



ORAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS

INTERVIEWEE: WO1 Colin Watego

INTERVIEWER: Margo Beasley

PLACE: Victoria Barracks Sydney

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TRANSCRIPT

0.00 MB: This is an interview with WO1 Colin Watego. It's taking place in the Sergeants' Mess at Victoria Barracks. The project is the Aboriginal Ex-Servicemen and Women's Oral History Project which is being done on behalf of the City of Sydney's History Program. My name's Margo Beasley and the date is the 13th of October 2008.

So, Colin – if I may call you that - - -

CW: Yes, absolutely.

MB: - - - perhaps for people who are listening to this you could describe what your rank actually means here at Victoria Barracks, if we could just start with that.

CW: Yep. O.K, I think the first thing that our listeners need to understand is that throughout the Defence Force you have two basic streams in terms of rank. You have your officer or your commissioned officer stream and what that means is that young men and women in the Defence Force, they can either go to ADFA, which is the Australian Defence Force Academy in Canberra, they do a degree, they come across, in the case of Army to RMC, which is the Royal Military College at Duntroon and there they continue with additional studies

and they actually are commissioned by Her Majesty, the Queen, and hold a commission as they are appointed into the Defence Force. The other stream is what we call the "other rank" stream and that is where, like I did as a young man joined the Defence Force, joined the Army, went through recruit training and then over a period of years throughout my time in the Defence Force I did a series of courses and training which allowed me to be promoted.

1.58 Now, WO1 is the highest possible rank that I can achieve with the exception of one other rank in Army and that is Warrant Officer. There's only one appointment for that and he is the Regimental Sergeant Major, Army. But as for myself there's a WO1. The only way that I could be promoted to any higher rank now would be to actually take a commission, become a commissioned officer.

MB: Right. Thank you for that introduction. Now, I'd like to go right back to if you could just tell me where and when you were born.

CW: Yes. I was actually born in a small town in northern New South Wales called Bangalow. My family settled in Byron Bay which is the most – Cape Byron is the most easterly point of Australia. There's a lot of history and a lot of heritage there; Wategos Beach, which is the namesake of my ancestors. I grew up there as a young man, going back, visiting relatives there.

MB: I think you told me Wategos Beach was actually named for your grandfather – is that correct?

CW: Yes, named after my grandfather and coming from my father's side of the family - my dad grew up there. At a young age my father in his wisdom decided to move to Queensland, to Brisbane, to better further our education prospects and as such we moved into the southern suburbs of Brisbane. Back in those days it was pretty tough. I come from a – my father worked in those days for the Postmaster General's Department; he was a postman. We lived in a two bedroom fibro home – it was Housing Commission – in the southern suburbs of Mount Gravatt.

4.02 I spent most of my growing up years there, even though I used to continue to go back to Byron Bay to visit relatives, family and friends and I still have relatives in Byron Bay in New South Wales. At around about the age of just about twenty I decided that – at school I joined the Cadets and I've always had a heart after the Defence Force and I thoroughly enjoyed that. I then joined the Army Reserve - and in fact my brother and I joined together – served there for a substantial period of time and then decided to join over to the Regular Army. I have now been – that was all back in 1974, so to date I would guess I've served in the Defence Force now for thirty four years as an artillery – as a gunner – I joined artillery as a gunman.

MB: As a gunner?

CW: Yes, as a gunner.

MB: And what year were you born?

CW: I was born in 1953.

MB: So, that makes you about fifty five now?

CW: Yes, that's right.

MB: And you've told me earlier on another occasion that your name, Watego, is actually a Kanak name – is that correct?

CW: Yes, there's a lot of – I guess for us to have an understanding of my ancestry, my father's grandfather's family – there's a couple of schools of thought – one of them is that – and the most significant is that my ancestors on my father's side of the family come from Torres Strait Islands and in particular the Murray Islands. And I have actually seen documentation where one of my great uncles was actually brought over to Australia as a Kanaka and used – he cut sugar cane up in the northern – and we have got – there's a lot of Wategos up in northern Queensland who I honestly don't believe I've met but as I understand it they are related.

6.12 My mother's side of the family – she was English and with a good old name like Jarrett and my grandfather's family come also from around the northern New South Wales area but Ballina - so, that's obviously how my parents met. But my grandfather - - -

MB: So, your mother – sorry, that's your mother's father?

CW: My mother's father, correct.

MB: So, not Aboriginal?

CW: No, no, they're not - English descent. In fact, there's Scottish and a bit of Welsh, I think, and a bit of Irish and a little bit of mixed bag of everything there that - - -

MB: Very Australian.

CW: Yes, very, very early Australian – so, a typical family. But for me, as far as I personally am concerned, I see my roots as coming from the northern New South Wales area; that's where I was born, that's where my grandfather and my dad was born, in Billinudgel which is a small town just out of Byron Bay. That is, in terms of – that's Bundjalung country as far as my Indigenous heritage is concerned

and I feel that I have a – my own personal ancestry for myself, I relate back to that area, particularly the beach, the coastal waters of Byron.

