where a couple of extra people came down to keep

29:00 up with the demand 'cause there was a lot more work suddenly likely to occur, might be a lot of manoeuvring and they might need more sprayers, need more work done, but they'd only come down, they might only be there for an hour and then they'd go back to whatever they were doing, while they were coming alongside, but that was your watch. So you had four people say running the boiler room and you'd have four people in the engine room. One would be a petty officer, usually an engine room artificer who was in charge of the boiler room, sorry, the engine room and then you'd also

29:30 have a leading hand who was on the throttles and he actually physically opened and closed the throttle, backed up by the bloke in charge, and you'd have another couple of stokers and they were doing things like running the generators which were in the engine room and the lube oil pumps and the condensers and things like that, and the evaporators made the water.

Now the water that went into the boilers to create the steam, was this sea water?

Well it came, ultimately came out of the sea but basically

30:00 no, you had evaporators or desalinators. The water was, the sea water was pumped into the ship, put through an evaporator where basically it was boiled, turned into steam and that then, that separated the salt out, the water was then put into tanks on board and we kept a couple of hundred tons of water on board and that water was then used through the boilers to produce steam to run the engine

30:30 and the whole system was sort of a cyclic thing. The water came in as sea water, was boiled, turned into steam and then condensed and stored in a tank. Now from that water you could get water for your ships, what we call ship's water which was basically all the water we used for domestic purposes, cooking, washing, showering, all that sort of thing and feed water which was the water that actually went into the boilers and then it was boiled in the boilers, turned into steam,

31:00 run into the engine room, run through turbines which turned the turbines through a gear box and then turned the propeller and that steam, once it had gone through the turbines was then condensed back into water and put back into tanks again, so that you weren't actually losing all the water all the time. What you were trying to do is only replace the water that you lost in the process rather than losing all the water in the process and then having to continually produce water. Now the water that was produced,

31:30 I forget the exact figures, from the desalinators was if it had a certain amount of salt in it you could use it in domestic water because, you know, no harm, but it had to be very very low concentration of salt to use inside the boiler or otherwise it will damage the boilers. So if the water was, had a certain part per million of water, sorry, of salt, you could put it in ship's tank which was domestic water or if it was below

32:00 a certain percentage it could to feed and if it got above the acceptable level it had to go back to sea until we sorted the evaporator out to get it all clear.

So it was actually quite a sustainable kind of clean way of running the ship?

The water simply came in, was boiled, the brine, the excess salt and water that wasn't passed over was simply put back into the sea and the other water was simply,

32:30 OK, you lose, you lost a certain amount in the system because of leaks and bits and pieces like that, but generally speaking typically steaming on a ship like a destroyer like the Hobart, typically you'd probably, out of all the water you'd put into the system you might lose about I suppose 100 litres an hour, maybe less, depending on how long it is since we'd last done maintenance on the total system.

So in terms

33:00 **of running a ship sort of sustainably, and now they're running it on diesel, is it more**

They still have a, they still have evaporators to produce water. They still need water for domestic purposes and for other purposes, but basically the advantage, the, a steam system was relatively cheap to run, was very efficient

33:30 but it did require an awful lot of maintenance. It was also very heavy. You had very heavy machinery that took up a lot of space. On warships in particular space is very very important. So boilers, steam turbines, they took up a lot of room but they were very efficient which was one of the reasons why they were popular for years, but with modern diesels and modern gas turbine engines which are basically

34:00 the same as a jet engine in an aircraft, they take up a lot less room. They don't need, other than some cooling water sort of thing, by and large they don't need much water to run the engine itself. It just runs on its own fuel. The boilers themselves in a steam ship they ran on initially back in the good old days they used to run on coal, but then they, when I was in they ran on Furner's fuel oil. Later on they ran on diesel.

And what ran the generators?

Well you had

34:30 a number of generators. Every system on a warship is duplicated. Normally you'd have two machinery spaces, you might, and once again the Hobart to use as an example, you had two boiler rooms, two separate boiler rooms, two separate engine rooms and each boiler room had two boilers any one of which could provide power to run the ship. So if one ship or one engine room or one boiler room was damaged you always had another one to keep the ship going. You mightn't have gone as fast

35:00 or as far but you always had, so the generators, you normally had well on a Destroyer, on Hobart you had four steam generators which ran off steam plus you had two diesel generators which were really always permanently on standby. It's only if you totally ran out of steam for some reason that you, normally that those generators really came into play.

Is this more common on a warship because they might sustain

Yeah, it's built in redundancy because of the need to cope

35:30 with battle damage in the event the ship's damaged. Theoretically you've always got at least one engine to get you home or keep the ship going or at least one generator to keep vital equipment going, maybe not all the equipment you want going but certainly the vital equipment you need to keep going.

Is the fact that you were called stokers a bit of a nostalgic

Well technically speaking until the mid 1950s the stokers

36:00 which were basically the shovellers of coal and the people who ran the boiler rooms and engine rooms in the early days, in the 1950s it was recognised that they did more than just shovel coal and they changed the title to mechanical engineer but that was probably over emphasising our skills, but we, colloquially we always kept the time, or the title of stoker. We just called ourselves stokers and everybody knew us a stokers or bilge coolies or

36:30 black gang, dusties. That was another old term from the coal days, was the dusties because every time you brought on coal you filled the ship up the coal dust and it took them days to clean it again.

And is there any sort of like you said, colloquialisms or myths associated with stokers?

We were recognised as being the salt of the earth.

Why is that?

Well without us nobody went anywhere.

37:00 It's a long way to row.

A big ship to row. And in the time on the Melbourne when you'd go down

To the machinery space?

Yeah, to essentially be trained I guess, how much responsibility were they giving you?

Probably limited responsibility. We worked under the supervision of people who were trained and we'd go and give them a hand. We'd, for example we might go on the, do

37:30 a watch on the evaporator. Now the guy on the evaporator basically was responsible for producing the water and putting it into the storage tanks. Now that meant he had to run the evaporator. He also had to, every half hour or so he had to test the water that was coming through to make sure that it was up to standard. So the jobs we'd get to do would be under their supervision. Run the vap, they would supervise, they'd let us test the water and supervise us while we did

38:00 that. So any job you did was very much on the job training under the supervision of somebody who knew how to do the job, and it would only be for a certain amount of time each week normally and then we'd go, we'd do, we might work all day and then do a watch at night, in the middle of the night and then next day we'd be back at the, our normal ship's duties. Now on the ship's duties you might end up doing a watch on the wheel at sea or a lookout on the bridge

38:30 or something like that, or you might be working in the stores. You might be pushing a broom, you might be mopping the decks, you could be doing anything. You might be running, going away in a boat or something like that. So every so often you would just do this job in your particular trade. If you were going to be a radio operator you'd probably spend it up in the radio room where you'd work with the people learning how to handle the message traffic and all that sort of thing. Whatever your particular, if you were a cook you might

39:00 spend it down, spend it in the galley with the cooks learning how to cook, which was always a busy job.

Was the cooking up to scratch?

Generally speaking I found it pretty good, given the way, the conditions under which most of the work had to be done, the food was very good in most cases.

And what did you wear down in the machine and engine?

Well generally speaking you wore overalls or what was called number 8s which was

39:30 action working dress, basically like a pair of blue jean sort of trousers and a denim sort of shirt. Anybody working in the machinery space basically had to be fully dressed, none of, no shorts and short sleeves. All machinery space work, you either had to be fully covered because you were dealing with hot machinery. Everything, almost anything you touched in there, metal was just too hot to hold onto, so basically just to protect you from burns and things like that everybody had to be fully covered

40:00 and generally speaking you wore leather gloves for most jobs.

In that heat?

Mmm. It was good fun.

Yeah, I'm sure. We'll just change tapes at that point. Just reached the end of that one.

Tape 4

00:38 **Tell us about your first kind of experience at sea?**

Well after I'd been on the ship, on Melbourne for a while we eventually went to sea and did sea trials. We went in and out of Jervis Bay on a number of occasions, did time at sea,

01:00 being a carrier we had the air squadrons on board and they were doing flying training and all that sort of thing, and we were also operating with Voyager and one night while we were off Jervis Bay in about February we collided with Voyager and sank her and killed 82 of the crew.

Tell us about exactly your experience of it. What was

01:30 **happening that night for you?**

I was off duty at the time, it was about 9.00 o'clock at night. We were doing night flying. I was off duty as I was in the forehead café watching a movie. They used to set up the café at night, one of the cafés was a fairly large area and they used to run a movie and it was almost like I suppose MASH [American Television Series] you know, the projector set up in the corner sort of thing and everybody sitting down and watching it and the projector broke down every five minutes and all

02:00 that sort of thing, you know, if you sat, anyway, I was sitting in there watching the movie and

Do you remember the movie?

Some Like It Hot. Anyway, about a bit after 9.00 o'clock there was a, I was in the café, there would've I suppose been a couple of hundred people in there watching the movie, and there was a hell of a thud. The ship sort of lurched and the table I was sitting at,

02:30 the tables were all designed to fold up to be put out of the way so we could end up with a big open

space if we needed it, the table folded up and collapsed and I fell on the deck and the TV [television], the movie projector fell over and all that sort of thing and one of the petty officers who just happened to be walking through the café because it was also the main passageway for the ship went through that café, fell over, came, happened to be passing though and

03:00 he said, he started to get us organised in, he took us up, got us all to start closing the watertight doors. At this stage we hadn't really received any word on what had happened and everyone, there was a fair amount of confusion as to what had happened. We were all inside and nobody really knew. Anyway this petty officer grabbed us and we went up forehead and a guy got right up on 4 deck up on 4 Alpha and I found that

03:30 there was a big hole on the front of the ship. Anyway we started closing all the doors. There was obviously a lot of damage up there, all this closing all the watertight doors all the way back to the café area and it was probably a good 10 to 15 minutes before we were told that we'd collided with Voyager. At that stage, you know, there were just rumours. Someone said he thought an aircraft had crashed on the flight deck and someone else said we'd run aground. We were about as far as, we were

04:00 about 20 miles out to sea off Jervis Bay but anyway eventually they came over the PA [Public Announcement] system and the captain said, we have collided with Voyager. After that we, people were grabbed to do all sorts of things. As at that stage I was working with the hold party in the stores. One of the first jobs I was given was to go down and help get out all, we had a lot of bedding and

04:30 stretchers and clothing on board, was get all, start getting all that stuff out because they were starting to get survivors on board, a lot of whom had no clothing or the clothing they had on was oil soaked and they had to get all this oily clothing off them, and then they were going to put them up on stretchers, the uninjured people up on stretchers up in the hangar deck over night. So my first job was with other stores people was to go down and start

05:00 getting all this bedding out of the stores, get it up to the hangar deck and get it all set up ready to, and start helping to bed some of these people down and help them get out of their oily clothing or get some dry clothing on them if they already, if they had no clothing at all. So I spent quite some time doing that and then later on I was given the job working with other people in helping clean oil off people so that the medical staff could work on them because a lot of people, a lot of guys had a lot of oil

05:30 on them and before the medical staff could provide them with some of the treatment we had to help clean the oil off them. So we were getting old waste material and cleaning the oil off them and cleaning them down so the medical staff could do their thing for the injured guys.

What were they like?

Most of them were pretty heavily shocked. Some of them were very severely injured. Some of them had broken limbs and what have you. Just about all

06:00 of them were covered very heavily with heavy furnace oil. Some of them had swallowed oil, but at the very least most of them were very wet and shocked because a lot of them had just got out of the ship. Some had got out through escape hatches and that sort of thing. The forehead part of the ship sank almost straight away and the after part stayed afloat for an hour and a half, two hours before it finally sank.

Did you see it sink?

06:30 Yeah. They told us that she was about to sink and I managed to get out on the upper deck and sort of in the darkness I could, they had a couple of searchlights on her and I could see her sink.

What was that like seeing that?

Somewhat surreal. I just couldn't believe it had happened. I'd only been, by that stage I'd only been in the navy six months. It was just quite staggering and on top of that some of the guys that we'd brought out I knew 'cause they'd joined the navy with me.

07:00 **Were you thinking about them?**

Yeah. I was totally stunned, and some of the guys I knew from recruit school, other guys I'd sort of met. We used to hang out together in some of the pubs in Sydney and there was one guy who went down I mentioned before. He was in my cabin, in recruit school we used to operate, live four to a cabin and he used to sleep in the bunk next to mine and he was the guy who'd actually

07:30 put in for a discharge from the navy and they were, he was still appealing the decision and they were still mulling it over. He went down on it. Quite incredible. Anyway after that we basically spent the rest of the night, they searched around for a while. Other ships came out from Sydney and there were some rescue boats came out from Jervis Bay itself. They continued the search for survivors and what have you. We got a fair number on board, I can't think of the

08:00 exact number we recovered. They had helicopters out searching and all that sort of thing. Anyway the ship had fairly severe damage to the bow. We headed back to Sydney at slow speed, went back into Sydney and then went up to Cockatoo Dock up at Cockatoo Island and we were in there for a couple of months while they replaced the bow.

What was the feeling like on

08:30 **board when you realised this was happening?**

Well there was, people were absolutely shocked. You know, I don't suppose everybody realised that that was part of the job or the risks of going to see, but fairly big ships operating in close company and preparing for war means that there is risk

09:00 involved but like most I suppose, you just think it's not going to happen to us, but it did.

How were you rescuing the men in the sea?

Well the ship, the Melbourne dropped her boats and they went out. The crew went out and picked the people up from the water, most of the people were picked up from the water. There were also some air sea rescue boats came out from Jervis Bay and some helicopters came out from Nowra and some

09:30 ships' helicopters also were involved in recovering people from the water. They would, then the boats would come back alongside and they would be lifted up onto the deck and then carried through into the hangar. The injured ones would be taken through the hangar into the sick bay. The relatively uninjured people we basically cleaned up, gave them a change of clothing or wrapped them in blankets and what have you.

10:00 The ones that we could then bed down were given stretchers and made as comfortable as possible, gave, of course they were give a cup of coffee or tea or brew to help them stabilise and we gave them, you know, cigarettes and whatever we could to make as comfortable as we could under the circumstances.

Was there any fire?

No, there was no fire. The forehead end of the ship basically sank almost straight away and that's where most

10:30 of the guys I think died. We hit around about the bridge and we cut her straight in two and went straight through the forehead boiler room so I don't think very many people from, who were on watch in the engine rooms or boiler rooms survived. Quite a few guys got out of the forehead section but a lot of them also went down. There's not too many ways out.

What did you think it was when you first felt the bump?

11:00 I had no idea. When someone said perhaps an aircraft had crashed into the flight deck I didn't think that was true because I thought the bang was too big and I didn't think an aircraft would've had that affect, not that I had any experience in that sort of thing. When someone said we'd run aground I thought that might be a possibility, but then I thought we were supposed to be operating a long way off the coast and as far as I knew there was nothing to actually run aground on to, and it was only, you know, some, it was a few

11:30 minutes sort of thing before we were actually told we'd hit Voyager.

How do you think that it happened?

Well there've been inquired which suggested that the Voyager got it wrong. Certainly what they were doing as I understood it was something that was a common practise but it just simply went wrong. They were acting as plane guard for the ship, which basically they sat behind

12:00 the carrier and if an aircraft crashed their job was to pick survivors from the aircraft. Now when the ship turned, when the carrier turned into wind to land on aircraft or fly off aircraft they, the carrier, the destroyer cut across in front of the Melbourne to be in a position to carry out plane guard. Well they must've, somebody must've misjudged the

12:30 cut across and unfortunately we hit her.

There were rumours about someone being drunk or something. Is that, did they speak

Well various inquiries have suggested that the captain of the ship may have had a problem. I really don't know anything about it personally. I've only heard what inquiries have said and the usual innuendo. To me it just appears as though someone misjudged. Whether it was the captain or the officer of the watch or

13:00 somebody on the bridge of the destroyer, certainly all the blame seems to have been sheeted home to Voyager and I can only assume that there was a mistake made somewhere on Voyager. The captain died and a number of other people on the bridge died and they were the people, probably the only people who really knew what happened at the time and the bulk of them died. So I really can't really say what would or could've been done better.

It was a night operation but was there

13:30 **any viewing, any sight that could've helped?**

Well it was a fairly clear night. Now as I said I wasn't on watch and I hadn't been outside for some couple of hours so I really didn't know, but certainly from my observations getting on the upper deck it seemed to be a fairly clear night, but you've got ships moving at fairly high speed in close proximity to each other and it doesn't take much

14:00 to make an error and it can be very unforgiving if you do get it wrong.

How was the mood of the ship after?

