

CITY OF SYDNEY ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

**ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER
SERVICE MEN AND WOMEN**

Name: Dean Dobson

Date: 7 November 2013

Place: ?

Interviewer: Fabri Blacklock

TRANSCRIPT

- 0.00 **FB: Interview with Dean Dobson, the 7th of November 2013. So Dean, can you tell me your name and where your mob comes from, please?**
- DD:** Yes, sure. My name's Dean Dobson and my mob's from Wiradjuri up at Griffith where most of my family is but I was born in Paddington in Sydney and grew up mainly around Sydney, Waterloo and pretty much that.
- FB: Thank you. Can you tell me when did you join the army?**

DD: Yes. I first joined the Army Reserve back in '96 for a couple of years and then I got out because I was a bit busy with work and then I got back in about five years later and I've been back in the Army Reserve now for about eleven years.

FB: And what inspired you to join the army?

DD: Yes, that's a tough question. I guess since I was a kid I always wanted to join the army. I don't know what it was, whether I'd seen the ads or just seen people when I was a kid and I'd always wanted to join and, yes, when I was old enough I guess that's what I did, had a crack at it.

FB: But did you have any rels [relatives] in the army or friends?

DD: No, no, not that I know of but I guess since I was a kid. I think I remember going to one of the army open days and they had a flying fox and all these other cool things that you do when you're a kid and I just remember from that I always wanted to join.

FB: And can you tell me have you been deployed on any overseas missions?

DD: Yes. I think it was '07 I went to the Solomon Islands with RAMSI [Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands] so we were just peacekeeping over there for four or five months and then just last year I went to East Timor with TLTG5 [Timor Leste Task Group 5]. Yes, we were just doing more peacekeeping over there and basic closing up and that was the end of the mission over in Timor so we sort of just packed up and came home from there beginning of this year, actually, end of last year.

2.05 **FB: So can you tell me a little bit about your experiences over there, what was the experience like?**

DD: Yes, it was great. The Solomon Islands I really enjoyed. I really felt that we did some really good work over there and made a difference, that people really enjoyed having us over there and, I don't know, it was just really good just to feel that you're actually doing something and, I guess, serving your country and making a little bit of a difference over there and also just actually seeing how other people and communities live I thought was really eye-opening and I guess it helps you appreciate Australia a lot more. And, yes, that was it. And in Timor pretty much the same thing. I mean obviously when we were there there wasn't all the dramas, it was pretty settled as opposed to how it was a few years before but it was still good, like I said, just to be

part of another culture and see how they live and see what's going on in other countries. And I guess for whatever little bit we helped it's good to do that; you feel like you've done something.

FB: So you were mostly peacekeeping?

DD: Yes, just peacekeeping.

FB: Can you just tell me a little bit about what that involves?

DD: In the Sollies [Solomons] basically like the police over there don't have weapons so we'd basically just follow the police around on their patrols and we'd just provide security for them.

FB: Just tell me what the peacekeeping involved.

DD: Yes, so as I was saying the police didn't have weapons so we'd just basically go on their patrols with them and just follow them and just cruise around with them, interacting with the locals and just providing security for them while they went about their daily jobs and it was quite interesting, actually, and enjoyable.

4.09

And in East Timor, because they were closing up, there actually wasn't a lot of work we were doing over there. We were basically just security for the base so we were, yes, just security for the few bases we had over there and helped pack up and come home from that. That's pretty much all we did in Timor.

FB: And how long were you away for?

DD: The first trip was just five months in country but East Timor we came back early because the UN left and the trip got cut short, so I think we were only over there for, maybe two and a half months, two and a half, three months, if that.

FB: And how do you find that being away from your family? That would be really difficult.

DD: Yes. Definitely the first couple of weeks are the hardest and that but after you sort of get into a rhythm and a routine it's not too bad. And in this day and age we're very lucky with the internet so you're able to talk quite regularly and email and all that sort of stuff and telephone so it was O.K. The first time I left my wife was pregnant with our third child so that made it a bit easier: she was sort of busy with worrying about that sort of stuff. But it was O.K, you get used to it; it's doable.

FB: And have you ever experienced any racism in the armed forces and if so can you tell me a little bit about what you experienced and how you might have overcome that?

DD: Yes. What can I say? Well, yes, obviously I think everyone would have. Like unfortunately I think it has been known and previously has been a bit of a racist organisation. However, I think it's definitely changing, it's definitely getting better over the years I've seen; yes, they're definitely trying to do things, I'd say they're really improving. But, yes, you always hear little comments here and there.

6.03

If there is such a thing as an innocent comment but if there is no real malice behind it I'll let it slide but if I feel that someone's said something that's wrong I usually just tell them what I think. Yes, if I felt that it was something that I found quite insulting then I'd definitely say something. Like I said, some other times other people say something too. It sounds bad, not everyone's like that but there's definitely some elements in there that still need to be put in check but in general I'd say it's heaps better than what it was a few years ago and it's definitely turning.