MB: In other words, what I think you're saying is you identify as an Aboriginal man?

CW: Oh, absolutely.

MB: But also another really strong part of your identity is your life in the Army.

CW: Yes.

MB: It's been your life, really, hasn't it?

CW: Well, it has. And it's funny: when you choose to join the Defence Force it's not just a career, a job, it is a lifestyle. It has impacted on many ways on my whole family. I'm married to a lovely lady. We've got three children – all adult children now – and three granddaughters. My oldest daughter is married.

8.15 But when you're in the Defence Force, irrespective of the service, you do do a lot of travelling and it does take its toll on your family after a period of time, so you've just got to be cognisant of these things, that you're not just – that's if you're, you know, a married person. For a single person it's fantastic; you know, you get to see the world, you get to do all the things that you want to do, you stay fit and healthy and it's a great lifestyle.

MB: I think there has been more awareness in recent years about the effect on families – is that correct?

CW: There is. The Defence Force work very, very hard in many areas and many arenas to protect the most important interest to a married person who is in fact their family. If you have a soldier or a sailor or an airman who's struggling in the family life, well then you can understand where their attention – you're not going to have their full attention when it comes down to applying themselves to the military life and that's absolutely critical. So, Defence Force have put in some fantastic initiatives to look after the family and even to the extent where, for example, many of my postings that I had was what we call "MS", which is "married but separated for service reasons". They actually pay your accommodation to bring your family up, they pay the airfares to reunite you with your family several times a year. When you do move they really look after you in terms of it doesn't cost the individual, they're not put out of pocket in any way. In fact, they actually compensate our Defence personnel for the inconvenience of having to move and reestablish in new locations.

10.13 The areas of health for the military person - but the resources that our families can use in many, many bases all over Australia, be it Army, Navy or Air Forces are equipped and do cater for the needs of the family in terms of childcare centres. In Pukapunyal, for example, they've got every - even though it's an isolated place in terms of what we would consider in a metropolis like Sydney - Defence have sporting youth organisations and a lot of the people that run those are Defence personnel who have a vested interest in all that - no different to what any other mum and dad would do with their local club, you know, in your local suburbs. So, they really do work very hard to look after the family unit because it's in our interest to do so.

MB: Now, when you say you were in the Cadets at school - - -

CW: Yes.

MB: - - - and you were always attracted to army life, was that because you had had relatives who had had that kind of life or was it something else?

CW: I always - I guess for me there's been some really highlight points in my own career. One of them in particular is one of the - from a soldier's perspective now, I'm talking not the officer, so I'm just going to delineate between officer and soldier - but from a soldier's perspective I would say that I could confidently say that most soldiers, if they can reach my rank, Warrant Officer Class 1 and hold the appointment as the Regimental Sergeant Major of a unit most would be very, very happy with that or their equivalents in any of the services.

12.05 **MB: So, it's quite a senior position?**

CW: Oh, it's a very senior position, a very, very senior position. Now, for myself, my own father was artillery, he was a gunner, and I think for me, when I took over as the Regimental Sergeant Major of the 8th/12th Medium Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery - which is now located in Darwin - their colour patch, the patch that those soldiers wear to identify themselves to that unit is exactly the same colour patch my father wore when he was a serving soldier. So, to me, that's very important - I put a lot of emphasis and a lot of significance on ceremony, protocol and tradition and, for me, I must admit that that was one of the highlights of, you know, my own military career. Now that I've indicated that there are Regimental Sergeant Majors or Warrant Officer Class 1s, you do have different levels and it depends on the size and the formation that you would be working in. Now, for me, the pinnacle for me was I was the, what we call in artillery the Regimental Master Gunner which is the absolute top job in artillery for the Warrant Officer Class 1. I was the corps RSM for artillery and that was a fantastic appointment and obviously with it comes a lot of responsibility but it was also great - and a lot of challenges. It was

absolutely, you know, extremely – given that my family, the men in my family have been gunners it has even more significance for me.

MB: Was your father's association with the Army and the Defence Forces a happy one?

14.01 CW: My dad never spoke much about it. From what I can understand, he never complained about it and I know that in my own family – like, I come from a family of six; four boys and two girls – three of us have all been Army. I was the first to go in. My younger brother, twelve months junior to me – in fact, our two regimental numbers when we first enlisted were only one digit apart – so, I joined and then directly behind me was my brother, the next oldest, and then some years later our youngest brother also joined. Now, I think – and I cannot – because my dad died at a young age as well, so I haven't had the benefit of sharing a lot of these things with my dad but at no time did I ever hear him complain about his time in the Defence Force. I have got photographs at home and I know my mother has photographs at home of him with mates and the only comments that I can ever recall him talking about were the good times that he had with the mates and the camaraderie that you develop through the Defence Force. It is very unique because it's a funny thing - like, you will share – because your life is so – in the Defence Force you spend a lot of time with other men and you get a very special bondage with other men that is unique anywhere else, a camaraderie and esprit de corps and you can understand that and we work very hard within Defence to develop that because you really could be finding yourselves in situations where it could be life threatening. So, it's more than just good buddies, it's more than just mates, it's definitely more than acquaintances in the teams that you work in and they are lifelong friendships.