The crew were generally somewhat subdued. We got back into harbour. Once we got into, got the ship into Cockatoo Dock and they pumped the dock out, they started work on it. The guys went ashore. We met up with a lot of guys

14:30 with, who were survivors from Voyager. Most of them went off and went over to HMAS Penguin, which was the shore base there, into the hospital and what have you to be checked out and they had interviews for the survivors and all that sort of thing for the inquest. As soon as that was all over within a day or so of getting back the boys went ashore. We ran into each other, there were few pubs in those days, which were notorioUS Navy pubs. We generally met up with each other and compared notes and

15:00 generally went through a little bit of a debriefing over our stress and trauma.

Did you have an official debriefing?

Each of the crews were interviewed. I don't know that it would necessarily be the same as they do it today but certainly the crews were all interviewed to find out what their view of the interview, the event was all about.

15:30 Our, I suppose most of the boys had a big debriefing at places like the Civic Hotel where the locals put on a pretty fair welcome back for the survivors of Voyager and also for the crew of Melbourne, and a number of other hotels. We were pretty much given all the assistance the locals in our favourite drinking or watering holes

16:00 could give.

What kind of things would you say to each other after a few beers?

Generally it was finding out where people were and what they did at the event. Sort of things like what did you do, what did you find out and you know, who did, did you see Bloggs and what was his condition and so on and so forth. Generally, often it was trying to find out those people who were still missing, at that stage

16:30 we were not really sure whether they'd got off the ship or not, trying to find out where people we knew, if anybody knew if they'd been seen after the collision, where they were, what condition they were in if they were seen, that sort of thing. So it was very much seeing if you could find people you knew and all that sort of thing.

How did you react to some of the bad news such as the cabin mate?

Well, I suppose most of us squared their shoulders

17:00 and got on with life, but I think most of us sort of still remember. I've always remembered the guy or remembered the circumstances so I don't think a lot, I think a lot of us would not have forgotten people that we knew and particular events of the night. Most people have tried to get on with it, some people I understand have had a pretty bad reaction to it over the years.

17:30 **Was there a service that you remember?**

We had a service on board. A lot of the guys from Voyager went on leave. Most of the, I think certainly from my perspective, most of the remembrances were somewhat low key and official things were, certainly for me, didn't have the same impact as meeting a few of the boys

18:00 ashore and making a night of it, but I think that was certainly the way most of the people I related to anyway got on with it.

Did it make you or any others question being in the navy or any of those [(UNCLEAR)]

It heightened your awareness of the risks of the job. There can be a bit of a tendency once you get

18:30 used to the routine to think, oh well, it's just on a big ship and nothing really can go wrong. Well you realise that hey, things can go wrong and what we do, there is an inherent risk in what we do. So I think it certainly heightened that and certainly later on in a couple of events in Vietnam and that sort of thing I sort of cast the mind back and thought, well up to a point this is somewhat similar or you know,

19:00 the atmosphere is somewhat similar, not necessarily the events themselves.

Did the captain talk to the crew or anyone about the events?

Yeah, he addressed the crew. I always had a fair bit of time for the skipper. He was, I've always

remembered, remembering that the navy was fairly formal I always remembered him before the collision actually. I was waiting to, the ship was anchored

19:30 out, tied up at a buoy on Sydney Harbour, and in, and the ship being out, the last boat to the ship used to go at midnight and then the next boat after midnight was at 6.00am. Well I came back from town and I got to the wharf and I just missed the last boat by about a minute or so. They'd just gone. I could see the boat going back to the ship, and I thought oh well, terrific, I couldn't go back outside the dockyard because they wouldn't let you out after midnight.

20:00 So here I am twiddling my thumbs on the wharf thinking here's six hours sitting on the wharf and it was reasonably cool. Anyway about 1.00 o'clock the captain came wandering down the wharf, and the captain being the captain of course he had his own boat. He just got on the phone and rang the ship and in those days I was just a very junior ordinary seaman and here we've got a four-ringed captain. There was sort of a God like distance between his rank and mine

20:30 and we, I'm standing there on the wharf thinking, anyway the ship, the boat came in to pick him up and he came over to me and he said, you going back on board? I said, yes sir, but I've missed the ship, missed the last boat, and he said, oh, come with me. So he threw me on the boat and took me back. Now it was probably just good manners but certainly

21:00 at my stage in my naval career it seemed like, never having spoken to a four-ringed captain up to that stage, it certainly seemed like God sort of saying, I'll hold your hand lad. So anyway he got me back on board and saved me about another five hours standing on the wharf waiting for the next boat. So, and he, you know, he certainly seemed approachable, not that I had an enormous amount to do with him on a day to day

21:30 basis. So I always sort of had a respect for the guy. I thought he got a pretty lousy deal with the inquest and following on, but that was the way the navy was in those days, pretty much, we gave you the ship and you broke it, you'll wear the blame. That seemed to be very much the attitude.

How did that make you feel that they give him some blame if you believe it wasn't his fault at all?

Well, it didn't,

22:00 it didn't endear me I suppose to the navy or the hierarchy overall but by the same token I think there was an acceptance by everybody that by naval tradition that's the way it is. He's the captain of the ship, he's responsible for everything that happens on that ship, and in those days if something of that monument occurred, win lose or draw, right or wrong he pretty much

22:30 was expected to wear it. It went with the job.

What did he tell the crew about the disaster himself?

He didn't have a great deal to say about the actual cause, but largely he had a lot, a fair bit to say about the response and basically he indicated he was very pleased

23:00 with the way everybody behaved in coping with a fairly traumatic event, the way we helped the survivors, the way we'd kept the ship afloat and given the ship itself, our ship had suffered fairly significant damage. So those were the sorts of things he dwelt on and the fact the survivors were getting all the support the navy could provide, that we'd done all that we could for them, that we'd behaved well,

23:30 That it was a tragic event that really no one should feel guilty about and as I said, he didn't really dwell too much on the actual cause. Obviously until inquiries and all the rest of it were held it was very difficult for him to say who was to blame or who wasn't.

And what happened with you next with the Melbourne?

24:00 I stayed on board. We stayed in Cockatoo Dock for another couple of months while they put a new bow on. They had to cut all the old bow off, put a new bow on it, repair it, then we went back to doing, went back to sea, did our work ups. Then we went up north for SEATO [South East Asian Treaty Organisation] exercise, visited Hong Kong and Singapore, went through pretty much the

24:30 rest of the ship's program except we had a two month unplanned break in the program before, but basically we went up to Far East, operated up there with the SEATO forces, US Navy, Royal Navy and other navies, visited Hong Kong, Singapore, Rabaul.

What kind of activities were you doing with the SEATO exercises?

Well acting as a carrier. We were continually playing

25:00 war. We used to provide aircraft, we'd fight the American ships and the American ships would fight us. We'd do anti-submarine exercises, all sorts of exercises, chasing submarines, chasing surface ships, attacking, simulating attacks on ships. People on board the ship itself, it was constant sort of war games. Fires on board, damage control exercises. The sort of

25:30 work that you would normally expect on a ship that's involved in a war.

How do you do a war exercise without shooting and deciding how?

They would simulate, obviously people depending on the job you were doing, if you were in aircrew of something like that obviously you were flying aircraft out looking for helicopters, looking for submarines, looking for surface ships, simulating attacks on them and all that sort of thing. Most of the ship's company would endlessly be

26:00 going through damage control exercises, you know there's been a missile hit. Let's pretend, so you'd be running around in breathing apparatus carrying pumps, shoring up bulkheads, closing, locking doors, simulating injured people, moving them through, giving them first aid, all those sorts of thing. You might be, for example up on the flight deck you might be involved with the fuelling people, fuelling the aircraft or defuelling the aircraft.

26:30 Operating with the catapult people hooking aircraft to launch them off, operating with the [(UNCLEAR)] gear, getting, helping people with landing onto the aircraft, those sorts of things. So it depended, it varied from day to day depending on what job you were doing on a given day. You might be on the bridge. As an ordinary seamen I was expected to sort of rotate, both in the jobs that I was doing or in

27:00 my specialised area that I intended I go into, and also do general ship's work which would be look out on the bridge, in the wheel house, any number of different jobs.

We might just stop for one second there. Sorry.

On top of the war games of course a ship is like a floating city sort of thing and work goes on, jobs have to be done

27:30 all the time, equipment, people have to be fed, ships have to be clean, maintenance done on things just like any other form of endeavour. There's endless work to be done and the ship steams 24 hours a day and you've just got to keep it working.

Tell us about this floating city concept. It's a big ship. Tell us about being on a big ship and the crew of a large ship. What's it like?

Well everybody obviously is working in their particular area. You've got everybody

28:00 doing jobs from steering the ship, lookouts, running the engine rooms, boiler rooms, people doing electrical maintenance, operating radars, operating aircraft, working aircraft, all those sorts of things. It's a continuous process.

How many people are on board?

Well generally the ship carried about 1,000 crew plus when the squadrons, the actual aircraft came on board the squadron, people

28:30 came on board you picked up about another 400 there. So somewhere between 1,000 and 1400 most of the time were on board. There'd probably be a few less while we were actually in harbour for any length of time. Some people would go off, but generally speaking somewhere around that number and they all had their jobs to do. The squadron people were doing constant maintenance on the aircraft, flying them, all those sorts of things, and from the ship's point of view, ship's company point of view you'd be running the

29:00 engine rooms, the boiler rooms, fuel's got to be looked after, fuel's got to be stowed, transferred, boilers have to be cleaned, things have to be repaired, machinery breaks down and has to be repaired and there's all the administration for people involved in administrative work. You know, people have to be paid and fed and accounted for and all those sorts of things. Life just goes on. It's just like any large organisation except it happens to work 24 hours a day and it happens

29:30 to be sailing from Australia to Hong Kong and in between times we're playing wars.

Compared to some smaller ships it must've been different, like in the aspect of getting to know people with so many people?

Well the bigger the ship generally the more formality you've got. The more people involved you've usually got a lot more senior people involved. Like the Melbourne, in addition to being a carrier was also the flagship of the fleet, so generally at sea you had the admiral

30:00 on board. You had a four-ring captain, they also had their staffs. You had a fairly big organisation. You get down to a Destroyer you had generally you've gone from a crew of 1,000 to 1400 down to a crew of probably around about 300, maybe up to 350. So the numbers have got smaller, the formality is a little less because there's less senior brass and life, you know, it's like going from a big, working for a big

30:30 organisation to a smaller organisation generally speaking. There's less formality, you get to know more people outside your area of working. On the Melbourne for example, or a big ship, you could probably spend months working on a ship and there's people you'd never see. Whereas on a destroyer, the same people doing a similar job you might see more often. So there's less formality. When you get down to

smaller ships, not that I had spent a great deal of time on smaller ships like mine sweepers or patrol boats, you've probably got a crew of 30

31:00 or so people. Well generally speaking you live in each other's pocket and you see each other all the time.

Which did you prefer?

Well I generally preferred, I didn't like being on the Melbourne particularly. I generally found I preferred smaller ships. In fact I put in to go for a draft to a minesweeper or a patrol boat but it never ever happened once I went to the States for HMAS Hobart. Once you got onto one of those sorts of ships you tended to specialise and stay on those

31:30 ships. Particularly if you're in things like electrical or engineering world. Once you got to know those sort of ships you tended to stay with them more frequently so I never ever got to a patrol boat or minesweeper but it's just the luck of the draw.

Was there a bit of a hierarchy of ships that would be played out in say pubs or wherever?

Oh there was always inter-ship rivalry. You know, our ship is better than your ship, and you had high,

32:00 I suppose rivalry between different branches, who's the most important? The seaman branch or the engineering branch and if you're on something like the Melbourne the aviation world always thought that the whole world revolved around them and the whole reason for the ship being there is it's a floating airfield and what the rest of you do is of lesser importance. You know, that was the usual inter-group rivalry and that always applied, same thing where you had different ships

32:30 working together or joining, meeting up together in different ports. It was always rivalry between ships and I suppose that the navy, much like other services, you tend to identify with the unit you serve with. So if you were on the Hobart you identified with the Hobart. Now the fact that she was almost exactly the same as the Perth is neither here nor there. Hobart was your ship and there was always that rivalry, our ship is better than your ship, anything you can do we can do better.

33:00 **You mentioned that you had some leave in Hong Kong, was this your first kind of major trip overseas?**

That's the first, yeah, yeah, we had a few days in Hong Kong and a few days in Singapore and a couple of days in Rabaul so we went ashore.

What was that like for you?

Oh, sort of, I was very much I suppose, you've got all the horror tales and the good tales from the old salts

33:30 who'd been there, done that. They told you all the places to go to and not go to and all the rest of it, some of which you took in and some of which you didn't, and I suppose most of us were very much like the country yokel in the big city. We walked around, ooh. It was all so foreign, particularly in those days when Australia was much more insular than it is today. You know, things like dealing with on a large scale with

34:00 Asians or foreign cultures and that sort of thing was relatively for most of us a fairly uncommon thing and it was really a culture shock in some ways and very interesting and somewhat awe inspiring in some parts.

What particular things were a culture shock for you in say Hong Kong?

By and large seeing they way a lot of people lived. In those days a lot of them didn't live very

34:30 well at all. People lived in very very tiny little flats. Even today they live in, because of land values, they still live in relatively small, but in those days a lot of people lived in very very rundown shacks and flats and lived on old junks and bum boats in the harbour sort of thing, that you wouldn't even, that we wouldn't even sort of think of stepping on, but the people basically lived on them

35:00 seven days a week. Seeing things like some of the work that people did you'd think, good God, people don't really live like that or work like that, and yet they did, and it was, at least until you got, I suppose a bit more used to it, a lot of it seemed very very strange and a bit surprising.

35:30 You know, you could hear about it but actually seeing it and being amongst it is a lot different.

What about the aspect of you know, 1,000 plus odd men and a few months away, like meeting local girls?

There were a few of them around too. Generally speaking a lot of the time you got there, most people went on great cultural tours to see the ancient history of China and so on and so forth. Very few us went to a bar.

36:00 No, I think generally speaking you found a few of the favourite bars and you swapped cultural experiences with some of the locals.

What kind of cultural experiences?

Some of which I can't repeat. No, you'd, a lot of the guys went to bars, there was a lot of drinking. There was cavorting and carrying on up to a point.

36:30 It was a lot of boys away from home, a long way from home.

Would they talk about it?

Some would, some wouldn't.

What would they say, the talkers?

I'd probably be giving away secrets then. No, you'd meet the people in the bars, a lot of the people there, the women were there to encourage you to drink obviously and they were also, a lot of them were available to take out of the bars if you

37:00 so desired.

What kind of things would they say?

Oh, it varied from place to place, but generally speaking they'd want to know a bit about Australia or a lot of them knew more about Australia than we do of course. By and large the people you met in the bars were often there just to encourage you to stay in that bar and to drink and to spend your money there. They also had quite, some quite

37:30 funny sort of, they expected loyalties and that sort of thing but weren't always bloody realised. But you know, Hong Kong was a bit different because it was largely a British port but places like Subic Bay in the Philippines, the locals you know, they, if you go into a bar, if you went into a bar they expected you to only drink with the same girl each time you went into the bar. They didn't like you going into a bar

38:00 and what they used to call butterflying, which was basically hop from girl to girl. The girls didn't like it and they used to say, "You don't butterfly on me, if you butterfly on me I give you Filipino haircut." So there were some pretty wild times.

Were there any stories where any guys got in trouble?

Oh people occasionally would get themselves

38:30 into trouble, get arrested by the local shore patrol and dragged back on board. It was all the usual carry on.

Was it fun?

Indeed, indeed, as I said it was a great cultural, a lot of cultural awareness going on.

Yeah. Look I'll just stop now because I just can't think of a question and it's two minutes to go.

Tape 5

00:37 **So we just ended talking to Keirnan [interviewer] about the time in China?**

Hong Kong, yeah.

Hong Kong, and so what was the sort of last couple of months that you spent with the Melbourne?

After we came back from Hong Kong I continued on board, just general duties. Then

01:00 having completed my year at sea on a ship I was drafted down to Cerberus to the engineering school down there where I spent six months doing my stoker's course.

What was it like leaving the Melbourne?

I wasn't broken hearted. Being a fairly big ship I wasn't particularly thrilled with big ships anyway, plus basically it was another step in progression

01:30 so I wasn't broken hearted to leave it. I didn't particularly want to go down to Cerberus because that was a main training base and those places were usually full of bullshit and a lot of formality and ceremonial type stuff and lots of brass, but it's all part of the job.

And so what did the time end up being like at Cerberus?

It was fairly routine.

02:00 I did the, my course at the engineering school, a fair bit of study and work. Anyway qualified, became qualified as an ME [Mechanical Engineer] and immediately on completion of that I got a drafting back to sea onto the HMAS Sydney.

And how was the difference, sort of training specifically and what you'd already been working in? Did you find you were learning a lot of new things?

