

**CITY OF SYDNEY ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**

**ART & ARTISTS**

**TRANSCRIPT**

**Name:** Uncle Roy Mundine

**Date:** 25 April 2014

**Place:** Redfern Community Centre

**Interviewer:** Fabri Blacklock

**Audio file:**

**Duplicates:** Master and Reference CDs held in CoS  
Archives

**Recorder:** Marantz PMD 671 Digital Recorder

0.00 **FB: This is an interview with Uncle Roy Mundine on the 25th of April 2014.**

**So, Uncle Roy, could you just tell me your full name and when and where you were born and who your mob is, please?**

RM: My name's Roy Leonard Mundine and I was born in Grafton, New South Wales, and my people come from Baryulgil.

**FB: Can you tell me what year did you join the armed forces?**

RM: I joined the army in about 1958.

**FB: And what inspired you to join the army?**

RM: I was always interested in the army and all that and so I just went and applied and I was accepted and joined up.

**FB: And I believe you were deployed overseas. Can you tell me some of the places you went to?**

RM: Yeah. I was posted to Malaya, I did a couple of years in Malaya, and I did a stint in England and I also went to New Zealand for a few months and also I was in Vietnam twice - I was there in about '66 and '69 in Vietnam - and, of course, I was posted to different states in Australia and all that.

**FB: And can you tell me about some of the experiences that you had on any of these overseas missions?**

RM: Well, in Malaya we were fighting the Communists terrorists and all that business and we used to go out patrolling in the jungle all the time and different other things and exercise - we used to do a lot of training and all that. I remember one time we went to Borneo, training, and then we come back and we continued on doing that, patrolling against the Communists terrorists in Malaya. And then I was posted back to Australia and I was out at Holsworthy for a while and then I went to Parachute School at Williamstown.

2.06 I was there for twelve months or something and then went back to the battalions at Holsworthy and then I went off to Vietnam, my first trip into Vietnam. And I came back from that and then we trained for another about twelve months or so and then we went back again and we come back from there and I got wounded on that second trip and then while I was there we went to New Zealand on various exercises and all that. And then I was posted to the Royal Military College at Duntroon on the staff and then from there I went up to Queensland - I was posted up there.

**FB: So you've been to quite a few places.**

RM: Yes, that's right.

**FB: And you were talking about Parachute School there before.**

RM: Yes.

**FB: What was that – you learn how to parachute?**

RM: Yeah, we parachute, we were in the parachute business. And, of course, when I was in England I was with the 1st Battalion of the parachute regiment.

**FB: Was it fun?**

RM: Yes, it was O.K, yes.

**FB: I've always wanted to do it.**

RM: It's a bit different done within military with hundreds of people jumping out of airplanes, I can tell you, with all that equipment on.

**FB: And so you went to Vietnam twice.**

RM: Yes.

**FB: Somebody explained to me that they used to replace people every twelve months. Is that correct?**

RM: Yes, yes. Or you got word you come home early or something like that and then you could go again. It all depends. Some people stayed a bit longer, some people did it shorter but when you went with those battalions generally you went twelve months or maybe a month or two over or a month or two less.

**FB: And what was your actual role in the army?**

RM: I was in the infantry, of course, and I was a section commander in the infantry and, of course, I was a quartermaster.

4.10 **FB: And did you ever experience any racism in the army?**

RM: No, not particularly and that. I think most of them were all the same boat, all the people who were there, because as they always say misery needs a companion when things are going tough.

**FB: And what about when you returned to Australia? There was no racism when you returned?**

RM: No, not in the units that you were in and all those things. You might have found it outside in the civilian world and I think it's still there today, actually, and that. I know a lot of white blokes pointed it out to me and that, you know, at the time. At the shop one bloke said to me one day "You're always being served last" and all these things and that's a thing that a lot of people don't realise.

**FB: Yeah. So have you been involved in the Black Diggers Project and the march before?**

RM: No, no. I've been away most of me life and I just happened to run into Harry and Harry got me to come into that thing at Hyde Park a few times which I have and that. And when I'm here I go in there and that, because he does a pretty good job, Harry. And, you know, that was it. I used to run into a few Aboriginal people in the army, of course, and that - young blokes and all that, and I've got to know a fair few; a few got killed. But I enjoyed meself in the army because I did about thirty six years in the army; I was a warrant officer class one and a lot of power in that job.