16.08 You may not see each other for years but you just never – when you do catch up it's always worthwhile going out of your way or the opportunity to share with each other and make that effort.

MB: And you think your father had that same experience?

CW: Absolutely, absolutely.

MB: Did he serve in WWII?

CW: Yes.

MB: Where did he serve?

CW: He was a gunner but he was what they call "coastal gunner", O.K, because it's 8th/12th Medium Regiment it's artillery but it's a medium regiment. O.K, so what I mean by that is the calibre of the equipment is very big. My father was also coastal artillery which means big

calibre guns as opposed to the field equipments that are available out there. Now, like I said, I never got to speak to my dad a lot but I do know that in some of the experiences that he did have – and some of them weren't too pleasant – but I know that he was at one stage did a stint in Newcastle in the coastal guns, the coastal batteries in Newcastle, because he did share with me some things that happened there which weren't very pleasant but that's when there was a war goin' on and those sorts of things, even as close on our own shoreline in Australia things were happening. So, you know, I guess apart from that I've never really gone back and tracked down his posting history. But that being said his brother, his oldest brother, actually died at Alamein.

MB: Did he?

17.55 CW: Yes, and there's a memorial at Canberra now. So, even within his own family, of the siblings, out of the brothers and he came from a large family, the eldest was killed in Alamein – he never come home - - my dad served, another brother that I know served and also one of his cousins who were all – and the others actually were deployed overseas.

MB: Did your father actually go overseas?

CW: Not that I'm aware of.

MB: No. You think he was just in Australia?

CW: No, yes.

MB: One of the reasons I'm asking about him is because there is a quite a kind of concerted push at the moment to get recognition for - - -

CW: Yes.

MB: - - - Aboriginal servicemen and women and ex servicemen and women and there is certainly a lot of anecdotal evidence to say that in the past some of those people were treated very badly when they left the forces and I wondered if you knew if that may have been the case with your father.

CW: From my father's perspective I can honestly only talk to you about my experiences and, I guess, being Indigenous - and I've got a lot of them – thirty four years of serving in the Defence Force. I do know for a fact that when my father did come home he was well looked after because my father died at a very young age – he died at the age of fifty three and I was quite young then myself when my dad died – I know that through the Defence Force and war services my mother

and the rest of the family were secure. My dad purchased a house, the house that I was talking about earlier, through war services.

MB: So, he got a war service loan?

19.67 CW: He got a war service loan; he got the war service home. How much of that transitioned across to the PMG - know that today as a Defence member if I was to leave the Army and transfer into, say, the Department of Correctional Services my super and things would be able to transition across – I can't say that was the case then but I do know my mother was very well looked after.

MB: Would she have got a War Widows Pension?

CW: She got a – she does, I know that for a fact.

MB: Still has it?

CW: Still gets it, even today. And I think my dad's been dead now for – goodness sakes, it's have to be – he died in, I think it was 1985. No, it was 1980. So, he's been dead over thirty-odd years. So, but mum's been very well looked after by that, so I can only tell you my experiences and my family's experiences.

MB: Well, I think that's one of the interesting things about this project, is that although a lot of those very negative experiences did happen to a lot of people that it's not the only story; there are many different stories and many different perspectives on this.

CW: Yes, yes.

MB: And I think your own story, really, has been a pretty positive one.

CW: Oh, I'm more than happy with – and, I mean, that's easy for me to say but just seeing what – in fact it was thirty five years ago when my dad passed away, so for thirty five years my mother has been looked after in all their senses you could say by Defence, you know, through war services, war service homes and, of course, her PMG Department and whatever they do as well – so, yes.

22.00 **MB: And for yourself, if you don't mind me asking – I'm asking really just because it's what this project is about – but I'm just wondering if you ever experienced any issues about your Indigenous heritage in the Army?**

CW: I guess one of the things that I – particularly being in a leadership role within the Defence Force now – one of the things that I really enjoy about the Defence Force is that – this is from my experiences, and I'm going back nearly thirty five years – I've never had any, never

ever had any negative abuse, any negative feedback. Mind you, I've had my nicknames but nicknames in the Defence Force are a term of endearment and it's just a phase you go through. In fact, I worked with a gentleman, honestly, for over twenty years and I kept calling him Fred because I honestly thought his name was Fred. I only found out not so long ago that his real name is Rod. You know, but this is just the way it works, particularly in this organisation - so, particularly from a soldier's perspective.

MB: So, what kind of nicknames would you have had?

CW: Wattie was one of 'em. When I was a junior I used to be called 'The Black Duck' – those two in particular.

MB: But you didn't feel as though that was any - - -

CW: No, not at all, you know.

MB: They were affectionate or friendly names?

CW: Exactly. And, in fact, you know, it was almost like an accepted – I mean, if you didn't have a nickname you'd be worried.

MB: It's a problem.