Yeah, I was probably learning

02:30 more, probably more technical detail or expected to know or learn a lot more technical detail. A lot of engineering work on board the Melbourne was very much, you know, this is how you do something without too much sort of depth as to why you do that way, or here's a boiler sort of thing. The specific detail of different parts of the boiler and the different functions of the different parts wasn't all that in depth. We got into a lot more

03:00 of that once we started on the course at the engineering school.

And was there much sort of camaraderie between the people training together?

Yeah. Most of us or a fair few of us had in fact been on the Melbourne with me but there were other people who had been on other ships who were also joined in, joined us and were on the course so there was camaraderie, but there was also as in most of the service life is meeting new people all the time because it's a very sort of a mobile population.

And did you miss

03:30 **being at sea?**

I preferred being at sea, yeah.

Why is that?

Well I could never see much point in being in the navy and not being on a ship. Why join the navy to be on a shore depot? In those days of course I was single too, so life was relatively carefree on a day to day basis. So I always preferred being on a ship.

And so what was the process of being posted to the Sydney?

Well

04:00 basically on completion of your course they, somebody somewhere probably in Canberra pulled a ship out of a hat and people were posted to the ships. Most or a fair slice of the guys who were with me went to the Sydney and that was basically seen as being the first job sort of confirming our, the training we'd done at Flinders.

And what year was this?

19

04:30 60, end of '64. Yeah, '64.

So what were you hearing about the situation in Vietnam at this time?

Not a great deal. When we first went there I don't think we'd, the government had made a decision to actually put a battalion there because there were no troops in Vietnam other than a small group of people on the army training team. Very few other troops

05:00 were on the ground. It's only probably two or three months after I got onto the Sydney that suddenly a decision was made that they were going or they would be transported on Sydney.

We'll just stop there for one second. So the sort of political I guess knowledge at the time, was there any talk about the situation there?

05:30 Not really. Obviously there was some talk about Australia's committing troops but I know certainly from our point of view it was all supposed to be hush hush and secret, a great big secret and you could walk into any pub in town and find out what was happening, but it was supposed to be, you know, secret and all the rest of it, but basically no consultation really with us. I'm sure there was somebody somewhere who crossed all the issues but

06:00 really the first we really knew about it when suddenly the government announced the troops were going and the Sydney was taking them.

And how about the threat of communism?

Well that was always part of our reason for being and certainly there was a lot of to-ing and fro-ing within political circles about communism and domino theories and all the rest of it because that had been part of the issue we'd had

06:30 a lot of trouble during the confrontation with Indonesia over the war in Malaya and all those sorts of things and certainly communism had been a bit of an issue in Indonesia itself where they had an

uprising and Sukarno basically killed a hell of a lot of people to basically maintain the status quo in Indonesia, but we, for most service people other than the ones

07:00 who were on the training team in Vietnam or some of the army battalions that were in Malaya, the direct relationship was not all that, not be on a day to day basis.

What was the reaction when you heard that Australia was committing troops?

Well the guys were quite interested to, that we were going to transport them. Sydney was an old aircraft carrier that had been converted

07:30 to a troop transport and she had been used for transporting some troops up to Borneo in the year previous to that, but by and large we just regarded it as another job, transporting troops and off we went.

How many troops?

We took a battalion. I suppose there would be 700 or 800 troops plus support people. We loaded them all in Garden

08:00 Island.

And what had you been doing, what had the Sydney been doing previous to this?

Basically Sydney had been converted to a troop transport and had been used as a training ship. So a lot of the people on board were relatively junior people who'd just finished various courses in their different trades and what have you. So a lot of the component of people on it were in fact just seen as

08:30 doing advanced training in their particular field.

And what sort of a ship was she, a happy ship?

Yeah. Like Melbourne she was about the same generation, slightly different design although they came from the same class. The main difference between the two being was, when they were built, they were both built at the end of World War II, they stopped the actual construction with the completion of World War II and they sat on the, sat there for a couple

09:00 of years before they continued the building. When they finished the Sydney she had what was called a straight flight deck which was the old design and when they started work on the Melbourne they put an angled flight deck on which was more modern so she could operate higher performance aircraft, which was one of the reasons why Sydney was quickly converted from a carrier to a troop transport.

And what does it take to convert a ship to

09:30 **a troop transport?**

Well initially not much. Being a carrier she had a great big open hangar deck, she had a great big open flight deck which could still technically operate aircraft but she had no aircraft on board. Most of her aircraft handling equipment had been removed. The hangar deck would make a pretty good hold for cargo and what have you. The flight deck allowed them to,

10:00 to transport a lot of vehicles and trucks, armoured personal carriers and what have you, park them on there and bolt them down and transport them there. The main difference and it didn't occur while I was on there, once we started the runs up to Vietnam we found that when we got to the other end at Vung Tau that there was no offloading facilities. We weren't allowed to go up the river to Saigon

10:30 because a couple of American ships had been attacked and sunk in the river and the government wouldn't let us operate, go up the river. Therefore we had to use landing craft to unload. Now we had to borrow the landing craft when we got up there from the Americans or the Vietnamese and it was, the first couple of trips we did were pretty slow unloading. It took a fair while unloading, a long turnaround time. So as a result of that the first thing they did after the first couple of runs was

11:00 they started to improve. We got more cranes on board. The original aircraft cranes that were on her had been removed except for one and there was one, what was called an old NCK crane which was really a converted civilian crane which that had been simply bolted on the side and anyway they put in additional cranes on board and they also got their own landing craft and built davits on the side so they could raise and lower the landing craft and so she could carry her own landing craft so she was less dependent on landing craft

11:30 at the other end, but that was done after I got off actually. I did the first two trips on her in '65 and then by then I left her and went to the States for Hobart. She continued running up to Vietnam for about the next four or five years.

And in terms of the work you were doing on Sydney, what was the difference compared to the Melbourne?

I was initially doing watch keeping in the

12:00 boiler room working on boilers. Work which I'd done a little bit of before but I was doing a lot more of it. I had probably three months of that and then I went to what they call double bottom party which was basically looking after storage and transport of fuel and testing of fuel on the ship. All the fuel in the different tanks and that had to be transferred to keep the trim and all the rest of it and as we burnt fuel or brought fuel on, fuel went off, we had to transfer it and that was basically a full time job

12:30 moving that. There were about four or five of us who were involved in that plus fuel had to be tested and all the rest of it from time to time. I worked on that for a while and then I went to a job called flight deck machinery which was working on the flight deck and given that was an aircraft carrier that had most of her aircraft equipment taken off, the only thing we had to operate or had to maintain, this is doing mainly some operation maintenance was a couple of forklifts and the cranes. There were only

13:00 about two of us working on that particular job but it meant we worked with the actual cranes that were doing the unloading and also the forklifts and that sort of thing so we worked quite a bit with the army guys and with the loading and unloading parties.

And when you picked up, or the army boys came aboard at Garden Island, what was the atmosphere like on the ship at that stage?

Well I think there was, a lot of people were somewhat amused because the government had been, and the navy

13:30 and everybody had been ssh, very very secret, don't let anyone know. Everybody knew, it was in the bloody papers but nobody could talk about it and all that sort of thing, and they had things like the troops came down at night and got loaded at night and it was all supposed to be secret. The whole world has got TV cameras over on, off, opposite, over at Mrs Macquarie's Chair and outside Garden and could see it but you know, everyone played the game. Yes, it was all secret. Go up the pub and ask a couple of the girls, when are we going?

14:00 They could usually tell you, but anyway, but we loaded the troops. They had a big Bailey bridge. The army had constructed a big Bailey bridge at the carrier wharf at Garden Island and most of the vehicles that they brought on board could simply be driven up like a big ramp up onto the flight deck and then simply parked like a big parking lot, then they were chained down onto the deck and left there for the trip. A lot of the cargo was put onto the, onto the actual aircraft lifts and lowered down

14:30 and then simply stowed in the aircraft hangar which was the hangar deck which was probably oh, about 300 or 400 feet, 100 metres long by about 50 metres wide and probably about four stories high and that was where it was all stacked on deck. The first couple of trips the navy hadn't had a great deal of experience since World War II in bulk transport of army stores. They hadn't done a

15:00 great deal of it and I think they were sort of feeling their way, but after the first couple of trips when they recognised they could do it better, they got a number of people in who were in fact naval reserve officers but worked in civilian transportation, marine transportation, and they came on and sort of, I think they got the loading much better and they got the offloading much quicker later on, but the first couple of trips were, you know, where

15:30 we could've unloaded sort of in, later on they were doing it in 12 hours, we were taking two to three days which the navy didn't like because we were anchored off Vung Tau and potentially subject to attack.

And how about the soldiers, where did they..?

They were brought on board, they were brought down in vehicles, offloaded and then we sort of, a lot of the mess decks where we normally as a carrier the ship had gone from a crew,

16:00 normal crew of 1,000 to 1400 perhaps to a crew of about 700. So all the excess accommodation was used for the army so that simply the army guys were sort of brought on board and led into a mess and said, that's your home for the duration of the trip. They usually had, very similar to when we, when I first went on the Melbourne, they had a couple of sailors who hung around with them for a while so they could sort of take them around the ship and get them settled

16:30 in and tell them which way was up because as I said before, they were very much like new guys. They had no idea of which way was up on the ship and to find their way down to get something to eat or where to go and we were always tripping over troops looking for something. You'd be going one way and they'd be tripping over doorways and what have you, where the heck am I? You know, people suddenly wander down a boiler room, lost.

Very lost.

Yeah. Not too many

17:00 went down the boiler room. Most of them opened the door and got a blast of hot air, found another place to get lost.

And did you ever talk to them about what they were heading into?

Yeah, we used to talk to them. They, on the trip up there they, we, at night we'd usually get a beer issue so they'd have a beer and we'd have a beer and we'd sit around and have a bit of a chat about things

they did and what we did. They spoke about some of the training

17:30 they'd had leading up to going and all that sort of thing. So we had a fair chance to talk.

What sort of

During, sorry

What sort of things did they tell you?

Oh, they were just going through the exercises they'd had at places like Shoalwater Bay and where have you, the sort of training they did for the war, for jungle warfare and what have you. Most of them were in fact infantry troops, although we did have some armoured troops in armoured personnel carriers, but general, I don't necessarily

18:00 think we went into too much technical detail but general discussion about differences between the services, the way, for every stupid thing you've got one equally stupid, just different.

What sort of things would you compare notes on in terms of services?

They, the way they did different things. They were always for example very keen on food because spending a lot of time in the

18:30 field in the army living off ration packs and living out of cans our food was considered somewhat better than their food which I have to agree with. So those sorts of things. Sometimes, you know, the way the sergeants used to operate versus the way our petty officers operated, those sort of things. They used to be fascinated by the fact we, a lot of our people never seemed to stop painting. It's an endless job, you know, it's a bit like Sydney Harbour Bridge, you just finish

19:00 one end and it's time to start all over again. It's a never ending job on ships, one of the favourite jobs all the time is paint paint paint paint paint, and they always found this somewhat fascinating.

Did they have any sort of duties or routine that they had to

Yeah, on the way up they continued their training. They sort of set up, they used to do PT [Physical Training] up on the flight deck because that was the only really open space on the ship, a little bit up of the forecastle but mainly up on the, they'd do PT and

19:30 those sorts of things. They also did a lot of shooting, they set up rifle, you know, troops go out with their rifles and set up machine guns on the upper deck, on the quarter deck, and we'd throw balloons over the side and they'd use them for target practise so they stayed current with weapons handling and all that sort of thing. They used to let some of us when we had a spare moment go along and have a bit of a shot with their machine guns. Most of our guys had very limited experience with some of the fancy weapons that the army had because

20:00 it just wasn't our, really our scene. We used to help them with some of their maintenance work. For example the armoured personnel carriers, they were fairly new in the army at that stage and I believe they got a lot, some of their weapons had just come out of storage. They hadn't really been properly set up and if you've ever seen a firearm that's just come out of the military storage it's almost caked

20:30 in grease, solid grease, and almost impossible to get off this grease, hell of a job. Anyway we ended up having to help them by taking them down to the boiler room to get steam to steam the grease, the preservative off so they could set them all up and use them on their carriers. So there was all that, plus they had their continuation training, bits and pieces. They were doing a lot of orientation work on things like basic Vietnamese languages and things like that and we sometimes used to hang around and annoy them and listen in over

21:00 and see what they were up to, but they had their job, we had our job which was basically making sure A, we had to get them up there, and B, we had to look after their equipment and that sort of thing on the way.

And did any of them, I suppose on a ship the size of the Sydney it may not have been a problem, but any of them seasick?

A few of them were a bit sick at sea. I don't remember any actually being seasick but a lot of them were somewhat regularly lost. It

21:30 used to be everywhere. There'd be working out, you know, people, we had special meal sittings for them because obviously we couldn't fit everybody through in one meal sitting. We had more people than the ship normally carried, plus they also had to provide a certain number of people to assist in the galley and spud bashing and all the rest of it, so the guys would be looking for the cafeteria for a meal and they'd be lost. They'd be wandering up

22:00 and down ladders and through doorways and all sorts of things. So quite often for the first few days until they sort of got their general bearings it was lost and a few of them I think didn't particularly like being at sea. It was just a totally different environment to the one they were used to anymore than I suppose a lot of sailors suddenly dropped in the jungle wouldn't particularly like it.

And how long is that trip from

Oh, it took about two weeks. We basically went up

22:30 through Indonesia, up through the Sunda Strait. We, there was a bit of concern by the government that the Indonesians might interfere because the Indonesians didn't have any particular love for Australia at that particular time, and in fact we were tracked by a reconnaissance aircraft, a Russian one supposedly. A Bear which was a big, big maritime reconnaissance aircraft

23:00 came and tracked us for a few days just to see what we were up to, keeping track on what we were doing.

How did this affect the way the ship was run?

We knew it was out there. We were told it was out there. It came, I forget the exact distance, but say within 20 miles of us. We went to action stations and that was somewhat interesting because we're going to action stations and the army are half lost. We knew where we had to go but the army guys, see there's a sort of a routine

23:30 to action stations. Certain areas, if you're going forward on the ship so you don't end up with grid lock with people all trying to run in different directions at the same time. You go up one side of the ship going forehead and go down the other side if you're going aft so you don't have people running into each other. Well the army weren't quite attuned to that so we had people in gridlock and you know, the alarm bells are going and they're, what's going on? Where the hell? Anyway it was really just going to action stations

24:00 and the aircraft sort of came in a bit. I think they might've photographed us from a distance and then just went back to where they were.

Did this kind of put a bit of impression of what you were heading into?

Well it certainly heightened things. I think our main concern was basically when we got to the other end at Vung Tau that was probably the

24:30 area that was of greatest risk, but it certainly sort of added a little bit of flavour to taking the troops to war.

And where was your action station?

My action station was in the hangar deck. Basically I didn't really have much of a job. When I was on boiler room, on my boiler watch keeping I was in a damage control locker up forehead, but when I was

25:00 flight deck machinery my action station was actually sitting in the hangar deck waiting for glory. We used to, really we would join in with the damage control party if there had been any real problem, but basically just looking after things like the forklifts and that sort of thing. I don't know what we were supposed to do with the forklifts, ram them I suppose.

I've heard stories from the World War II guys

25:30 **who, when they were being taken to New Guinea or somewhere like that, that they'd in the hot weather they'd go up and sleep on deck. Was anyone allowed to?**

Well, most of the crew. Sleeping inside was very very difficult. Most of the crew would try to find somewhere outside. We all had our what we called click-click beds which were basically a folding bed. We used to set them up in the hangar or up on the flight and go to sleep. Usually about 2.00 o'clock in the morning you'd have a shower of rain so there'd be a quick scurry to cover yourself with

26:00 a bit of canvas sort of thing for about a quarter of an hour and then pull it all off and, but most ships you tended to try and sleep on the upper deck, certainly the older ships because the air conditioning, you know the internal temperatures on the ship was very very high so you'd sleep on the upper deck in a boat or wherever you could find an open piece of deck.

Does this mean that you could fall asleep easily anywhere sort of thing?

Well, one of the things you had to get used to was sleeping

26:30 in a very noisy, very crowded environment. You basically had an environment where there was work going on, machinery running around you 24 hours a day, people getting, either going to bed, getting out of bed. Every four hours basically people were getting out of bed or into bed. So you got very much used, and certainly during between about 10.00 o'clock at night and 6.00 o'clock in the morning. Sorry, 6.00 o'clock in the morning, 10.00 o'clock at night work just went on

27:00 around you. If you've had a night watch sort of thing you got out of bed and you couldn't go to bed until the mess deck had been cleaned up and the deck polished and all that sort of thing. So you know, you just got used to very broken sleep and also you got used to working in a noisy people crowded environment. People walking around you, walking over you, climbing over your bunk to get to their bunk or whatever. You just got used to that as being a normal environment.