6.05 **FB: So do you think there should be more awareness in the community about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Service Men and Women, the contribution that they've made to Australia?**

RM: Oh, yes, yes. Well, it's always good and that and good stuff about it, what they did. And it's not only with the Aboriginals but some of those other units and that it's the same with them. All you do is hear about certain things or units and that. But I don't think a lot of Aboriginal people understand what those blokes done, especially the older fellows and that that were 'round. I don't think they realised what those blokes done and it's just awesome and that when you think about it, especially people who were in the First World War. It was a mince; they were just thrown into a grinder. And over the years and that people have fought for things for them and that and they've got a few benefits and all that which they never, ever did before. But I remember Ghandi, you know, the famous Indian bloke. Well, when he was a young lawyer in South Africa in the late 1800s – he went there as a young lawyer to defend people – and he got into trouble with the system there and the South Africans told him that they were hoping to bring in the \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ policy like New South Wales and that and so he formed his own unit in the Boer War and he become the sergeant major. And that was probably the thinking of that day and some of it's still around today.

7.53 But I never had any problems with those sort of things. And I had some really, really good people I worked with and that, and my bosses

were really, really good. But you'll always get that and especially if they're losing an argument or something they'll always ..... these things, some people. I just ignore it. At the end of the day I got back at them; I was in a position to do that.

But, yeah, in some places like in Queensland and parts of Western Australia it was rife for some people and I remember some of the officers in the army were quite horrified about some things and that and they got stuck into people about it. But, as I said, when you're up at that pointy end misery needs company and you meet some great people. I was talking to a lot today - they're quite good people.

**FB: So you think the armed forces are a good career for Aboriginal people?**

RM: Oh, yes, yes, definitely. There's so many things you can do and that and so many courses you can do and I think over a period of time and that it probably would be – a lot of young blokes and that come through now that have got good jobs and some have went to ADFA and Duntroon and all those things. What's his name, Smith, he was a colonel or half colonel - come from up around Newcastle - he went through Duntroon. He was one of the chief logisticians when they went to Timor and those places which is pretty good. And bit by bit they get up and all that.

9.42 Of course, nowadays the army's different to what I was. I think it's much more politicised and academically and all that business, which is a good thing in a way but a bad thing in another way because at the end of the day when the crunch comes and that, no matter how much education you've got and what ..... it is people die and get badly mauled and bashed.

But, as I said, I enjoyed my time and I met some great blokes and all that business that I haven't seen for ages. I seen some today, actually. We all had a yarn and that. I met Stewie Yow Yeh - he's part Aboriginal/Islander fellow from Rockhampton – today. He lives out at South Coogee, he's telling. I hadn't seen him for ages. He come up and he said "Remember me?" I said "Yeah". I said "Oh, God". I said "You don't talk to us. You're one of those eastern suburbs people". He laughed. He said "Get out with you". But he was there today which was good to see them and that. And, of course, there's a lot of people, some people only stay a little while. I met one Aboriginal bloke. He did nearly twenty years in the army and he wanted to get out and his sergeant come and spoke with me about him and I said "Well, try and keep him here till he gets the twenty years up so he can get his

pension and all that". And he was determined to go but we ended up getting around that and I seen him years later – he lives in Western Australia today – and he's glad that he stayed. And I said "You don't realise it" but I said "even if it's only fifty dollars a week coming in it's coming in all your life". I said "You've got to have the cash flow". But as time goes there'll be a lot of them come through. Like in New Zealand they've got even Maori blokes who are generals and everything and that but they've always been a few years ahead of us and in ways – it's right throughout the Aboriginal community – I don't think we will ever advance that quick because we're all these little groups and they're all fighting against one another instead of all pulling together.

12.01 And you only have to go back to in the 1920s or whatever it was when whatsaname, Maynard and Kennedy and all those blokes come out of the First World War started those things and it was all little separate groups. Well, they just don't work because the political system and that just cut you down. It's like people have got these ideas. Like there's this thing about the amount of people, Aboriginal kids especially, committing suicide. And that's not only Aboriginal kids but in the wider community and that and the government's not particularly interested in it, which is quite a sad thing, especially young people – well, even old people – when they have no one to talk to. I always say to people "You don't need a psychiatrist. All you need is a family and friends to talk to". Those days are gone. There are too many twitting and on the phone and all that. Well, that doesn't save you in the long run.

**FB: No. That's true.**

RM: Yes.

**FB: Sometimes you just need a good old yarn to somebody.**

RM: That's right. And some of these problems some people have got minor things that turn into monstrous things and that and the sad fact of it is that, as I said, people commit suicide or self-harm themselves and that it's probably getting bigger, it's probably getting worse instead of cutting down and there's a lot of young people in it. But education is their big thing, education is their pathway through life and I don't mean by going to university and get some kind of a degree and sitting on your arse in university, writing papers. Get out in the community. As I said to a bloke, "Go out where those white people are. They've got all the money and you need money to do all these projects" and you've got to do that.