23.56 CW: You know, you'd be thinking you weren't part of the crew and part of the mob. But, mind you, that was quite some years ago and I guess as you go up through the ranks – it's all right when you're at that level and you're no different to kids at school, I guess, you know, because as recruits and as young soldiers you're in that environment but as you go up, well then obviously your name changes completely to your rank.

MB: Because you've got more formal relationships?

CW: And we insist on that. In fact, after I got promoted to my very first promotion all the nicknames dropped, see, because I was no longer considered – you are but you're not. You know, like, you've got to be able to start exercising that authority and that's when you've got to be – familiarity can breed contempt and a whole bunch of other things – and you've got to be doing what the role that you're now in. So, I can honestly say that when I first got promoted all that other stuff sort of stopped, so, you know.

MB: And have you enjoyed being in positions of authority, does it suit you?

CW: Yes, I believe it does. And in fact one of the things I'm actually doing at the moment is I'm actually working with a few youth groups in my own time and I actually work very hard – and one of the groups is

Indigenous that I work with. And one of the things that I've found is that by working in authority, by exercising authority, it's a great way – particularly under the auspices of Defence because there's an accepted – people know that when you're talking about Defence there is going to be authority and it is something that we foster and we put in that we – it's not an option, it's there and there's a very good reason for it.

26.06 Because we're talking about taking men and women into battle and there's no negotiations, there's no room for that. Once the decisions are made what's got to happen, that's what's got to happen. But even within the groups that I run, one of the things that I've noted is that once you exercise authority, set the boundaries it's an amazing thing how people look for that. I've just recently come back with a youth group that I take away, which was half of them were Indigenous kids, the other half were just a mixed group of different cultures and I found that once I – and I run it like a mini boot camp – and I found that once I put in process all the boundaries, there is a rank structure involved in it, it's an amazing thing how the teamwork builds and the leadership because then you can exercise the leadership by allowing people, give them the opportunity to exercise their leadership within the boundaries that you set in place. And it's an amazing thing to see these young people. Now, these young people are between the ages of twelve and seventeen, it's mixed gender, male and female. Some of them, as I said, come from low socio-eco environments, some of them are just your everyday kid on the street who come from fairly well-off families but once you get them all together and you put them in this environment it's a really good equaliser. So, yes, in terms of the leadership I think from my perspective I think it's an opportunity that if people do have that opportunity you just don't know what's there until you've actually had a go at it and be given the opportunity to allow it to develop.

28.12 **MB: And you've enjoyed it?**

CW: Oh, very much, very much.

MB: I think that the youth work that you're talking about that you have a very active life away from the Army.

CW: Yes.

MB: I think you've told me before that this has developed in recent years - - -

CW: Yes, it has.

MB: - - - I think partly with the idea that you need to have a life apart from the Army.

CW: Yes, you do.

MB: You've spoken to me about coming to realise how much families were affected by - - -

CW: Yes, yes.

MB: - - - the husbands moving around all the time and being absent all the time - - -

CW: Absolutely.

MB: - - - and their mind being on the job all the time and so you've consciously built up another area in your life - - -

CW: Yes.

MB: - - - with youth groups and I think often in association with your church, is that correct?

CW: That's correct. It's funny – I guess I've always had a heart for young people. I mean, even before I was involved in the church that I now go to and even before I was involved in the studies that I am now doing, part of my background was, before I became a full time soldier, a regular soldier, even as a part time soldier I used to own squash courts.

MB: Did you?

CW: Yes. And what I used to do there was I had a very, very strong youth following, a junior club. And what I learnt, I guess, years ago is that there is a lot of potential in our youth. All it really needs is for someone to take the time with some guidance and some boundaries and a shove – there is a shove involved but they get to make the choice, you give it as an option.

29.58

And even back – I'm going back many years now – I had one of the strongest junior clubs in terms of numbers in Brisbane and one of the things that I found is that no matter what you do you're always going to get your jets, you're always going to have your handful of very skilled young people and because they are skilled and being given the opportunities they exceed, they excel and they get all the good trips and all the rest – no different to any other organisation, I guess. But when you give a whole bunch of kids an opportunity, no matter how good or bad, whatever their level is, to go away and to train up for something and be part of a bigger team, even if they're not the best it's amazing the results you can achieve. And I learnt that many years ago and even to the extent where, I guess, with the Defence Force the training that – even when I was a Reserve soldier I used to get involved with youth groups and we used to teach them – it's like

Scouts, I guess, but basic map reading, navigation, different skill sets and they used to - - -

MB: Self reliance.

CW: Exactly, and they loved it, they really do. If they're given the opportunity just to be part of that they embrace it. That's been my experience and it's still happening today.

MB: You mentioned your studies also.

CW: Yes.

MB: Now, can you tell us a bit about that?

CW: Yes, what I've done is I've been in artillery now for over thirty four years. I'm in my third year of part time distance studies through the Southern Cross College and what I'm actually doing is I'm doing a Bachelor of Theology.