And did you become more considerate

27:30 **of people?**

Yeah, you certainly didn't, you knew in a darkened mess deck you knew you didn't go in there making any unnecessary noise and you certainly, it worked both ways, 1, you were a bit more considerate, but 2, the other guys were very much attuned to sleeping through almost anything, and in fact like on the gun line in Vietnam where we, I found that you know, two

28:00 or three hours sleep at one time and that was about it. Even after we came off the gun line it would take you a week or so to adjust yourself to having more than about two hours, two to three hours sleep at a time. You just weren't used to sleeping that long.

Was there ever a time you mentioned that the ship was busy and that, was there ever a time when the ship was quite quiet and where you'd experience a bit of sort of

During the night. Outside of the machinery

28:30 spaced during the night probably, you know, midnight through till probably 5.00 in the morning it was probably as quiet as it ever got. Most people who weren't watch keeping actually on watch, were asleep and generally speaking it was fairly quiet. The only people you'd see around would be people on watch going about doing some work, whatever was going on. So that was about the only time it ever really got quiet. The only other time other than that would be something like a weekend

29:00 if you were actually in harbour when most people were ashore and apart from a few people on duty watch or whatever it got relatively quiet, but all these things are fairly relative. You just got used to a noisy environment, hatches slamming, doors opening, people walking around, people talking, you know, PA systems rabbiting on at all hours of the day or night. Unless it was an alarm bell or something like that you just slept through it.

And how about when you were sleeping up

29:30 **on the upper deck on the flight deck or something like that, what's the ocean like at night?**

It's very nice. It used to be, generally you've got no, relatively little, no ships. They used to run without a lot of the upper deck lights running. Obviously you had your navigation lights and things like that but most of the upper deck lights up on the flight deck would be off. So you'd sort of lie there and look at the stars and it was almost like the Love Boat.

30:00 You used to look for the cruise director.

And you mentioned that when you left Sydney on the Sydney with all of the troops, there was a lot of sort of media interest and that sort of thing, did that continue on during the voyage? Was there anyone covering the event?

I don't remember there being anyone actually on the ship but when got to, got up to

30:30 Vietnam there was certainly world media suddenly descended on the ship from ashore and were very interested in what, they brought the press on board, American and Australian press and there were a lot of filming of the troops loading and unloading and equipment being moved and all the rest of it. So there was certainly that. I, to the best of my remembrance I don't think there was any press actually on board on the trip up itself. There may have but I just don't remember them.

Did the troops play up to

31:00 **this media attention?**

By and large the troops were a little bit indifferent to it. I always remembered this, being used to the pictures of the US [United States] Marines storming ashore at Iwo Jima or something like that, I always remember this group of troops waiting to unload. Admittedly this was more an administrative loading, it wasn't a tactical assault, but all these troops

31:30 came out with all their packs and piled them on the deck waiting to be, waiting for somebody to come and help load them into the landing craft and this guy was left to look after the gear so no one moved it or nocked it off whatever, and I remember him sort of lying there on top of all these packs reading a Mickey Mouse comic or something, and the world, a couple of the press photographers were absolutely amazed, taking photos. Here's this sun bronzed sons of Anzac going ashore and his this guy reading a Mickey Mouse comic lying on all these

32:00 packs on the flight deck just off Vung Tau. I think the troops were a little, certainly tried to come across as being reasonably blasé about it all.

And when you had to get the landing, extra landing gear and stuff with the Americans, was this your first sort of interaction with the American Navy apart from the war games, but in a situation of

Well certainly

32:30 in an operational zone, yes. I had some dealing with them ashore in places like Hong Kong and Singapore and what have you prior to that and Subic Bay in the Philippines. That was the first time I'd had any real, sort of real and it was only limited anyway. The landing craft came out, they brought a few armed guards with them, a few guys sort of wandered around the ship. We had our own people armed, we had divers in the water and all sorts of fun

33:00 things like that. Anyway

What were the divers in the water for?

Well basically any time a ship anchored in the operational zone up there, we had to have, they went into what was called Operation Awkward which was anti-diver procedure where one of the concerns was people putting mines on the bottom of the ship, so we used to have our boats in the water and our diving team ready. They'd do regular searches of the bottom of the ship and keep and eye

33:30 out in case somebody tried to sneak in and put a mine on the bottom of the ship. That had been done to a couple of American ships up there and it was pretty much a standard navy way of doing that sort of operation anyway anywhere in the world in a threat zone. So the diving team, they had their own boats. They'd go around and they'd search the bottom of the ship every couple of hours or so, just have a check see, and before we sailed they'd do a final check before we left just in case anything had been stuck

34:00 underneath.

What was Vung Tau like at the time?

Well we were anchored probably a couple of miles off the beach. The coast itself I suppose would be very similar to the Queensland coast. There were a few hills, the Long Hais and there was a few low hills on the Vung Tau headland itself, Cape St Jacques. The rest of it was sort of mangrove and that and the Saigon River sort of

34:30 flowed into the sea near there. The Americans had a naval base there and they had an old fort there which was actually an old French fort built during the French Colonial times. They were using that as I believe a communication and harbour control point. The US Navy were responsible for security in the anchorage, so we were using anchorage just outside the harbour. So you basically sat back a couple of hundred miles and you could just see the coast. You could see the landing craft sort of come out. They'd come alongside us

35:00 and then we'd lower vehicles. Men would climb down the ladders into the landing craft and they'd go into shore and unload.

And what about things like, was there air cover at the time?

There were aircraft all over the place. You could stand back and watch air strikes from the ship. At night you could watch the flares and all that sort of thing where the aircraft were dropping flares and bombing strikes, but that

35:30 was like that, the whole coast of Vietnam was like that the whole time we were up there.

What was it like seeing action?

Well we were relatively detached from it. We obviously had our own, we didn't see a real threat from things like, although they had possibly some rocket launchers. Our main concern was the possibility of a mine attack from a diver. We didn't, there wasn't much in the way of air threat from the Vung Tau area.

36:00 But it was fascinating watching the war sort of thing. You could sit on the upper deck and watch the war in between loading and unloading our contribution to it.

Did that feel at all strange?

I don't know how that felt actually. It was, it was the backdrop to what you were doing. I found

36:30 it interesting but I don't know if strange would be the right word.

And in a situation like where there were divers checking for mines, and obviously there was a certain level of threat, I don't really know what it's called but were there, was the ship on a higher alert I guess than usual?

Yeah. The navy had a sort of a standard procedure called Operation Orchid. We used to practise that even in places like Jervis Bay just for the practise of it. It was

37:00 basically where we were operating particularly when the ship had to anchor or stop for any length of time if we were alongside a wharf or anchored where there was a high, perceived high threat of diver attack. Now they could swim out with mines and lay them magnetically on the hull of the ship and blow holes in the ship and things like that, and the navy had a pretty standard thing where the ship went to a higher level of alert. We had damage control lockers were manned, we had

37:30 armed guards wandering around the ship and that sort of thing. We had boats in the water, diving teams either in the water doing bottom searches or on standby ready to go into the water at any time and also

the guards themselves would go around dropping what we call scare charges, like for want of a better name, like a small hand grenade. Every so often they'd just simply drop one in the water, they'd go bang and if it landed anywhere near a swimmer in the water, you know, within a, probably within 50 or

38:00 50, 20 or 30 metres it would probably stun or even kill anyone swimming in the water, and that was really very much a standard method of protecting the ship, and that went on day and night while we were at anchor. So basically we came in, we anchored. As soon as the anchor went down the boats went in the water, the divers got ready. They had all their gear laid out ready to go before we even, as we approached the coast. They would, although I wasn't directly involved

38:30 with that because we were too busy getting organised for unloading the troops. They would then have armed guards, they would all be issued with weapons and ammunition. They would be at strategic points throughout the ship and they would also have these scare charges, and they would just at random drop these little charges over the side just in case there was a diver down there, and every so often the divers would actually jump in the water and do a sweep along the bottom of the ship just to check and see if anything had got through.

39:00 **What are the damage lockers or danger lockers?**

Damage control lockers. They're basically, throughout the ship there is a damage control system in place and they have lockers set up with repair equipment, breathing apparatus, fire fighting equipment, shoring to patch up damage, bulkheads and that sort of thing. They have three or four of them throughout the ship with all this gear in there. It has it's own interconnected telephone system between the systems and to the engineering office and what was

39:30 called HQ1 [Headquarters 1] which was the damage control control centre and basically the people could talk to each other and if there was an explosion or fire or whatever the people manning that centre would go out, have a look, repair what damage, report back. They might have to, you know, whether compartments needed to be pumped out, whether fires needed to be put out. So they had all the equipment necessary to do damage control repairs and each

40:00 locker had a certain area of the ship they were responsible for and there was a central HQ1 or damage control central which they, from which this whole process was managed and that of course had contact direct with the captain and, if we really got serious.

We'll just change tapes there.

Tape 6

00:37 **OK, once you'd done your job with the Sydney of transporting the troops, where did you go from there with the Sydney?**

Basically we did one trip from memory around about March of '65, we went up, took the troops up,

01:00 the round trip took, by the time we went up and unloaded and came back it took about a month. We came back, we stayed around Sydney and then we did another trip later in the year. Subsequently coming back from the first trip they said, the navy called for volunteers to go to the States to crew the Hobart which was due to be commissioned the following year and I put my name into the hat and they pulled my name. I had to go to the States. Anyway we did the first trip, about a month round trip, came back,

01:30 continued operating around Sydney area. Then we took a second lot of troops to Vietnam. We picked up equipment in Sydney and then we called into Brisbane and loaded some troops in Brisbane and then went up and did a second trip. That took about another, round trip took about another month. Did the second trip and that was around about, that took us through till about from memory I think it was probably early September. I

02:00 stayed on the ship for a few weeks after that and then I went over to Penguin to standby to go to the States for the Hobart.

Why did you volunteer for this job?

Well it was a trip to the States, new ship. In fact new ships being introduced to the navy are totally different so I thought, well why not? So they said, who wants to go? I put my name in and they selected me.

And what was the trip like?

It was good. We did nearly 12 months in the States. We flew

02:30 over, flew out of Sydney, flew over and we did some training in, different people went to different places but we did some training in the States, and then in December of '65 we commissioned the ship in Boston, and did, we did initial work up out of Boston. We operated out of Boston for a few weeks. Then we went down to Norfolk in Virginia.

03:00 We did some more training and operating out of there for a few weeks, a couple of months I think. Then we went to Jacksonville down in Florida and did some missile work. Then we came down through the Panama Canal and up the west coast of the States, operated out of Long Beach for quite some time, San Diego, visited San Francisco and then went up to Seattle and did, all this time we were going through different schools with the, we had people from the US Navy Operation Readiness Group would come on

03:30 board and run us through training. We might do engineering problems or we might do electrical problems or we might do missile problems or gunnery problems or command and control problems, whatever they had in that particular module of the training. So we'd just spend days and days operating out at sea with the Americans on board taking us through their operational readiness because until we'd completed that successfully the ship basically couldn't come home.

04:00 **What kind of things were you noticing which was different about the Americans and their teaching?**

They had a, well a totally different system. They really, in some ways it was simpler and their system seemed to be more attuned to shorter term enlistment. Their

04:30 navy enlistment was only three years, ours was nine years and in many ways the Australian navy, and the Americans themselves often said that they found that we had better experience than them because we were used, we were dealing with people, in most cases with people who had longer service, better level of training. You know, person for person at an equivalent rank quite often our people were better trained because they'd had more experience. They generally

05:00 had a longer time in service. Mind you their promotion system often tended to be faster than ours. Ours was slow because it was more attuned to a longer term service. So that sort of thing was the main issue. Their training, ours was probably often a lot more staid than theirs. Theirs was flashy and the 'Sands of Iwo Jima' and John Wayne and all that sort of thing. So there was a little bit of that involved in it. They seemed to be more showy about the way they did things.

05:30 By the same token they had some very good training because they had more resources to throw at training, things like fire fighting. Go through a fire fighting school at Newport in Rhode Island, they had a fire fighting and damage control school. Well they had fire-fighting equipment that we hadn't even seen and the Australian navy at that stage couldn't even hope to approach. They had cut-outs, sections cut out of World War II ships built in like big swimming pools that they'd fill with water and sink and you had to sort

06:00 of stop them from sinking, and they had all sorts of, they had mock ups of aircraft carrier hangar decks filled with fuel and they'd set fire to them. Workplace Health and Safety would probably have horrors at seeing some of this stuff, go in there and fire fight in those conditions and some of it we were doing in winter. You'd be roasting from the front fighting the fire and you'd have ice behind you, breaking ice to get through the water to get a pump going. They had very very good

06:30 training that way but their training was much more. They were more flamboyant than us in a lot of ways. I can remember going into a fire fighting school. Now in the Australian navy it would be most unusual to have a class made up of officers and ratings, but they had, we went into this class, there was a mixture of Australian and American naval people but there were

07:00 officers involved, and I can remember this damage controlman first class, he was an American damage controlman by the name of Kantoo and he looked like the spitting image of Sammy Davis Jr and he walked in and he had this real sing song voice and he used, he came into the classroom and said, "Good morning gentlemans, my name is Kantoo, I is a DC1 [Deputy Commander, Class 1] and I don't take no shit." We all sort of, who is this person?

07:30 But when you got in with the fire fighting it was excellent because they certainly had it to a level that we hadn't. I'm not even sure if the Australian Navy would still have it to that level, but they have a lot more resources to do it with. They have a much bigger navy.

What did you notice about their kind of interaction between say private and officers?

It,

08:00 they tended to have, well their officers tended not to be long term commissioned people as much as ours. They didn't seem to be quite as standoffish between their officers and ours, and their enlisted men, but at the end of the day they did things differently but they still did much the same sort of thing in a lot of ways.

08:30 But generally speaking I think I preferred our system to theirs but I think ours was a little bit stilted and very much I suppose still in the British tradition.

Did you notice any differences say between their white sailors and their black sailors?

On the job not a great deal. I did find later on particularly after about 1976

09:00 that in some of the ports we went to they certainly had areas which were very much whites only and blacks only. There did tend to be a lot of separation or segregation and I think it was largely voluntary

between the members themselves rather than, I don't think it was any official policy. It was just the way the white guys tended to go to one area and the coloured guys went to other areas. In places like Olongapo that was fairly noticeable in a lot of cases.

09:30 **And what about your time in the states, what kind of social activities did you get up to?**

Well, we had a whole range of visits to different establishments around the place. They had quite a number of sort of official functions and what have you that we used to go along to, like for the commissioning ceremony the Defoe Shipbuilding which was the company that actually built the ship, put on a big do for us after the formal ceremony, big

10:00 clam bake and chowder thing in New England, New England chowder and all that sort of thing. So there were a number of those sorts of things. A lot of, went to the usual bars of course but we did a fair bit of travelling. Guys used to go off to inland, the ships themselves obviously we tended to stay near the coast but people would quite often, if you had a weekend off get on a plane and go inland

10:30 somewhere to some part of the States. Guys go and visit the Grand Canyon or go off to New York. I went off to New York in the train for a few days and got out to Phoenix in Arizona when we got to the west coast and those sorts of things. A lot of us tried to get away from the naval ports on the coast.

Did you get to know the locals at all?

Got to know a few of the locals and tried to get to know a few people outside the naval ports. The Americans have a, more so

11:00 than we do, they have military towns which are very much military orientated and obviously on the coast it's mainly naval. Places like Norfolk in Virginia, Jacksonville in Florida, San Diego, Long Beach, they were very much navy towns. They had so many servicemen concentrated there and they'd had them for so many years they'd sort of built up a town within a town, and quite often you could find yourself in a place that was almost totally navy and

11:30 yet it was ostensibly it was civilian because it was just close to the navy base and 90 per cent of the people who went there were navy. Now admittedly US Navy, and it was very much attuned to the young single serviceman. There was very little other than those things that sort of attracted them. You really had to sort of get on a bus to get away from, or a train,

12:00 whatever, to get away from a lot of that sort of environment.

Just pause for one second. Naomi [interviewer] just passed me a note before. Tell us about the Hobart, what kind of a ship was she?

She was a Charles F. Adams class destroyer, guided missile destroyer. They're commonly referred to as DDG. The RAN bought three of them. The first one

12:30 commissioned was the Perth, they were basically commissioned six months apart. First one commissioned was the Perth, the second one was the Hobart and the third was the Brisbane. They were basically fleet defence ships which they carried a couple of five inch guns which were both used for anti aircraft defence and also for things like shore bombardment and surface, surface gunnery. They had anti-aircraft missile systems and they also had anti-submarine missile systems plus torpedoes, and

13:00 they were the first of the American built ships that the RAN ever purchased and it was a sort of a major jump I suppose from a navy that was primarily, that always bought British design, British built ships to these totally new American and different ships and that was sort of what sort of led I think to a sort of a change in a lot of the attitudes within the navy,

13:30 within the navy culture.