14.02 **FB: Yes.**

RM: And you can get into places with your jobs and all that where you can do a lot of things, do a lot of things. And it's quite interesting what you can do, I can tell you that.

**FB: Do you want to tell me a little bit about what you do now? I know you do a lot of community work and you're very busy.**

RM: Yes. Well, I go and help raise a bit of money for charity things and that and a few other things like that. And I used to help run the football and all that but I do a lot of travelling.

**FB: Yes, I know.**

RM: I like to travel. I've travelled the world numerous times and I always say to young people "Don't end up like your parents, sitting there with the blinkers on. Go out and see the rest of the world. You'll find they're not much different to you and I" and I said "You think you're poor. Wait till you go and see some of their countries but they are happy, really, really happy and they enjoy themselves". As I just say in the army if you went to an area and they thought the baddies were there I'd say "No. Look at those kids out there playing, enjoying themselves". I said "Get in good with those kids and they'll tell you what's going on" and that's the interesting thing. And you've got to be able to be a man manager because without you know how to manage your people and look after them, care and maintain them and that, you'll never get anything done. There are certain times when you've got to pull someone aside and give them a few blasts ..... but they've all got to pull as a team, especially in the army.

15.50 If one bloke goes down in the army in any of those big situations the whole lot of you go down. You will all end up dead or badly mauled so you've got to all pull together.

**FB: Teamwork. And so what does ANZAC Day mean to you? You talked a little bit before about catching up with old friends and things like that.**

RM: Oh, yes, it's always good to see how they're going. You hear all these bad vibes about people but when you see them they all think they're seventeen again and those things and that. Well, ANZAC Day, I've never been into ANZAC Day things and that. You know, it was a terrible thing that happened and all that business and I don't know how we got beat and of course it was a different time years and years ago and all that business, for Mother England and different other things like that. But the western front after that was horrific, it was horrific the amount of people who died. It was like going into a grinder, the amount

of people that died in there. And also on the ANZAC Day I got blown up one day in 1969 about half past two on an ANZAC Day on 25th April 1969 and that's another reason why I ..... it although I'd forgotten all about it till a bloke mentioned it today, "Do you remember the day we had that thing and you got blow up?" I said "Yeah". But I just went to hospital for numerous months and operations and just got out and got on with life because if you don't like self-motivate yourself and that and if you sit around feeling sorry for yourself and all that you're not going to survive, especially in today's world; it's dog eat dog and all that business and no one wants to hear about your problems; they've probably got more problems than you.

17.45 **FB:** **That's the way of the world these days.** RM: Yes, that's right. But I've enjoyed myself, I still enjoy myself and all those things.

**FB:** **Well, that's the most important thing, as long as you're enjoying life.**

RM: Oh, yes. That's what I said to some of them. I said "The only person I've got to please is myself. I couldn't give a damn for the rest of them". I don't have to worry about that. I'm not in the army any more where you had to worry about all these people and that, especially whenever I become the quartermaster. I had to have all this equipment and get them from point A to point B and bloody billions of dollars' worth of stuff and bloody explosives - it was awesome. One of the ..... said to me one day, he said "People don't realise the bloody problems you've got". I said "Yeah, I know" because you've got to have everything there for them, from bloody shoelaces to needle and pins, feed them, clothe them and you've got to get all these things there so they're ready, so that they land on the ground and ready to fight. And the ammunitions, you've got to get all the ammunition although the ops officer generally helps you do that. Sometimes he has that many problems he can't do it so you pick up the slack. [You're the Quartermaster.]

**FB:** **All right, excellent. Thank you so much for your time, Uncle Roy. Is there anything else you wanted to share today?**

RM: No, that's it. But all those who go in the military and that, especially blokes who stay in there for a while and get a bit of rank and all that, they should keep an eye out for all those young Aboriginal blokes and that and pull them into gear and point them in the right direction, otherwise they get out there with their mates and that or they get left behind. And they've also go to remember it's more money for them for a start and more better jobs and also it's good learning for them because you can do all those education courses and trade courses and

all that and at the end of the day if they do twenty-odd years or more they get a pension, another pension, you see. And it mightn't be that much - it all depends what rank they are and how much they pay into it – and it's money coming in. Of course, probably the military is one of the first people to have like a superannuation scheme.

**FB: O.K.**

RM: Yes. They started theirs about 1940s, long before even the politicians. And it's probably a lot better now for them and that which is quite good.

**FB: All right. Excellent, thank you.**

**Interview ends**