32.09

It's my intention to continue with my studies until I graduate, with the intent of becoming a chaplain in the Defence Force. Already I'm involved with other organisations outside of the Defence Force: I have been accepted on the chaplaincy team at the Liverpool Hospital, for example. So, when I get the opportunity I go and do visitations at the hospital as a chaplaincy team member there. I'm involved with the Outreach arm of the church that I attend out at Liverpool, which is another youth group - and predominantly a lot of them are Indigenous, a lot of them are Indigenous. It was an initiative set up by another young man and I just got on board with it because I had a heart for the youth and I just saw what was going on. And these aren't just kids, this is a community thing; you can get all ages there. And we in fact just recently played a big football match where we got them to the stage where they actually had a team and they developed to a standard where they could take on another team and play a very formal - touch football, of course - which was the highlight of eight months of hard work on their part and they stepped up to that and did very, very well.

MB: Can I ask which church it is?

CW: Yes, I intend Inspire Church at Liverpool.

MB: Inspire?

CW: Yes, Inspire Church - that's the name of the church. It used to be called the Liverpool Christian Life Centre. It's actually at Hoxton Park - Hoxton Park Road, Hoxton Park.

MB: And is that Assemblies of God, is that right?

CW: Yes, it's Assemblies of God church, it's a Pentecostal church. And it's funny that for many years, every time I get posted back to Sydney that it's always been our home church now – that's been over twenty three years.

MB: And your wife's very active in the church, is that correct?

34.00 CW: Yes, she is, she is indeed. In fact, my whole family are very active in the church. But my wife, she's a training and development officer with DADHC, which is the Department of Disabilities, Age and Homecare. She's been in that business for many, many years, looking after the intellectually disabled. Now she's a trainer and a learning development officer with that organisation and she runs training courses that are through the church for the development of members within the church and those that don't attend the church as well – I mean, it's open to anybody who wants to go.

MB: So, the church is very obviously extremely community minded, is that

CW: Very much.

MB: In a way, it's part of your faith, is it, to -?

CW: Well, it is. I think we've always been community active. I mean, church or no church my family – just thinking back – we've always been out there, you know what I mean, like getting involved in stuff, getting involved in the community. Like, when I was in Pukapunyal I actually ran a squash competition for Defence Force kids. Well, there was no faith or church involved there. There is a faith but what it is is I guess it's just the encouraging young people to step up.

MB: You just really like that kind of thing, yes.

CW: You know, and we got it off the ground and had something like fifty five kids in a small town like Pukapunyal, which is a military base in Victoria. All ages, and they were devoted but, you know, I had to be there every Wednesday afternoon after school to coach the squash and then they'd come every Saturday and play their games and it's just a matter of getting involved at the time. And if you've got the skill sets where you can actually pass some of that stuff on I believe that's what it's all about. I guess that's where my faith comes in, that I think we're given a whole bunch of giftings. So, yes, we can do well and excel in that but I think it's more than that, you know, to pass it on to someone else.

36.08 **MB: And why do you want to be a chaplain with the Defence Forces?**

CW: Well, I've experienced – even myself, in my own personal walk and my own personal journey, families are really important in and out of the Defence Force. The chaplains in the Defence Force, as chaplains outside the Defence Force, provide a tremendous support for husbands, for wives and for children, and I'm not just talking spiritual, I'm talking about in the practical application of life. And I guess for me I see myself in a place where there is still – I mean, look, a few months ago one of my roles within the Defence Force in previous times was a paratrooper. Now, those skill sets, I've still got those – I'd need to do a medical – and if I needed to I could go and do that. But a few months ago I went and actually did a parachute jump just to raise money for some kids overseas - which was an action initiative from our church – a whole bunch of us did. I guess the point that I'm getting at is that within the Defence Force there is a need - where you've got families and where you got people you're going to have needs and they're going to be very diverse and complex in some cases, sometimes just to be able to be there to listen, sometimes to be able to give good practical advice. For example, if someone was struggling with a youth who's struggling in their studies or struggling with addiction in those sort of areas.

38.04 And I'm not talking just about youth, I'm talking about anybody – you've got a network of support out there that a lot of people can't – they can all access but they're not all familiar with it. Plus there's also the spiritual aspects of it as well and this is where I feel that I've been called and that's what I'm doing.

MB: You feel you've actually been called?

CW: I do.

MB: And that's a relatively recent experience?

CW: It has been. To the extent where I am involved now, it's – like, I've been doing the studies now for three years, so I guess in all honesty for about the last ten years, I guess, I've had this thing in my spirit where maybe it's time to move to something else – I wasn't sure what. But as I've progressed and things have happened and things have changed and I guess it's become more obvious to me now this is the way I need to go because that's within me and it's amazing how many doors even just changing that has opened up. For example, the last youth group I took away, a bunch of the youth – as I mentioned before – were Indigenous. Now, I've picked up a lot of those kids from the youth group that I'm involved with through the church but I've also had access to, for example, the Miller TAFE through the Aboriginal and Education Training Unit who are also very interested in their youth being involved in something similar. Previous to that, on one of the previous camps that I did, I took away a bunch of kids from Mission Australia. Now, these kids were what we call “high risk” kids. These were kids that were struggling in areas

of their lives – a lot most probably came from dysfunctional families - and just trying to get by and just get on with life was difficult.