So tell us about taking this ship back to Australia?

Right. We were operating, we finished with the operational readiness group in the States. Most of the guys had been over there, over in the States for probably nearly 12 months. Some of the specialist people in electronics and radar and missile and stuff had been overseas for two or three years.

14:00 We brought it back via Hawaii and Suva in Fiji. Brought it back and the first port of call was Hobart. Pulled in there and it was great to be home. I always remember the guy, there was a guy on the wharf with a pie cart selling, you know, pies and most of the guys had been overseas living on American food and there was a mad rush as soon as the ship got alongside and we bought him out of pies and he went away and got

14:30 another cart load of pies and he came back and sold all of them, and then he tried, I believe he tried to get a third load and he couldn't get anymore pies and the boys were still ready to buy more. Most of had been living on American food which didn't include much in the way of things like pies. So we were trying to get back to our culture. We called into Hobart, that was our first port of call. Then from there we went back to Sydney. We had a march in Hobart, we were given freedom

15:00 of the city of Hobart and went through all the rigmarole, big welcome home and all that sort of thing. We were there for a few days and then we sailed back to Sydney.

I was going to ask actually was there a lot of excitement attached to this new purchase of

Oh yeah. The Perth had arrived back in Australia six months before and there had been a fair bit of interest in her arrival back and certainly from the point of view of our

15:30 first port of call being Hobart, there was a lot of interest in Tasmania particularly Hobart, to have a ship named after their city arriving direct from the States, arriving there and when the city of Hobart gave us freedom of the city we had a big march, had a big reception for the crew and all that and a few of the boys had a quite enjoyable couple of days in Hobart before we came back, returned to Sydney.

And what did they tell you was going to happen with your service

16:00 **from here on?**

Well when we first arrived back we weren't sure of where we went from here. The ships, when they arrived had to be fitted with the Ikara missile system, which was an anti-submarine, an Australian anti-submarine missile system. We didn't have the American ASROC [Anti-Submarine Rocket] system. Perth had already, which was six months before us, had already gone in and started her refit to have the missile system fitted and it was a fairly lengthy process, having a whole missile

16:30 system installed on your ship, and it probably, so we came back, people, you know, a few people, we were, a few people got some leave and that sort of thing because we'd all been away for quite some time, went on leave. Came back from the end of the leave period, everyone's had their couple of weeks leave and that usually used to take, by the time half the crew went on leave and came back and the other half went and came back, it used to take a month or six weeks to get through the cycle, all of a sudden the government announced that early in the new year we were going

17:00 to, they were deploying a destroyer to Vietnam, the, because the DDGs were compatible with the American system, they were American built ships, all the parts, everything apart from a few Australian quirks were totally compatible with the American system, they were sending a DDG and because the Perth had already started her refit, or the fitting of the Ikara system and couldn't be

17:30 made available straight away and because we were a fully worked up crew who had just finished operational deployment with the US Navy, Hobart was given the guernsey and they deferred the fitting of the Ikara system until we came back from our first deployment?

Wouldn't you need this system?

Well, the submarine threat was not great. We had a couple of torpedo tubes which was capable of being used in an anti-submarine role anyway, so the Ikara system wasn't essential for

18:00 Vietnam operations. It just made the ship a more, well rounded warship, but for the work we were doing in Vietnam the anti-submarine missile system wasn't a high need item. So we then started to go onto work up to get ready for going to Vietnam. We were doing through the operational readiness group but we had to do a lot more work on, obviously

18:30 on the Vietnam problem itself and the highest priority there was going to be the need for gunfire support. So we had to really concentrate to a large extent on having gunnery, a gunnery system on full, falling in line.

And how did you concentrate on this? What kind of things did you have to

Basically went on to gunnery ranges and fired lots of rounds. Worked up the gun crews, worked up the,

19:00 the gunnery system, ironed a lot of bugs out of it and basically made sure we were set up for naval gunfire support because it was, most of the operational deployment work we'd done in the United States had been more ship on ship sort of work, but now they were saying, well the main job we're sending you there to do is actually do shore bombardment which is different again and you've got work up the ship for that. You know, the other role is a possibility but the main focus has got to

19:30 be shore bombardment. So that's what we, that was a large part of our work up, but everything else still had to be worked up and even if you knew how to do it, you had to keep current with it all.

What kind of bugs did you have to iron out?

Oh, there was always things like breakdowns with gunnery systems, working, and from the gunnery point of view with, working with the army. Most of our work had been concentrating on working with other naval ships, well the army does it a little bit different. The

20:00 requirements are different and so on and so forth. So you've got to work with the army and sort of get on line with them, and given also that even most of our work had been American focused and now we were translating some of what we'd already learnt back to the Australian focus because the Australian Army did it differently to the way we'd been sort of concentrating before.

So tell us about how you were feeling about going back to Vietnam

20:30 **at this stage?**

Well I was quite excited, quite interested. At the end of the day that was certainly before a lot of the, I suppose the protest about Vietnam became very big, and most of the crew, given that the navy was basically a professional navy, we had no National Servicemen and that sort of thing, most of the crew just regarded it as being the job. This is what we, this is what we

21:00 have a navy for, this is what we trained for, this is what we do, and I suppose there was an interest in seeing how well we would do in an operational environment as opposed to a let's pretend environment, and particularly given that, certainly on the Sydney we were doing a transportation job, this time we were actually going there as a weapon system to actually do the job.

So tell us about the journey back to Vietnam?

21:30 **What was the send off and this kind of thing? Start with that.**

Well we, prior to going obviously we spent a lot of time at sea doing work ups, getting organised, getting things worked out. We then, before we sailed we had families down, took families on family cruises and that sort of thing. In those days they used to do that sort of thing, have sort of family days and families, you know, wives and kids used to come on board

22:00 and we'd take them for a bit of a cruise around for an afternoon, things like that, and then the day we sailed we had the bands and fanfare, families down saying goodbye and all that and we sailed off for Vietnam and the gun line. We sailed up, stopped off at Manus Island on the way for a refuel stop. Then went to the Philippines, had a few days in the Philippines so that the brass could have consultation

22:30 with the US Navy people to get everybody sorted out so we were all playing from the same sheet of music and then we were deployed on to the gun line. At that stage we were operating as part of the US 7th Fleet. Now around about that time the, operating in Vietnam the Yanks had something like a dozen to 15 destroyers operating off the coast at any one time and we were expected

23:00 to form a part of those ships on the line. They had a series of different operational areas, there was complete blank. Oh.

It doesn't matter.

I've lost the words.

Yeah, that's OK.

There was market time, which was basically the interdiction

23:30 work in South Vietnam below the demilitarised zone and there was Sea Dragon which was the operations north of the DMZ [Demilitarised Zone]. Additional to that there were carrier operations, Rolling Thunder and what have you where they had carriers up, they had two offshore stations, Yankee Station and Dixie Station. Yankee Station was way up in the Gulf of Tonkin where they had a couple of carriers that basically

24:00 operated up there, escorted by destroyers and they were doing air strikes into North Vietnam and then down south of South Vietnam they had Dixie Station where they had a couple of carriers doing the same thing, mainly doing strikes into South Vietnam. Well the carriers, the carrier groups used to operate and the carriers basically ran at high speed all the time in a great big, a point in the middle of the ocean and all they did was basically run, launch strikes into Vietnam. They always had destroyers escorting

24:30 them and they also had a nuclear submarine out there somewhere. You never ever saw it but it was there, and wherever the carrier went the submarine went and wherever the, wherever they went the destroyers escorted them and went, and we also used to take part in that too. In effect we were just, we were just one additional unit to the US 7th Fleet operating, operating on strikes in Vietnam. We weren't technically part of the air strikes into North Vietnam.

25:00 We weren't allowed to operate into Cambodia but as far as South Vietnam was concerned and shore bombardment and interdiction along North Vietnam was concerned we were part of the US Seventh Fleet, part of a dozen or 15 other destroyers, a couple of cruisers and later on a couple of battle ships doing exactly the same thing.

What were you doing? What was your exact role? Say..?

Me personally?

Yeah.

I was working in engine rooms and boiler rooms and doing all that sort of thing because the boilers never

25:30 stopped, the engines never stopped and we were doing, once we got on line we started shooting. Once the guns started shooting we basically kept, you carried about 800 rounds of five-inch ammunition and when you got down you had to bring stuff on everybody carried the ammunition and stowed it away in the magazines. So basically we were working around the clock. The way we used to operate was basically eight hours on, four hours off around the clock and

26:00 if it happened to be, if they were bringing on ammunition on your four hours off well sad, better luck next time.

When they were shooting, like so you were in the engine room, what kind of sounds could you hear?

You could hear the guns firing. You could hear our guns and then later on when we came under fire ourselves you could hear the shells exploding outside in the water. We got some, on the first deployment we got some shrapnel on board. We never actually received a hit. Perth received a hit on one of her deployments,

26:30 but we regularly came under fire. We used to go in an do, you'd go to do a shoot somewhere and they, the Vietnamese would have shore batteries with anything from an 86 millimetre up to about 130 or maybe 150 millimetre guns, batteries would just fire at you, you'd fire back and shoot through.

What goes through your mind in particular when you're hearing these sounds and you're not actually seeing them?

Well at least initially

27:00 the guns, our guns, we were familiar with our guns firing [(UNCLEAR)]. We'd gone through all the work up and you'd hear the gun go bang, that sort of thing. Occasionally you might be on the upper deck when it happened and it was a lot louder, lot noisier, but the first time we actually came under fire I was in the number 1 boiler room, or number 1 fire room as we call it because they were using the Yank terminology. Anyway I was in the boiler room and I could hear this rattle, a lot like, over the sound of our own machinery.

27:30 Like I'd hear this rattling sound a lot like a water hammer in a pipe, and I was trying to work out what the hell it was. I thought we've got, we must have some water in one of the steam lines, and I'm draining some of the steam lines, not getting any water, and it came to me what it was. It was actually the sound of shrapnel in the water as we were being fired on, but after that we got used to the general noise, but you'd regularly come under fire.

28:00 We used to go in and do, you know, you'd fire on a target on shore. It might be a boat inshore or it might be a river crossing or a bridge or whatever, you'd fire at them and they'd fire at you and as soon as they started firing back we'd get out of dodge.

Was it a scary thing to just hear the sound of shrapnel?

The sound itself isn't scary, but certainly I found that if you sat down and thought about it you're

28:30 sort of locked in this boiler room and there's not much likelihood that if something nasty happens you're likely to get out of this place, because we well knew that if we had a major steam line burst in the boiler room you had only seconds to get out because the boiler room would simply fill up with steam. Never mind about water getting in from outside or anything like that. If you ruptured a steam line, and it could occur accidentally, the likelihood of getting

29:00 out was pretty remote.

Was it one of the most dangerous positions to be in?

Well if you rupture a steam line it is. Oh well, you know, it's all relative. The same as if you get a shell in a magazine you can have the same effect for everybody, but certainly any job that puts you in a relatively confined space below the water line is not exactly the easiest place to get out of in an emergency. So in some

29:30 ways you've got protection from the water but in other, because, in other ways it's, you think well if something goes wrong we're probably not going to get out of here.

Can I just ask you to turn front on just for a sec?

Sorry.

No, that's alright. Maybe if the fan's off.

No, no worries.

Now, you did a lot of these operations at night?

Yeah.

Yeah. How, what's this like, can you sleep? What's the story

30:00 **with that?**

Generally, when you mean, in close to the close, we went to action stations anyway. So you weren't asleep, you were either on watch in the boiler room or you were in a damage control locker or somewhere like that, so basically everyone was awake anyway. You might only be sitting there lying on

the deck waiting to see what happens and at night most of the lights were out. We just generally worked in red light because you wanted to maintain night vision in case you had to go on the upper

30:30 deck, because the entire upper deck was completely black and if you were working in white light it took you 20 minutes to get night vision. So generally you worked in red light conditions and you just sat inside. You could hear the guns go off and you could hear stuff coming the other way. A couple of times I was on the upper deck when they actually started shooting at us. At night sometimes if, it was slightly different, if you were up off North Vietnam the level

31:00 was higher because there were shore batteries and things and missile sites that could shoot back. Off South Vietnam there weren't really many missile sites or gun batteries to shoot back. That was different. So it depended on where you were working, there was a higher threat in the north than the south, but given that you'd be doing a shoot in the south today, tomorrow you might be doing a shoot in the north 'cause being, ships being ships we used to operate up and down, anywhere up and down the coast and

31:30 it was nothing to do a shoot here tonight and be 200 Ks [kilometres] up the coast tomorrow night doing another shoot somewhere else. So you were very mobile, so you moved all over the place.

Would you get news of this or was it kept fairly, just secret?

No, generally they used to have a sort of a map set up in the café where people at meal breaks you'd go up and have a look at the map and this is where we are or where we, and the captain every morning at about 7.00 o'clock or so would come over

32:00 and give us a bit of a briefing on what we'd been up to in the last 24 hours and the general picture for the next 24 hours as far as he could tell. So within reason they tried to tell us as much as they could of what operations were so we had a reasonable idea of what the plan was. Given though that a lot of the shooting we were doing particularly the shoots into North Vietnam it was very hard to really determine

32:30 how effective we were. You fired, you fired 20 rounds at a target in North Vietnam, other than the fact that they might have stopped shooting back at you, you didn't really know whether you did any damage until they got an aircraft up to have a look and see, and quite often it was very hard to actually pick the target. You're looking at a well camouflaged artillery battery sort of thing, it's very hard to actually pick unless you happen to see it as it fires, or the gun as it fires, it's very hard to pick exactly where it's coming from.

33:00 **How do you feel as a member of a crew in this, because you know, I guess it's obviously different to shooting in the army, this kind of concept of being part of a team and firing on a target?**

Well you felt you were part of a team. You recognised the fact that our war was probably in many ways a bit more impersonal than the army war close in and dirty.

33:30 We quite often, you know, we were firing from five, ten miles away. In some case at targets we really couldn't even see or maybe someone in the aircraft could see it but we couldn't and we had to depend on them telling us where our shells were landing and what effect they had. Sometimes we had no real report on how effective our shooting was. A couple of times, a number, sometimes we were told, you know, we sank that barge or we hit the bridge or that building that we fired at,

34:00 we hit it. Other times it was somewhat vague as to what we did, but I think everyone accepted the fact that you were part of a team, whether you were actually operating in the gun turrets, whether you were in the gun plot, whether you were on the bridge or whether you were in the engine room or boiler room. At the end of the day we all needed each other's work to keep the ship operational, and of course when it came to bringing on ammunition or food stuffs

34:30 it was everybody, everybody was involved in loading and bringing the equipment on board.

Is this why a lot of navy men refer to the ship as an identity itself?

Yeah. The army tend to operate, tend to identify with a unit, a battalion or a regiment or whatever. The navy, you identify with a ship and we were all part of the ship's company, the crew of the ship and very much

35:00 the ship is a she and we identified with that ship. I think I said this morning the Perth, the Brisbane, the Hobart apart from the actual hull numbers painted on their side, look at them from a few hundred metres away and most people probably couldn't tell the difference. They were pretty much the same ship but you'd always identify with your ship and the Hobart was always better than the Perth or the Brisbane any day.

So how did you feel

35:30 **when you would hear news about say a successful mission as such or firing?**

Well I suppose the feeling, broadly the feeling was that we'd done the job we were there to do. The political considerations or whatever I don't, for most people most of the time weren't particularly relevant. We were there to do a job and we were, we had been successful

36:00 or as far as we could assess we had been successful.

So tell us, after that first kind of period in Vietnam where did you go from there?

Well we operated up there for six months. We would probably do a month on the gun line and then we would either go back to say either Subic Bay in the Philippines or somewhere and

36:30 have a few days off, do some maintenance on the ship, you know, there was always something to be done, a new barrel to be put on a gun or something like that, something you couldn't do at sea and you know, the ability to shut down some machinery so you could work on it rather than trying to work on it while it was still running. You know, there was always stuff, that sort of thing that had to be done. So, and we would get a few days, it might be two or three days, the boys would go ashore

37:00 stretch their legs, have a bit of enjoyment and then back on the line again and it just went on and off like that. During the deployments also you might get a trip to Hong Kong or you might get a deployment to Singapore. We did Hong Kong and Singapore, the first, the 97, correction, the '67 deployment we went to Hong Kong. We had a bit of a problem there because they were

37:30 having riots. The, one of Mao Tse Tung's [actually Mao Zedong] friendly little riots in town so we missed out on a day ashore there and we were lucky to get ashore the second day and they still had riots anyway. But we used to operate on the line, you'd do shoots for a few days and every three or four days you'd go out and join up with a supply ship, bring on more ammunition and bring on more spare parts, bring on more food, bring on more fuel, whatever. You weren't allowed to let your

38:00 things like fuel get below about 30 per cent fuel level. So you had to constantly top up with fuel to maintain it, and particularly when you were chasing carriers it was a lot of very high speed running. You used to use fuel very quickly so that would mean you fuelled up more frequently, but we were always, always those sorts of the line and all the Yanks had a great fleet of supply ships that operated out of Subic Bay all the way up the gulf, the coast of Vietnam about 50 Ks off

38:30 the coast and you'd simply steam out, join up with the ship, bring on ammunition, bring on food, whatever, and then go back on the line and shoot for a couple more days.

How would you transfer supplies?

Usually by high lying which is basically run lines between the ships. As ships would steam along, you'd come alongside the supply ship and they'd transfer pallets of ammunition and that. They also had helicopters doing vertical replenishment where they would fly

39:00 pallets of ammunition or spare parts or whatever from the quarter deck or the flight deck of the supply ship and drop them on our ship and we'd just store them all away. Fuel, they had big fuel hoses from a tanker. They'd just steam along at about 10 or 12 knots, keep going in a straight line. You'd come alongside them, steam alongside them for an hour or so, couple of hours and top up with fuel, then break off and go back on the line.

39:30 **We'll take a break there so, just got the tap. Excellent.**

Tape 7

00:35 **I guess zones or divisions.**

Well basically the, Vietnam had been divided politically since the 1950s into North and South Vietnam. The demilitarised zone which divided the two, naval operations to interdict supplies the US Navy believed that the Viet Cong

01:00 were getting a lot of supplies delivered by sea down the coast delivered to their units in South Vietnam. Now no one could ever prove for certain one way or another. There were a few Vietnamese ships sunk loaded with ammunition and things like that. Sometimes they used to go out from North Vietnam, miles out to sea, come down the coast and then sneak in somewhere in South Vietnam and unload all this equipment, deliver it to the Viet Cong in the South. Other equipment used to come in

01:30 by land through Cambodia on the western side of Vietnam. The naval side of things was pretty much looking after obviously the coast and we used to do interdiction which was basically firing on ships believed to be carrying supplies, firing on river crossings, bridges, those sorts of things where transport was moving

02:00 equipment across down to the South and that sort of thing. We used to fire on them and occasionally sink the barges or destroy vehicles, damage bridges and so on. Operations in the north, to the north of the demilitarised zone were generally called, part of Operation Sea Dragon and that went on for a couple of years. The area to the south of the demilitarised zone, which was actually South Vietnam itself

02:30 was generally Operation Market Time, and that included destroyers doing interdiction on supply ships

but also smaller ships, patrol boats and that sort of thing which the Americans operated off the coast and the Vietnamese also operated some of their ships, and they used to interdict supply ships and search small fishing vessels and things like that looking for weapons and arms. Tied in with that was of course a lot of shore bombardment to support

03:00 the army ashore. We used to fire emissions for the US Army, US Marines, the Vietnamese Army. Down in the southern part when we were down around Cape St Jacques around Vung Tau and that we often did shoots for the Australian Army up in the Long Hai Hills and some of their operations, so we didn't spend a great deal of time working with the Australian Army. They were in the southern part of South

03:30 Vietnam. We spent most of our time in '67 up in the north of Vietnam up in the Gulf of Tonkin, we did do some shoots. The second trip that I did in 1970 we spent more time in the south but still a fair bit north of where most of the Australians were, Australian Army were. We did have some involvement with the Australian Army training team guys who are people attached to US

04:00 or Vietnamese units around Vietnam working direct with them. They were just usually one or two people attached to a Vietnamese unit. Sometimes we'd work with them and provide them with support on Vietnamese supporting Vietnamese operations or we'd operate with Americans who were also sometimes attached to Vietnamese units. So we really had a wide range of organisations we worked with. We were doing naval work and we were also doing gunfire support

04:30 for the army.

And when you were down in the engine rooms or the boiler rooms sort of thing, is there a different process that you go through when the ship's firing? Is there a different, does this affect your job down there at all?

No, not directly. At the end of the day the engines move the ship, provide power for, you know, at the end of the day everything on the

Is that the phone?

05:00 **We were just talking about I guess the job of stoker while the ship's firing?**

Yeah. At the end of the day the whole ship depended on electricity. We needed electricity for the gunnery systems, for the radar systems, you know, every system on board basically was electronic. The ship, the ship required steam to run the main engines for propulsion, movement, we operated

05:30 the generators. So the workload by and large, there wasn't the need for, or there was a need for power all the time whether you were in a war zone or not, but what was, the major difference would be the requirement maybe to really accelerate quickly. If you came under fire the ship had to basically get away quickly. If you couldn't

06:00 you remained, retained yourself in a position where you could be fired on all the time. So we really depended on the engine rooms and boiler rooms to keep the ship mobile and to run almost every system on board. Without the electricity nothing else happened.

And you were telling us about that occasion when there was the blackout. Can you walk us through what happened then?

Yeah, we were doing a shoot and the basic procedure was we would

06:30 fire at a target. Now quite often the Vietnamese would have shore batteries in the hills near places that are likely to be of interest for us and they would quite often wait until we came as close as possible into the coast before they would engage us and there might be several guns would fire at us at once. Anyway we were doing a shoot and they started to fire at us, a number of gun batteries fired at us and the

07:00 standard procedure of course was once they started to engage us was we withdrew. Well in most cases you probably had to get a couple of miles before you got out of range of the guns, so for the first couple of miles you were within their range and they had a chance to hit you. On one occasion we just did, we just had a shoot. We started to come under fire. As we went to take off one of the boilers

07:30 failed. We lost power in the forehead machinery system, which basically knocked out the boiler and knocked out one engine room, so we in fact were only running for a time on one engine with only one propeller. It was only for a couple of minutes before we were able to isolate it and get power to the second engine and get back to relatively close to full

08:00 power, but it was a fairly hairy couple of minutes because most of the main lighting and all non-essential power was cut out to the forward of the ship, so it was a fairly interesting couple of minutes getting everything back on line again and still being under fire at the time.

What was running through your head when it

Well I was sitting up in the forehead damage control locker and the lights went out and I thought, uh oh, and I really wasn't sure what had gone wrong. It's only later you, most of these things you find out what

08:30 actually happened later. You don't know what happened immediately. All you know is the lights have gone out and we seem to be slowing down when we thought we were supposed to be speeding up. For a couple of minutes it was fairly interesting and you're sitting there in the semi-dark because you've got a couple of emergency lanterns which come on, like little torches that come on and the rest of the lights are out and you're just wondering what's going on. So it does concentrate the mind.

In terms

09:00 **of the Hobart, what sort of level of I guess interaction was there between the crew? Was it a, the way that you got along on a social level?**

Very well. You tended naturally on a day to day basis to mix largely with people within your own work area and then operationally there wasn't always that much

09:30 time to mix socially with people on a day to day basis, but certainly whenever you got a chance you'd meet up with people. Now occasionally even on operations if it was a quiet time away from the gun line we'd get a beer issue so the boys would, which was basically a large can of beer per man. You'd get issued with that and you'd perhaps have a beer with a few people you mightn't have seen for the last few days and have a bit of chat about how their end of the ship was going because you mightn't have been up there for a few

10:00 days, and of course when we got into harbour quite often you'd go ashore with people from other branches that you mightn't see much of in between shore visits. The ship itself, by the very nature of things quite often people who worked at one end of the ship often wouldn't see people at the other end of the ship for several days at a time just because their work schedule didn't coincide and even when it did coincide they weren't able to get from one end of the ship to the other.

10:30 **And were there different sorts of, like you mentioned that the stokers were always like the salt of the earth, were there other reputations for different groups within the ship?**

We generally found that the stokers were the salt of the earth and most of the others were somewhat strange, but we learnt to tolerate them.

And did this provide like a good natured..?

There was always interbranch banter about, you know, the guns

11:00 were important because without the guns what's the point of the ship, and the stokers, you know, the engine room and the boiler room's important 'cause without them we don't go anywhere, and the electricians would say well everything runs on electricity anyway so without us, it was the usual I suppose pretty pointless point scoring on people.

And were there any interstate sort of rivalries? If people had come from different places in Australia was there ever any my football code's

11:30 **better than your football code?**

Oh yeah, was the usual interstate rivalries, and we used to keep, as far as we could, try to keep track of sport, sporting fixtures in Australia and you know, if you were from Victoria you probably wouldn't watch, you'd probably have a go at those who were running a seep or something on the rugby or vice versa or those sorts of things. There was always that sort of thing going on too.

And how about at times, like say

12:00 **if you weren't, you weren't sort of on leave or something like that, but just the general times like when you said you were able to have a beer or something, were there any sort of games or typical thing people would do just on a bit of down time?**

Well there, the common games. There were a lot of card games, a lot of mah-jongg used to get played in the navy. I never mastered it myself, but a lot of people used to play a lot of it. It was sort of an

12:30 Asian game that people who'd spent a lot of time up in the Far East picked up on from the Chinese and it became very popular.

How was it played?

It's played with a series of tablets, small tablets. I never really quite got the hang of it myself but games used to go on for hours when we were off the line and basically on our way say to Hong Kong or somewhere people would sit there for hours off duty and sort of play mah-jongg, a lot of cards and that, that sort of thing.

And how

13:00 **about this sort of concept that you hear about of mateship that develops within the Australian armed forces? Would you**

Oh yeah. Well I recently only a couple of weeks ago attended a Hobart reunion where I saw people I hadn't seen since my, since the '67 deployment, 30 odd years, and people develop friendships with people

13:30 often you don't see. You might live on the opposite sides of the country but you occasionally see, you mightn't see each other for years but when you get an opportunity you generally try to catch up on people and keep track of who's who and what's been going on and who's done what to whom with which, and there was a lot of mateships that started off in the navy and just continued for years.

And what do you think it is about something like being on a ship together that bonds people together?

Well you're living in

14:00 a very confined limited space. You know, you've got a ship that's about 350 feet long and about 50 feet wide and that's where 320 people live and they spend weeks and weeks and weeks on that ship, and even when they get off it's usually only for, it might only be for a day or a few hours over several days. So you're put in a very confined space, you're living space is very limited,

14:30 you live stacked in bunks three and four high and even the space between bunks on either side of an aisle might only be a metre or a metre and a half apart. You have small areas where 50 or 60 or 70 people live together and you learn to get on, you learn to put up with each other's funny little foibles and God knows what else and you just learn to get on with it, and it really does I suppose

15:00 engender learning to deal and live with people and put and tolerate some their quirks and they tolerate some of yours.

What are some of the things that are really hard to tolerate?

There was one person whose name I won't give, but he was somewhat notorious for going ashore in places like Subic and one of his favourite things was, he'd have a few beers and he'd come back to the ship and he'd bring a pizza back

15:30 and somewhere along the line he had this thing in his brain that he would keep it for breakfast and he used to put it under his pillow, and the number of times, and he slept in the bunk opposite mine. Quite often of a morning you'd wake up and you could see the eye open and he'd look under his pillow and it was not a pretty sight. I don't know what his problem was but it was quite a quirk.

16:00 And of course in those days pizzas were relatively rare in Australia but we were very cosmopolitan.

And were there any, like in your experience any fights, anyone sort of not quite tolerating?

There were a few of those too. People had to agree to disagree, a few. I had a bit of a to do with one guy. In fact it was

16:30 quite interesting, when I went up for my first good conduct badge which you got after four years of good conduct or undetected crime, whichever came first, the process was you went up before the captain to be given, and the way they used to run the system was they had, you'd go up to the captain, they had requestmen and defaulters and the requestman would go up first and request would be things like

17:00 to be given a good conduct badge or whatever, whatever the request was, and then after the requestman had all been heard, then they'd get onto the defaulters and they were the people who were in for bad things. Well myself and this other guy had had this deep and meaningful in a bar the night before which I lost unfortunately, and I had a slightly battered face. I went up as a requestman to the captain's table and went through the drill, saluted the Captain, M.E. O'Callaghan,

17:30 "Request first good conduct badge." The captain looked at me somewhat strangely and said, "Granted" And I went to the back of the queue and came up next as a defaulter and in the space of five minutes I lost my first good conduct badge for three months.

How was that?

Because I'd been arrested for being involved in a fracas on board the ship.

You'd been arrested?

We'd both been, we'd both been run in for it.

How did it, what happen?

Oh, we'd had a bit of a blue in the,

18:00 a bit of a barney in the after passageway and they came, about midnight. We got a bit excited, socially excited shall I say, which I lost, and we got run in and we fronted the captain. I got my first good conduct badge as a requestmen and five minutes later I lost my good conduct badge as a defaulter for three months. So I didn't even get to sew it on.

Were there

18:30 **many, you said possibly flippantly, but undetected crime, were there any sort of sly things going on on the ship, like anyone**

We were always familiar with the realities of life. The system couldn't always provide that which was necessary so we always had to find other means.

Examples?

I don't think the navy will come and arrest me now, but I was guilty of acquiring

19:00 a case of pineapple juice in Da Nang Harbour one night. They had it down in the after store and I went out, I had the middle watch down in the boiler room which was fairly hot and we were in the middle of Da Nang Harbour doing a shoot into the hills. Anyway I wandered off, we weren't actually at action stations but the guns were shooting. I went down to the after store and I had a means of getting into the after store and I

19:30 put to good use a carton of pineapple juice and I was carrying it along the upper deck. This is about 2.00 o'clock in the morning, pitch black along the upper deck because all the lights are off apart from the navigation lights, and as I went up under the after, mount 52 which is the after five inch gun it fired directly over my head, which came in the middle of being guilty of a nefarious crime, came as somewhat of a surprise

20:00 to me and when I got down to the boiler room the boys complained because I'd got orange juice and they wanted pineapple juice. So there were things, if the navy comes looking for me I'll deny all this.

Just blame us, say we put you up to it. And tell me the story that you were saying about your beer getting stolen by the

20:30 Yeah. Well on the '67 deployment, when we were up there the USS Sacramento which was a supply ship had been visiting Australia and she came from Sydney up to Vietnam doing re-supply and she was involved in re-supply. We'd arranged through the navy to have her transport about, I think it was about a three months' supply of beer, Australian beer up for us because

21:00 we used, when we were up there we used get one can of beer per man per day perhaps depending on operational requirements. Obviously when you were shooting and operational you weren't allowed to but if there were quiet days occasionally you could sneak a beer in, beer issue in. Anyway the Sacramento came up and we did an underway replenishment with her about 2.00 o'clock in the morning and she had all sorts, fresh food and all sorts, parts

21:30 and fuel and all the rest of it, sent over all that stuff, but funnily enough there were six dozen bottles of beer missing from our consignment. They denied all knowledge I believe. However I have my suspicions given that the US Navy ships were dry and didn't carry any grog anyway normally for their own people.

So they'd taken a slight tax.

I feel they carried out a nefarious act

22:00 but I understand they denied all knowledge.

And did the Hobart ever forgive them?

No. We will never forgive the USS Sacramento for that.

Sounds as it should be. And just another story that you were telling which is jumping back a bit in time was when in '68 on the Sydney when all of the troops

'65 on the Sydney?

'65 on the Sydney when

Yeah. We were going up,

22:30 we were taking the first troops to Vietnam. We called into Subic Bay in the Philippines, we had just called in overnight, it was really just a refuelling stop and they allowed the diggers to go ashore and I was duty watch that night and the arrangements in Subic Bay were that ships that called in there provided some of their own crew to act as shore patrol from their duty watch. So I was put on duty

23:00 as shore patrol ashore. Anyway we, the guys used to go ashore out the front gate into Olongapo which was a fairly rough and ready city in those days and a lot of the more experienced Aussie diggers they took along two or three slouch hats instead of just one. Anyway they then went ashore and sold them all to the Americans 'cause the slouch hat was always

23:30 considered a high prize by a lot of the Americans. Anyway people had to be back inside the gate at the base by midnight and back on board ships in the base by 1.00 o'clock. So around about 11.30 I'm on shore patrol at the front gate with some US Navy people and US Marines. Our job was just basically checking passes, ID [Identification] cards as they came through the gate back into the base, and

24:00 we had this great collection of Australian Army, Australian Navy, US Navy, US Marine. Servicemen came wandering through the front gate to get into the base and they were wearing a mixture of Australian Army, Australian Navy, US Navy, US Marine uniforms. There were Australians with American gob hats,

there were Americans with Australian naval hats or

24:30 Australian slouch hats, there were guys in army shirts and navy trousers and navy shirts and army trousers, guys with boots and without boots, all this sort of thing, all in a very chirpy mood all wandering through the gates wearing eternal love and brotherhood. Anyway we were given the job of, as they came through determining which country and which service they belonged to. Anything that was not legally part of their uniform was thrown in a pile on the ground and

25:00 from another pile you game them the appropriate item of clothing from their particular service without worrying whether it was the right size or not. So we ended up with a big pile of slouch hats here, given, and some of the Americans were not amused because some of them had paid a fair bit of money to buy a slouch hat and all of a sudden it was being taken off them and thrown in a heap. So if a digger came through without a slouch hat we just gave him the first slouch hat we came to and said put that on, and if he was wearing Yank navy trousers he had to get

25:30 the Yank navy trousers off and get a pair of green trousers back on. So this went on for about an hour at the gate as the boys came through, but there were all, we maintained service discipline.