40.08 But we had a fantastic outcome as a consequence of that, by just taking the time. The people that come on these things with me are all volunteers – no one gets paid – they volunteer their time and their resources to do it but it's really an investment and what you're doing is you're actually investing into these young people and when you see them turn around, when you see them change, when you see them having a bit of belief in themselves or what they can achieve and what they can do. You see, my own background, I come from a very – my dad was a battler. He did the Defence thing and all that stuff – it was just wonderful – but as a Postmaster General, working in that department as a postie back in the '50s and six kids in a two bedroom fibro house, you don't have to do many maths to work out that there's not a lot of resource there. And I guess I decided at a very early age that there is a lot more out there, I just needed to go seeking and looking. And I think that's one of the things that I can honestly say where Defence is a great equaliser; it will take anyone who wants to have a go and apply themselves. Even if sometimes you don't think you've got the goods, one of the good things about Defence is they are actually established in such a way that they can give you the skills; they develop the things entirely over time. So, from that perspective, but yes, and now I look back on that and it's been – for me, anyway, there've been tough times. I've had to go away from my family, I separated from my family for a long period of time, I've been on operations which takes its toll but at the end of the day - - -

42.08 **MB:** **Sorry, can you tell me a bit about where you went and what you did, just in general terms?**

CW: Well, just in general terms, I guess, that was pretty tough for my family and particularly from a Defence perspective because I was in a leadership role there. And one of the things that you come to terms with over a period of time is that because the Defence does become a great deal of your life you can fall into the trap of losing that balance and I guess it's understandable. From my perspective I've looked back in hindsight and looked at those things and I understand now that what I was doing – even though it was great in terms of, I believe, for what we were doing for the mission and the men - I could have done it better in terms of my family as well. And I guess for me that's one of the things that I believe I had that insight, that I've had that experience that I can pass onto – and I do and I've done it and I've told people, you know, absolutely. And it's amazing, the Defence Commanders do the same thing: they really work hard at maintaining a balance when you can to put your family – because your family is important – but as an individual that's something that you've got to get a grip on and you've got to decide that, "Yes, this is important, my family is important".

MB: So, it's been a long learning curve?

CW: Oh, yes, it has been but it's been a wonderful – I mean, I wouldn't change anything. I've been blessed; I've been posted overseas.

44.00 **MB: Where did you go?**

CW: To Canada. And I took my family. Now, while I was doing the hard yards and it was tough because I was doing a lot of study and a lot of work in Canada but my family had the benefit of seeing just about every major city in Canada, not to mention my daughter ended up going to Disneyland on the way home and we did the Fiji thing and, I mean, you know, so it's - - -

MB: There were benefits.

CW: Oh, absolutely. You know, and there always are and that's an experience that they would not have had.

MB: Without your life in the Defence services?

CW: Exactly, so.

MB: You told me last time we talked – I can't quite remember how we got onto the subject but you were telling me about your home and the things that you had on the walls there.

CW: Oh, yes.

MB: And you were sort of quite entertained by it yourself.

CW: Yes. I guess it's a funny thing. If you were to walk into my house – if you look in this beautiful [army] mess [at Victoria Barracks] and you see a whole bunch of presentations and wonderful military paraphernalia - - -

MB: Lots of lovely old photographs and sabres on the walls.

CW: Yes, exactly. Well, I guess in my place it'd be like walking into the mess because my history of – thirty four years is a long time and you get plaques and you get shields and you get presented different things at different times and any one of the rooms – well, when you first walk in - - -

MB: When you first walk in, what do you see?

CW: Yes, when you first walk in you'll see – well, the first thing you'll see is a replica of a unit flag that was presented to me after we'd come back from operations by my unit.

MB: Where had you come back from then?

CW: We'd been overseas, we'd been over to Timor. So, when we'd come back the unit actually decided to present me with it. Well, they wanted to present me with the unit flag and I refused to accept it because the unit flag, I don't believe, belongs to any single person and it never can – it belongs to everybody.

46.10 But what they did is they actually had a seamstress or someone sew up a duplicate – like, a replica, sorry – and they presented it and they presented it and it's fairly large and it's fantastic.

MB: So, that's when you first walk in?

CW: Yes, you'll see that hanging up on the wall and a big plate on it but you'll see this sort of – what I'm indicating here is a soldier - - -

MB: A statue.

CW: - - - a statue of a soldier with a weapon - well, in my case, being an artilleryman - and there's soldiers with big cannons and there's guns and there's replicas of different equipment, different - - -

MB: Any portraits or photographs of anyone?

CW: Yes, we've got a family – in fact, it's funny: one of our first family portraits was with me in uniform. So, straight away there's a very large, one of the presentations I got when I got back from Canada. As I mentioned earlier, I'm an airborne gunner. I like to relate to that because I spent a lot of my military career with the airborne and when I was in Canada I actually got permission to have some paratrooping with the Canadian forces. So, in the process of all that happening, there's actually a very large portrait of me exiting an aeroplane. Someone's taken it and then blown it up and then framed it and presented it to me with – when you jump in Canada with the Canadians they actually present you with a set of wings when you land on the DZ. So, they had them all mounted in this great big thing and they presented that to me before I left to come back to Australia, which was quite awesome. So, I have a tremendous amount of pride and history in my military career and that becomes fairly obvious and apparent when you walk into my house.