And did you ever come back to a ship at any stage in another service's uniform?

Not me, no no. I was always a good boy.

Right.

Never guilty of anything conduct prejudicial to the good order of naval discipline.

26:00 That's my story and I'm sticking to it.

And so tell me a bit more about what Subic Bay was like as, in terms of

Well Subic Bay was a large natural harbour which the US Navy had used as a base and they, since World War II they built it into a large base which was basically supportive of the US Fleet Operations for pretty much the whole western Pacific. It had a

26:30 large naval air station which was probably about the same size, or probably even bigger than say something like RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] at Amberley. They had a huge ship repair facility to repair destroyers and cruisers and all sorts. They had a big carrier wharf where they operated aircraft carriers from. They had a marine amphibious, couple of marine amphibious battalions stationed there. It had its own clubs, its own bowling alleys, its own bus service, it's own taxi

27:00 service. They had four or five different clubs within the base and of course going out the front gate you went across a narrow bridge over what was called 'Shit Creek' to the town of Olongapo which by and large was a town full of bars. I was told at one stage there was supposed to be 800 bars in two streets. I never actually physically counted them all myself but I'll, there were a heck

27:30 of a lot of them and it had two main streets, Mangsaysay Drive and Rizal Avenue which were almost continuous pot holes and the locals used to drive around in jeepneys which were basically fancy tarted up jeeps converted into local taxis come busses and for a peso sort of thing you get in the back and drive all over town. They'd stop anywhere, drop people off. The street was full of these things and motor cycles. You'd go into

28:00 town and there's all this endless stream of bars, given that there thousands, at the height of the Vietnam War there were thousands of US servicemen in town at any given night in the place and they just had an endless stream of bars and if you couldn't get it in Olongapo it probably couldn't be gotten anywhere in the world, but it used to be a very very wild town and they used to have some very very exciting things occur, particularly around about Filipino election time when local government people used to

28:30 get a bit excited. Most people, a lot of the people there walked around armed and used to have to check in weapons at bar doors and all that sort of thing. She was a pretty wild town.

And what, I'm interested what differentiates 800 bars. I mean did the bars have different themes or how did you pick where to go?

Well you just went to a bar. Most of them were, would never pass our

29:00 Australian health standards or construction standards. A lot of them were very very, of very dubious repute and most of them had some, obviously with a theme, they had a whole range of mainly American names. They had the New York Bar and the Alamo Bar and the Texas Bar and it just went on and on and on down the street and it was just, it was just the wild west.

What sort of beer did they

29:30 **serve, like American, Australian?**

Well mainly Filipino San Miguel was the most common beer and they used to just serve it in, a couple of pesos and you'd buy a bottle of beer and talk to the ladies and away you went.

How does it stand up to Australian beer?

I prefer Australian beer, but it's better than no beer at all.

And in terms of obviously all servicemen, were the other people there locals?

30:00 Yeah, the local, I think the local population of the town was something about 80,000 and they used to service, the town itself apart from the US Seventh Fleet really didn't have much in the way of industry in those days. I believe these days, well I know the US Navy's pulled out of there, but and I think they've done some development work and what have you, but in those days it was very much a town or a village that

30:30 developed into a town or a city to support the US navy facility and it was really very much attuned to a lot of servicemen coming ashore for a good time for a few nights and then they were back to sea again, back to Vietnam or back to wherever their ship was going, and it was very, they had a fairly large US Navy staff at the base itself too. Most, a lot of the staff there were in fact, you know, were sort of accompanied by family but most of the

31:00 ship's crew sort of thing you had thousands of servicemen there at any given night and they'd been, most of them had been at sea for weeks and they just were out to live a little.

And what was the kind of interaction like between the different, like say Australian and American navy guys?

Generally we got on with them quite well. The only, the main times when we might've had problems was

31:30 with shore patrol, you know, the enforcement of laws. Basically the way they used to try and structure things was that they had American shore patrol and they had Australian shore patrol and they tried to have Australians keep the Australians in line and the Americans keep the Americans in line because sometimes you know, if you have a foreign serviceman trying to enforce the rules it created unnecessary resentments. So generally speaking it went quite well. Mind you they also had some fairly hectic

32:00 occasions when a few fairly big fights broke out. In some of the, when the had things like SEATO exercises going out there you could have people from about six or eight nations ashore there. You had Australians and Americans, you could have Kiwis and you'd probably have English, French, Thai, Korean servicemen all ashore there and it was a fairly cosmopolitan sort of crowd.

And what sort of things

32:30 **would get you in trouble with the shore patrol?**

Generally if there were fights. The general rules for the area were that no going off the main street because they had a lot, there was a lot of crime involved, it wasn't all beer and skittles. A lot, there was in fact a fairly serious threat to servicemen who sort of got themselves out, a lot of the areas were declared out of bounds because people used to get robbed and mugged and what have you. So people who were found in out of bounds areas,

33:00 people who got themselves in fights, occasionally, drug problems were occasional issues. They certainly weren't as big as they are these days I suppose in some parts of the world, but there was an issue. There were also possibly firearm offences, people getting hold of weapons 'cause it was easy to get firearms and guns and sometimes you get some crazy people that want to wander around

33:30 with a gun in their hand and the shore patrol authorities didn't exactly take a happy look at that. Also the Olongapo Police, the Filipino Police themselves were very very strict about a lot of things. People getting robbed was a fairly common thing. A lot of the local hoons used to race around and do things like steal watches off your wrist and they'd ride, sort of ride by on motorbikes and grab

34:00 wallets out of your hand. There was a lot of things like you go to change money and money-changers and you get counterfeit money and things like that. So they're the sorts of issues but the main concern I think for most from the naval point of view was largely making sure that the troops didn't get themselves in a position where they got beat up or mugged or even killed, and that did happen more than once with a few people. No Australians that I'm aware of but certainly with US servicemen from time to time.

And I guess

34:30 **with so many of the services going ashore after having been on the ship for a while and that sort of thing, was there any sort of education given to all of the men about the dangers of the girls in the bars?**

Yes. When the ship first came to Subic you used to get an officer from the Provost Marshal [Military Police] Office used to come on board, you'd get a doctor would come on board and you'd get the story of, you know,

35:00 don't go with certain people, don't go to these areas, these are the rules, our people don't mess around, if you want to play up you'll be treated accordingly. So you used to get the rules explained to you and you used to get some fairly gory details of some of the consequences of dealing with some people from

the medical people.

And would people stick to these rules, take it seriously?

Sometimes, sometimes.

Did anyone get into trouble on the ship like as in

Not really.

35:30 A few boys, you know, a few people, you know, we got involved in fights. A couple of people had things like got ripped off with counterfeit money and things like that. A few minor altercations between people in the bars, no more than generally you'd find in some pub in any town in Australia most of the time. It's just the potential was fairly high. Generally speaking our boys were pretty good, and also the shore patrol kept a pretty

36:00 good eye on things and certainly with the Australians looking after Australians, Americans looking after Americans approach it did sort of tend to avoid too much in the way of very serious issues. Mainly minor disciplinary things that you know, no more than occurs in most country towns from time to time.

And how about things like in the bars, was it heavily focused on American culture? What kind of music would they play and stuff

36:30 **like that?**

It was very very American rock culture. You used to get some bars that would be country and western or blues or something like that, but the bulk of the bars it was sort of the top 40 of the day straight from the US. Top songs like Black is black and all that sort of thing. You could walk down the street and every bar would have a juke box or they'd have a live band and they had some very good

37:00 live bands in a lot of the bars and most of these poor people were working for very little, and they had some very good music and that but it was all the pop rock music of the day.

And did, was there ever any trouble outside of that area to any other parts of the Philippines when you were on leave?

No, not many people tended

37:30 to go, we weren't in the place for long enough and generally speaking you had to be, you only had night, you know, you might have leave from about 4.00 o'clock or maybe midday but you had to be back by midnight sort of thing and there wasn't really the time in most instances to go anywhere else. You just, because you were sort of, there was still work to be done on the ship. They gave you as big a break as they could but the maintenance work you know, that had the ship ready to go back on the line again in three or

38:00 four days time still had priority. It had to be done. Now some of it was done by people from the dockyard themselves because they were doing work that couldn't readily be done at sea, but also there was a lot of catch up maintenance that still had to be done so that the ship, at the end of the day the ship had to be you know, out in two or three or whatever days, ready to go back on the line and that was the first priority and getting time off was only after they made sure that could be done.

So in terms

38:30 **of if you had leave from midday what would you typical activities have been on that day?**

Well occasionally people would go and play sport. Quite often the guys might, you know, if you were, you might finish work, throw on the glad rags, go into one of the bars in the base 'cause they were generally a fairly high standard bar, air conditioned and the drinks

39:00 were fairly cheap so you'd have a few drinks there. Occasionally you might go, there was an island out in the bay itself, I forget the name of it, I think it's Treasure Island or something which had a sort of a resort on, you could catch a ferry out there and go for a swim or something like that. Then you might have a few drinks in one of the bars in the base and then quite often you'd then go into town and seek a night's entertainment but generally you had to be back inside the base by midnight

39:30 and back on board your ship by 1.00 o'clock. If you were wandering around in town after midnight you could be arrested and if you were still wandering around the base after 1.00 o'clock in the morning you could also be arrested.

And would you go out in groups?

Most people went out, very few people went out individually. Most people went out in groups of half a dozen or even more into town. Sometimes they'd come back

40:00 singly but they, depended on whether they got arrested or not. Most of the, even if people got picked up by the shore patrol, generally, the general thing was they put them in a wagon, brought them back to the base and took them back to their ship and simply put them back on board the ship as long as they weren't too raucous about it, go to bed and get your head down. It was basically keep, in most cases, my experience was it was keeping people out of trouble. You know, there were occasions when somebody

got a bit stroppy in which case

40:30 they paid the price.

We'll just change tapes there.

Tape 8

00:38 **OK yeah, just tell us yeah, how many tours you did with the Hobart.**

I did two on board Hobart, one in 1967 and the other in 1970.

And were there differences that you noticed in those three years?

Yeah, there were differences. The destroyers that went up there basically went up for a six-month deployment,

01:00 so we were relived by Perth in the '67 deployment. There were differences in the deployment. The '67 deployment I believe was probably the most intense of the two because we were operating more up in the north of Vietnam working up in the Gulf of Tonkin and doing shore bombardment and Sea Dragon operations along the North Vietnamese coast which meant that

01:30 there was much higher intensity of likelihood of attack. We were frequently fired on, came under fire from shore batteries. There was always a small air threat because the North Vietnamese did have an air force. It wasn't all that active in the result but it was always a consideration, and they also operated quite a number of small coastal patrol boats, which had missile launching systems which were

02:00 potentially a threat to smaller ships. In fact early in the piece in about '64 or '65 they had the Tonkin Gulf incident where North Vietnamese patrol boats attacked a couple of US destroyers which was basically the reason used by the US to start sending ground troops into Vietnam in the first place. So that was always a potential threat and obviously operating off North Vietnam that

02:30 heightened, that was the most likely place where those sort of threats existed. When you were operating of South Vietnam there was less in the way of, there were no real shore batteries that they had to shoot back. They didn't have really anything to attack us with in boat wise and the air threat was much lower also. But having said that there was just the sheer intensity of the US military air activity in the area was in itself a

03:00 threat. In fact, Hobart was attacked and damaged and a couple of people killed and a number of people injured in one attack by the US aircraft, US Air Force aircraft.

Were you on board for that?

No, that was on the ship's second deployment. I wasn't on it at the time but she was hit by a number of missiles which did fairly significant damage and also killed a couple of the crew.

What did the men talk about about this incident?

03:30 It, I suppose a lot of the boys weren't very happy with it. They, naturally enough, couldn't understand how that could occur. From the official story that we heard the, it was a US Air Force aircraft that was looking for helicopters that were supposed to be operating around the demilitarised zone. They in fact attacked, they attacked the Hobart,

04:00 they sank a US patrol boat and they also attacked a US cruiser that same night, where they got, they picked up a target on radar and just fired at it I understand and it turned out to be Hobart and not the target they thought.

How could they mix it up with a helicopter?

That I really don't know, but it sounded incredible to everybody too, but it was just one of those accidents of high intensity operation in war and unfortunately Hobart was

04:30 one of the ships that got hit.

Was there a feeling that maybe there was a bit of this gung ho..?

I think there's probably, the boys thought that the Americans could've been a bit gung ho. They in fact engaged the aircraft from one of our own guns, the guns fired at the aircraft but by then it was all over, that ship had already been hit. It made a couple of passes on the ship.

05:00 **It seems strange that they'd think they'd have the capabilities to have helicopters out there.**

Well, it was most unusual but there's often a tendency for people to think that Vietnamese were a, you know, were a group of peasants running around in black pyjamas with old truck tyre sandals. The North Vietnamese Army was a well equipped, well trained army. They had some of the best equipment that the

Soviet Union could provide,

05:30 good artillery, good radar, good air defence, good missile systems and they were also very well trained and very dedicated soldiers. You mightn't necessarily agree with their philosophy and you mightn't necessarily like them much, but at the end of the day they were very very hard soldiers, and anyone who thinks that they were just a group of people with a few rocks to throw is absolutely wrong. They had some very good equipment, and in fact some of the shore batteries that we used to

06:00 engage, their gunfire or their weapons were at least equal to ours.

Well talking on that, you were mentioning that you couldn't fire upon some delivery of Soviet ships?

Yeah. The Vietnamese used to get, the North Vietnamese used to get a lot of equipment from various Soviet countries, Soviet satellite countries and they used to bring a lot of the equipment through Haiphong Harbour which is just on

06:30 the coast about 50 Ks or so from Hanoi and we used to see the ships coming in delivery things like missile systems, ammunition, what have you and there was a policy most of the time that if the reconnaissance people saw a missile system being set up or a shore, gun battery being set up they were not allowed to engage that battery

07:00 until it actually started to fire. So you could spend several weeks watching them set up a missile system, building up, putting up missile launchers, digging them into the ground, camouflaging them, putting up radar systems and that sort of thing and all they could do is photograph them and look at them and say, yes, it's there and it's progressing, but until they actually fired no one was allowed to actually engage.

How did you feel about that?

Well it was somewhat bemusing to a lot of the servicemen involved, but you

07:30 basically had to wait until they fired first before you were allowed to shoot back. A bit unfortunate if they fired first and they were accurate, but that was the politics of the game at the time.

And could you actually see this all happening?

We couldn't see it from the ship but certainly air, they had photo reconnaissance aircraft flying over North Vietnam all the time day and night and they could watch a lot of these facilities being set up. The same applied to like the air strikes into

08:00 Vietnam. They could see the sites being set up, these surface to air missile sites to fire at US Aircraft. They couldn't attack them until they actually engaged the aircraft and then they could attack them.

Why?

It was just the military political policy at the time. The, I suppose the Americans or our side really were trying not to be seen as being aggressive.

08:30 It's pretty hard to understand how you run a war without being aggressive but that was just the, they were just the rules of the game, of the engagement at the time.

And what about the ships, Soviet ships?

There was no way on earth we were ever going to be allowed to interfere with the Soviet ships, they could sail on by. We'd be shooting into North Vietnam, they sail on by and there was no way we were ever going to be allowed to interfere with them because that would be

09:00 considered inflammatory and escalating the war way beyond where the politics were prepared to take it.

Was that ever strange, watching a Soviet ship go and supply?

Well you'd see the ship and you'd think, well, there goes some more supplies. You were not allowed, there was a big argument I understand, you know, at higher policy level where the US navy wanted to drop mines into Haiphong Harbour to stop the delivery of these supplies. They were not allowed to do it.

09:30 It was only in about 1974 or thereabouts that they finally mined Haiphong Harbour and once they dropped the mines in there there was not another ship went into Haiphong Harbour for the next three years until the Americans came back after the war and cleared them. But the politics of the time didn't allow that to happen.

Well talking about that, what do you think of the navy perspective in the Vietnam War? What comments do you have to say about

10:00 **how they've been portrayed for example?**

Well I don't think, I don't think the navy overall has been understood. In fact most Australians, even a lot of Vietnam Veterans themselves don't even realise the navy were there. To most of those veterans

they see the navy as being the Sydney delivery troops and a couple of destroyers actually escorting the Sydney up there, those sorts of things, but never, most of them don't even realise the navy was actively involved

10:30 in the war when in fact from 1967 through till basically nearly 1971 we had a clearance diving team stationed at Vung Tau and later on at Da Nang and Cau Viet up on the demilitarised zone. We had the destroyer attached to the Seventh Fleet operating on Vietnam operations on six month deployment right through for four years.

11:00 So there was permanently, Hobart did three deployments, Perth did three deployments, Brisbane did two deployments and the Vendetta did one deployment. We had people attached to 9 Squadron RAAF from the Fleet Air Arm operating helicopters with the RAAF and they even had people operating with a US Army helicopter company doing combat assaults in helicopters, out of Black

11:30 ..Black? ..Black Hawk? Black Horse I should say, and they were there for about four years and nobody, most of the Australian servicemen who were up there who were predominantly army, most of them wouldn't know that. They just see, they see the naval involvement in Vietnam as the Sydney, the Vung Tau Ferry, Sydney - Vung Tau and back again and that went on for years to, went from '65 through to '70, '71.

How do you feel about this

12:00 **perhaps lack of recognition?**

A bit disappointed that people don't realise it, and even then there's always the grudging, the grudging, oh yes, the navy was involved in Vietnam maybe perhaps, but that's the way of the world. Nobody really understood what the navy was all about anyway. Much of our focus was on the army side of things.

Do you notice, how do you find

12:30 **this interaction between the different services?**

Generally speaking we got on well, but often understanding each other's problems is difficult because you tend to get a little bit, in may cases, compartmentalised, you concentrate on the job you do and you really don't know, often you don't know what's going on around you with other people. Now I found that hard enough with people on the other end of the ship never mind what was happening to people who were 500 Ks away. So

13:00 it's the nature of things and particularly unless you've got an interest in I suppose military history and that you probably never ever really notice what other people have done.

Well talking on the ship, I mean tell us about any particular characters, which were memorable to you?

That's a hard one. I suppose we had all sorts of weird and

13:30 wonderful people. We had people who were I suppose almost hippies in their own peculiar way. People who used to sit around and play Jews' harps and used to try to buck the system in their own little way to try to cheer people up. It used to be quite funny, we used to run ship's concerts and that and it's quite interesting some of the talent that used to come on ship's concerts. People getting all dressed up and putting on little skits and plays and things like that. You used to have all sorts of

14:00 weird and wonderful people. Some very strange people of course after a few beers on shore, but we had a great mixture of people and people who surprisingly enough you wouldn't think they had the talent that they had or the attitude they had to [(UNCLEAR)], and some who you used to wonder why they were in the navy in the first place because their attitude didn't really come across as typical of what you expect of service people. Now I don't know what people expect of a service person anyway, but it's just

14:30 amazing the range of attitudes that you find in a group of people that theoretically are part of a team and really you'd expect to have a much more I suppose stereotypical group attitude and yet there'd be people who were sort of way out and wacky in some cases.

Who were some who stood out?

There was a guy called Prof, he was a stoker. He,

15:00 he was one of those sort of people who, he had a very sort of hippie sort of outlook. What he was doing in the navy I could never quite understand. I remember seeing him, he was, when we were in the States I'd been to Phoenix and he took a couple of weeks leave and he said he was going to Mexico. Anyway I remember coming back from Phoenix one Sunday afternoon I was coming back to the ship. I got out of the plane at Los Angeles Airport and I'm walking through the underpass under the runway

15:30 and here's this person walking along suddenly in front of me and he looked like Speedy Gonzales in a dirty old pair of Mexican, you know, canvas trousers and a shirt and a big straw sombrero with a guitar over his back and a navy overnight bag. And old Prof was coming back, he'd just spent two weeks in Mexico and he looked like he'd just been dragged through the Sonora Desert or something and he was one of those people, he used to go somewhere

16:00 and had, very good on languages and he could usually get into somewhere and start, pick up key working phrases of the language very quickly. He was quite funny, he'd get into a bar, a bar in Olongapo and he'd be talking to a lot of the bar people in Tagalog as opposed to American English which most of them and he used get on with people and, but he, one of the things he did do, he decided we needed to ease tension on the ship a bit. So what he did, he went and bought, you know

16:30 these little clickers, the little party clicker things? They're like, they're usually like a little insect and they've got a little metal, and they go click click click. He went and bought I don't know how many of these and he got a tin of dark green paint, army green paint and he painted each one of those and he drew a little, you know the broad arrow, government broad arrow on each one of them and he gave one to everybody on the ship and

17:00 he used to say, well look, if ever you feel tense what you've got to do is play it, and people used to be walking around the ship and every so often you'd hear click click click click click as someone played, and it was somewhat subversive I suppose but it was quite funny the way it took off for a while. It only lasted as a fad for a few days but it was quite funny the trouble he went to and he took it around and everybody used to walk around with one of these damn things in their pocket and used to go click click click click and every so often you'd be walking around the ship and you'd hear click click click click click.

17:30 Anyway these are the sorts of, he was probably a little bit different old Prof but there were other people you know, who'd put on good skits and you could always depend on them for a laugh when things were getting, you know, you were getting a bit tired and a bit tense, somebody would always find the funny side of things or come up with something totally ludicrous and entertain the masses for a short time, but certainly when we came to things like ship's concerts which we tried to run every so often some of the talent that came out of there and

18:00 musicians and poets and some of the poetry was somewhat unprintable in some cases.

In what ways?

It was somewhat risqué, not totally suitable for mixed company in that day and age I suppose, but used to be quite interesting some of it.

Do you remember any of it?

I remember a lot of it.

Do you want to tell us any?

Is that someone there? I think it might've been Basil.

Do you want to tell us any?

18:30 It would take too long.

OK.

You'd run out of tape.

Was there anyone who was picked on a bad way or had rumours about them?

Not really. It's like every other field of human endeavour where people are working under stress and pressure. There were people who had bad days, it was probably Rosemary, there were people who you know, who had little spats and little hissy fits,

19:00 a bit of fur and feathers occasionally but overall people got on pretty well. Most of the people were well skilled in dealing in a, you know, working in a close environment under fairly stressful conditions. People used to get a few beers into them and have a bit of a sobby fit and that sort of thing and generally speaking they got over it fairly quickly. 20 Years later it might've been different, who knows?

How was your experience of coming home? Did you notice anything about the change in

19:30 **attitude towards the Vietnam experience?**

Certainly after the '67 deployment we came back and were generally better accepted. We had our march through Sydney and the ship won an award, US Navy unit citation and that was presented to the ship's company and all that sort of thing. Generally our people were satisfied. I think after the '70 trip though there was

20:00 less happiness. The anti-war movement was much more vocal and it was, coming home was I suppose treated much more low key and I think disappointed a few people because a lot of people did enormous work up there. It was very high stress, very hard work and it was also in some cases fairly dangerous and people I suppose expected or hoped for more when they came back

20:30 and some people felt disappointed that either for various political reasons quite often coming home was played down and apart from family, a few family and friends it didn't mean much to a lot of society and I

think that didn't help a lot of people.

How about yourself personally? How did you feel about it?

Well I suppose at least had the advantage of having done the '67 trip and I think we felt there was an

21:00 appreciation when we came back. Therefore we could sort of, those who did both trips or did more than one trip had something to fall back on, whereas people you just did say the '70 trip they came back and they often, I think a lot of them felt nobody really appreciated their effort. There was also I think a lot of people thought there were a lot of lies told on both sides about what the war was about. Then again history has only said that the first casualty

21:30 of war is truth. So right, wrong or indifferent people probably have to accept it.

Tell us about meeting you wife?

I met my wife when I came back from the first trip. She was in the navy, she was a WRAN [Women's Royal Australian Naval Service, WRANS] down at HMAS Cerberus. After I came back from the first trip I was posted to Cerberus, went down there for a while.

22:00 She was working down there as a transport driver in the transport section. I met her and we started going out together, eventually got married and we had a child before, our eldest daughter, before I went to the '70 trip. It was, the '70 trip was pretty hard for her of course because she had, she was left at home with one young kid and I think the families really were the ones, they also suffered too because

22:30 their loved ones are away and they're left at home and life goes on and the rest, you know, often the rest of the community didn't give a damn. But what is it, 30 odd years later we're still here so we must've got something right.

So what stage were you at of your naval career after this second trip to Vietnam?

By the time we came back in '70 I'd done seven out of nine

23:00 years. I was passed out to be qualified, to be promoted to petty officer. When I came back I was posted to Canberra to navy office. I was driver for the Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Peek. I did that job for a short while and then I went out to HMAS Harman, which is the shore base outside Canberra and I was doing the job of the transport

23:30 petty officer out there running the transport section for a while. Because I had decided that I wasn't going to sign on and go, do any more than my nine years I was due for promotion to petty officer but because I wasn't signing on I didn't have long enough to go on my enlistment, and wasn't promoted. I decided nine years was enough, I'd go and do something else with my life. So after nine years

24:00 I got out and moved to Queensland and here I am. I came to Queensland, I worked for the Queensland Government initially in the Department of Harbours and Marine for a couple of years. Then I got a job with the Department, or State Emergency Service. I worked with State Emergency Service in Brisbane, ended up working for them for 28 years and just retired February this year.

And how do you feel overall

24:30 **about your naval experience?**

Well it was like every job. It had good days and bad days. I wouldn't have missed it. Certainly I saw things I would never have seen and a lot of other people haven't seen. I suppose it formed a lot of my attitudes to the world and life, but certainly I wouldn't have missed it for quids. I met a lot of good people. I'd like to think we offered a service to Australia

25:00 that, while it may not always have been appreciated, was as good as the country could get and I've always been proud of my naval service. Additional to that coming out of the navy I, just for a change of scenery I joined the army reserve and did 11 years in the army reserve with water transport and then with Queensland Mounted Infantry. So basically my service

25:30 involvement totalled 20 years, nine years full time in the navy and 11 years in the army Reserve and I always thought it was a, always enjoyed it.

And do you think that appreciation has come around in recent years or changed?

I think probably from 1970 to maybe the late 1980s there was a bit of a dip where people got, you know, somewhat anti-military and

26:00 blamed the servicemen for all the ills of the world and all the rest of it. I think probably from the late '80s and early '90s there was an understanding that the servicemen did what they were told to do. They weren't the brutal animals that some people tried to portray them as. They provided as honourable service as war allows them to provide

26:30 and they did Australia proud. Now whether that's politically acceptable or not is probably in the eyes of the individual, but by and large we fought an unpopular war and we did it well, and certainly did it, as I said, as honourably as any war is allowed to be fought, you know. There are mistakes and there are

things that are done in war that are absolutely

27:00 bloody terrible, but that doesn't, that's not always totally the fault of the servicemen. It's also the fault of the people who put them there.

Can I just ask you, I just got a note that that might make a little noise.

Sorry.

OK, can I ask you about your reaction when you heard the news about the fall of Saigon?

I suppose I was disappointed. I thought

27:30 well you know, there's a lot of people, Australian, American and Vietnamese who fought hard. The North Vietnamese and the communists weren't the good guys that a lot of people would like to portray them and if you look at Vietnamese history and communist history, while their system may have had I suppose some redeeming points, by and large they proved themselves to be very

28:00 brutal people in running countries. They might have hid behind nationalism as being their reason for being but what they did to their country before the American war after the French pulled out and then during the American war was bloody awful and yet it tended to be glossed over and all the bad guys seemed to be on our side. So, and I think the number of people who then became boat people

28:30 and, or shot through to Cambodia or into Thailand or wherever suggests that the North Vietnamese or the new Vietnamese Government wasn't exactly the great nationalist friends of the average bear in Vietnam that they'd like to portray.

Did it make you feel kind of sad?

Yeah, I felt sad and disappointed for the,

29:00 for the blood and the sweat and toil that had gone into that war and by and large it went down the gurgler.

What about some of those images you'd seen on the TV? What would run through your mind seeing helicopters pushed off and that kind?

I suppose you just felt sad. In some cases you just said, oh stuff it, but that's

29:30 war and that's the way the world is at times. We haven't have a perfect system in the last 10,000 years and we probably won't have one for the next 10,000 years either.

And what inspired you to join up with the army reserves after a period?

I still enjoyed service life. I didn't really want to do any further full time service and I thought I'd join a

30:00 reserve. I could've joined the naval reserve but I thought I wanted to do something a bit different so I went to another service. I enjoyed it, the camaraderie, the commitment wasn't as great as full time service but you still got to do a few of the things we used to do or a variation of that and I just enjoyed a lot of the life, lifestyle.

What was the say greatest kind of similarities

30:30 **between**

Probably the mateship and the common purpose and that sort of thing. There were differences of course. They, their clothing was different, they spoke a little differently, some of the work they did was a bit different but overall there were many similarities in comradeship and group purpose and all that sort of thing.

What do you think overall, mainly looking at your naval service, was kind of the best things that you gained from it?

31:00 I suppose an understanding of the world outside of Australian and seeing I suppose people in some of their, some very good circumstances and some people in some very bad circumstances and an appreciation of how people can react and how these things can affect these people's lives.

And what about the worst, worst of times?

31:30 The worst of times was wondering why the bloody hell are we bothering? Does anybody really care? In fact is there anybody out there who is not actively against this?

Is that especially in the context of this return from Vietnam that we were talking about just before?

Yeah, I suppose, but it also I suppose went on to, broader into the

32:00 community itself you know, the more you looked into the community. It, you really didn't feel as though anybody much cared, you know, blood, sweat, toil and tears, the whole bit, and some absolute bloody

horror for some people and a lot of people really didn't care.

Did you feel at the time there was a real disconnection between a lot of the civilian population and the military?

I think so.

32:30 The military for a long time became a great big bogey man. Anybody who was in the military either had to be brain dead or an absolute bloody monster or any combination of the two, and people just really blamed the servicemen for the ills of the world.

Where would you hear this or how would you feel this kind of idea coming across?

Largely looking at I suppose people's attitude,

33:00 news, the media, the general attitude of, you know, the attitude that we lost the war and we killed people by the million and all the rest of it, and I suppose there was a bit of a tendency for people to sort of say well really the North Vietnamese were just sweetness and light

33:30 personified and all they had was a certain national fervour, and yet if you look a the history of Vietnam, you look at the history of China, you look at the history of Russia, you look at the millions of people who were killed by people of the same ilk, Cambodia, and for some reason people, we seem to be able to sort of gloss over that as being just a little foible of theirs, whereas if anybody shot back at them or got involved in the fight to change it, they were then seen as being an interfering, war-mongering

34:00 bastard.

In this context do you feel it was worth it then, Australia's and America's involvement?

It's hard to know. If you see, I suppose if you look at the Vietnam War in isolation, just purely as one war, it's very hard to say was it worth the trouble? Everybody should've stayed at home and opened

34:30 another tinnie. But I suppose if you look at it in the broader span of geo-politics of the, communism versus the rest, capitalism and all the rest of it, all the other isms, basically the free world versus the communist world, it was one part of a bigger struggle and I suppose within reason our side one eventually because where's the Soviet Union which was really the

35:00 leading light that financed and supported all of this. Now I'm not saying our side was absolutely pure as the driven snow and perfect either. There's enough raving lunatics running the world to, on both sides of the fence, but I suppose if you look at the history of the two, the lesser of two evils was certainly their side.

And

35:30 **do you feel a part of the Anzac tradition yourself?**

I've never thought of myself, I suppose I am but I've never really thought of myself as part of the Anzac tradition. There's some suggestion that, you know, servicemen these days are trying to ride on the back of the ANZACs and the ANZACs are way up there as some special breed. They were a group of people who served their country. I suppose

36:00 they served well. I'd like to think that we served well in our own way, our circumstances were different. I suppose we are part of the Anzac tradition in terms of the country's history. We've got a long, for a relatively new country we'd got a long military history and most of it has been a very good history. Not always a pleasant one but generally being on the side of the angels and generally doing it

36:30 quite well.

On that note, do you have any final thoughts or final words you'd like to add?

Not really. I think I've said all that I can say without pontificating too much. No, not really.

Anything at all you'd like to add?

I suppose if any of this is ever used I suppose I hope it gives, or gives some

37:00 perspective or a part of the Vietnam War or the Anzac legend I suppose, or Anzac history. I hope it gives some perspective to people as part of, hey, we were there, this is what we, some of what we did. Some it was very good, some of it was very hard. It's probably just a part of a greater picture and I hope it's of some

37:30 benefit to somebody.

I'm sure it will be. Thanks, thanks a lot John.

INTERVIEW ENDS