48.05 **MB: Do you have other non military decorations there in your house?**

CW: Oh, we do but when you first walk in you do, you get absorbed by the military stuff because, I mean, it's significant to me anyway. If you were to walk into my garage - which has sort of now been converted into a family room because we're all into music, my whole family.

MB: Are you?

CW: Oh, very much. Always have been and I think that's one of the things that are gifts that's been passed down from both my father and my wife's father. My wife's father was a trumpeter and played drums and my dad was a pianist and he would hear any song, just hear it once, could not read one note of music, but he could play.

MB: He could reproduce it, yes.

CW: And many, many, many times I can recall when the whole family, you know, we'd all convene to my grandfather's place at Wategos Beach, Christmas and holidays and the family would all come together and everyone'd be around the piano and the musical instruments, singing and playing. And in any occasion, for that matter, not just Christmas, you know, like - - -

MB: Any excuse for a bit of a sing along.

CW: Yes, any excuse to get together.

MB: So, in your former garage cum family room now, do you have a lot of musical instruments and so on?

CW: Oh, yes. Well, a lot of that's to do with my son as well because he is a musician in his own right, he's a music teacher. Yes, but we've always had guitars and drum kits, so when my family all come together it's like a tradition, I guess, that we carry on with. So, around Christmas-time, if anyone's making a lot of noise it's usually coming out of our place because all the family get together and we all play.

50.02 **MB: So, what do you play?**

CW: I like to think I play the guitar but if you talk to my son he thinks I'm a hack and I am but I do, I love to – but he taught me, so, you know, he had a lot to do with teaching me but every one of us in the family play – even my granddaughter plays bass.

MB: Does she?

CW: Yep, but he teaches drums, guitar, keyboard, piano.

MB:

CW: Yes, and they all sing, all of them. He tours, he does gigs and he is a musician as well. So, he teaches as well as performs. But, yes, we've had that music streak in the family and we go away at Christmas-time, we always take the guitars and it doesn't take us long to be sitting anywhere around a fire – and it's wonderful because it attracts a whole bunch of other people because I think generally

people love music and even if they don't want to sing along they like to be part of it.

MB: Love to listen to it.

CW: They love to listen and they know all the songs. But we grew up on that stuff and I grew up on it and I'm glad to say my children have inherited it as well and my grandchildren – so I'm really, really happy, you know, about that.

MB: Now, you've also just recently been given a new appointment here in the Defence Forces?

CW: Yes, I'm in the process of changing my particular job right now. There is a new organisation within Defence that has been formed more recently and it's actually to do with the Indigenous recruiting programme. So, what they're looking at happening – and, in fact, it's been indicated to me that I could very well be – in fact, it's sort of been earmarked that the position will be for me.

51.59 But I will become the New South Wales Indigenous Recruiting Officer as a strategy to transition our Indigenous youth and young people, men and women, into the Defence Force, irrespective of the discipline or the service, Army, Navy or Air Force and also to look after the Indigenous personnel that are already in the Defence Force.

MB: And why do they need looking after – what's happening with them that they need this kind of pastoral care, I guess?

CW: I think what it is in some cases. I mean, I can't tell you the exact reason why because I don't know but what I can tell you is this: from what I have observed there is a tremendous amount of potential within our Indigenous population within Australia which could really be developed in our Indigenous people if we were just to provide an opportunity for them to come out of their – I will say "comfort zone", whether it's good, bad or indifferent but just to have a go and have a look and see that the Defence Force - and not only Defence – I would even go further to say even our police force. You know, that these guys, if we can just channel some of that energy and take a little bit of time and just provide some of that training which will give them that confidence and just give them that opportunity to have a go just to see if it suits them or not.

54.17 Now, I'll give you an example: the youth group that I just took away - even though half the youth were Indigenous, half the youth were not - there were three young men that I took away as leaders, junior leaders. Now, these young men are between the ages of eighteen and twenty two. They did an outstanding job. When they were given the opportunity to be put in a leadership role, clear boundaries, not just let loose but guided and shown – because that's what we do –

they did an outstanding job with the young people and just – I'm just having flashbacks at the moment, of thinking of different instances where I observed these guys because that's what I do when I run the youth group. It's not about providing a babysitting thing for a whole bunch of kids. I mean, I don't do that - I tell them I'm not into the business of doing that – but if they're prepared to come and do it a bit tougher and to learn something and to apply themselves I promise them that they will be different to when they started and I've had no one complain. They might complain during the process but they don't complain at the end of it, they see the benefit.

MB: Why do you think that the Army is looking at a position like this, this new one for you now - what's happening to make that happen?

55.56 CW: O.K. Well, what's happening is within the Defence Force you can't just go into a job; the job's got to be established like anywhere and what they're doing – because it's all a new initiative or relatively new initiative – I've had some very good reports that they've established this position in Townsville and they've just finished doing an eight week – as I understand it – an eight week training course programme up there and they've had some very good results. I can't quote the exact statistics but as I understand it, out of potentially, you know, sixteen candidates – for want of a better word – fourteen at this stage look like the opportunity's going to be there for these young people to transition, if they wish, into a Defence position. So, for me, I think that's fantastic. I mean, that could be a market for recruiting that we may have slipped past if someone hadn't taken the initiative to go looking for it. See, what I'm saying is this: it doesn't mean that it's not out there - it always has been - but unless you create the opportunity, unless you get it out there you're not going to have anyone making any inquiries. And it's not that they're not smart enough or not fit enough or anything else for that matter; it's about giving to opportunity for let them know that, "Hey guys, here's an alternative". Now, every one of the youth group I took away on my youth programme have come back to me and said, "I want to come on the next one" – which to me is always a good sign – and not only that they've brought all the cousins and the mates because most of them come from the youth programme I run separately to that one on a Wednesday night out at Miller and those guys.

57.56 But not only that, there's organisations that I've been in touch with out in the Liverpool district and in fact, indeed at Redfern as well who are very keen to talk more about just the youth. Out of these kids that come away, a few of them have indicated to me that they would really like to fully investigate joining the Defence Force and I guess I'm very fortunate that I'm in a position where I can not only just give them a number but I give them a name and they can do what they need to do to get that process. So, you know, I find it really exciting, I really do.

MB: How will it fit with being a chaplain, assuming that happens?

CW: I think it's awesome and I think it is important because, you see, like anybody chaplaincy to me is about helping people deal with issues. Now, for me, everybody's got issues, no one's exempt – very few people are, I think. Some of them might be more severe than others but at least I think everyone if they were totally honest with themselves would say, "Look, yes, you know, I've got a few issues too"- that's just the nature of humans, I think. But that's O.K, because if they have got any particular issues - for example, someone may be struggling in the area of alcohol. Now, there's another organisation that I'm getting involved with through the Defence Force that I'm trying to see if I can't – I've sort of done some assistance there before but the Defence Force also have a Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs and Substances programme - I lot of soldiers may want to give up smoking.

60.00 You know, the Defence is wonderful in being able to help in that particular area. Some people maybe struggle in the area of alcohol. I mean, it's not different to anywhere else – people are people – and they have some wonderful programmes out there. So, this is another area where I believe that chaplains can be of assistance. And a lot of manifests itself – I'm not just talking Indigenous now; I'm talking about in my previous roles even as an RSM because one of your roles as a Regimental Sergeant Major is discipline. That's one of the foremost, apart from training and a lot of other areas, discipline is a very important area for RSMs. And there's areas there where people who – yes, you've got to deal with the issue, deal with whatever is on the table but then, to me, my attitude towards, say, bad behaviour or something like that is, in terms of the way I look at, to me it is the fruit. So, if someone's not coming to work or someone's doing the wrong thing or whatever, it is the fruit of something else, which is the root. And, to me, if people are going to reach their potential, if people are going to be better at doing what they do, I think sometimes we need to get down to the root of the problem and sometimes that may need the help of a – maybe not so much a chaplain but a chaplain may be able to direct people to other areas, to other resources that are out there. No different to the secular world, you know, like in Civvie Street if people are struggling. It could be a simple thing like relationships. You know, you have a young couple who are having a relationship problem and sometimes all it really needs is someone to talk to them both and mediate or facilitate and, you know, you get things out so they can look at it and deal with the issues and get on with it, you know. So, there's a whole bunch of stuff out there, so.

62.09 **MB: So, you've got a very busy life ahead of you?**

CW: Yes, it's awesome.

MB: There's no kind of retirement on the agenda

CW: Oh, no, retirement's for old people.

MB: That's right. Now, are there other things that you'd like to say today. I think we're probably moving towards winding up, so maybe sort of

CW: Yes. No, I just appreciate the opportunity to – and I would just encourage anyone who has the opportunity to investigate. You know, one of the questions I do work with the Defence Force recruiting from time to time – that's an organisation that works out of Parramatta here in Sydney and they travel around the place and they do presentations and that sort of thing – and one of the questions that has been asked to me when I've been out there is, "Oh, look, I may have had a few problems with the law" or "I may have been in trouble in the past" or this or that and my advice to those people, "You're not on your Pat Malone". You know, everyone has a history, some more severe than others – some have been caught and some haven't – but my advice to those guys would be, "Look, don't let that be a deterrent from trying. Be honest, up front and say, 'Look, this is the way it is, this is what's happened and blah, blah, blah, this was the outcome of that'" but don't let it be a deterrent, don't come to the conclusion that it's all over before you even have a go. And even if then you're still not one hundred per cent, you know, successful, don't let that be a deterrent because as far as I'm concerned nobody fails anything until they stop trying. When you stop trying, then you fail.

MB: That's a very positive message to end on. Thanks very much, Colin.

64.04 CW: Thanks, Margo.

Interview ends