FB: So you're currently in the Reserves, so you also work as well.

DD: Yes.

FB: So what do you do as your full time job?

DD: Fire fighter out in Macquarie Fields Fire Station. So, yes, I just do that full time. Been doing that for about five or six years now.

FB: And how do you find doing both jobs, how do you find that?

DD: Yes, it's pretty good. I think they're both sort of similar in certain regards because the fire brigade's sort of similarly military structured in the way of rank and some other things. But, yes, I think they both go well together and luckily it's a government job so I have no problems getting military leave and time off to go work. So I just went away a couple of times now for six, seven months military leave and they have no problems with that so that works well, I think.

FB: And like how many times in the year do you have to do training for your Reserves?

8.04

DD: It varies each year but there's your minimum of obviously your two weeks a year, one weekend a month, that kind of stuff, but each year sometimes they have other things and there's obviously courses that you can do as well. If you want to, I guess, get other skills or

knowledge you can put in for different courses. So to a certain extent it's up to you how much courses you want to put in for and do that but, yes, your minimum of two weeks a year and your weekends and Tuesdays and stuff like that.

FB: So do you get to choose? Is there a variety of courses you can choose yourself or they pretty much tell you what you've got to do?

DD: Well, I'm in the infantry so usually it's courses that relate around infantry so any sort of courses that relate to that you've usually got a good chance of getting on.

FB: So what does the infantry involve for the people like me who don't know anything about this kind of stuff?

DD: Oh God. I've got to be careful; I don't want to bag it. Well, it's basically what being a soldier is, like what you see on the TV - well, it's definitely not as glamorous as what they make it out. And that's the reason I joined is I thought when you join the army, you being a soldier, you get your gun and your equipment and you go out there and do it. That's why I joined the infantry but I guess you just sort of learn to live out of a pack and you're in your section, your platoon or whatever, and you just live out in the bush which is what I like doing - I used to like going bush. Yes, you just stay out bush, do your section patrols and all that kind of stuff, yes, play with guns. I guess that was another reason I joined up as a young bloke: I liked the idea of playing with machineguns and rocket launchers which is a bit childish but, yes, when you're a young bloke it sounds pretty cool. So like I said mainly that sort of stuff: just weapons, just playing with the different weapons and going out bush is the basics of it and that's why it appealed to me as a young bloke. I think I'm probably getting a bit old for it now; it might be time to move on.

10.03 **FB: So it's basically just like training in the bush in situations that might arise?**

DD: Yes, exactly, soldier skills. Like I said, learning how to live out in the bush and be quiet, obviously, and all that sort of stuff.

FB: So if you ever get lost you know how to survive?

DD: Yes. Well, hopefully that'd be the plan but I don't know. I guess you've got your mobile phone these days or GPS so I'd probably be all right.

FB: Are you allowed to take your phones out there with you?

DD: Technically not, but yes.

FB: Everybody does?

DD: Yes, usually.

FB: So can you tell me what the importance of ANZAC Day means to you and do you usually march every ANZAC Day?

DD: Yes, I do. For the last few years I've been marching every ANZAC Day and it actually does mean a lot to me now and I've got to say that's gradually happened over the years. When I was a young bloke I definitely didn't see the importance of it and I get that as young people you don't sort of take it in but, yes, the last few years, obviously since being in the Reserves, I sort of went to my first couple and I've done the parade and it does mean a lot more. You know, the more you go there you appreciate it a lot more and I try to get my kids – they've been at the last few to watch me march and marched with me and they're starting to appreciate and hopefully they'll grow up understanding what it is and appreciate it as well.

FB: So your children, obviously they're proud of you that you're in the army. You were saying that your son is interested in joining the army.

DD: Yes. Once again I think he's a bit like me: he just wants to play with the guns. But he says he either wants to do that or be a policeman and I think both of them because they get guns. Like I said, I didn't grow up even knowing about ANZAC Day or anything like that so at least they've got that and I'm pretty sure they'll grow up appreciating and respecting it and enjoying it and paying respects.

12.02 **FB: And also we were talking a little bit before about they're building a memorial to honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service men and women in Hyde Park. Why do you think that's important that we acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service men and women and the contribution that they've made to Australia?**

DD: I think it's important because I just think a lot of people don't realise, even myself like just only recently finding out how much Aboriginal people have put into the armed service; I think it was kept pretty quiet and not really noticed for all those years. I think there's lots of reasons, really, I guess more so back for people who fought in the First and Second War and other subsequent wars where Aboriginal people didn't even have the right to vote yet they're out there serving their country. I think that sort of stuff really needs to be remembered and taught and shown; I think that's probably more important.

FB: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

DD: Not really. I don't feel that I've really done anything. I think I've done just some peacekeeping which isn't much. There's definitely a lot of other people who've done really good things in a time when it wasn't like it is now, where it was such a big statement to go and do what they did. I think that's more important than this but I think it is good for those guys who really did the hard yards for them to be noticed and acknowledged; I think that's what this thing's good for.

FB: Excellent, thank you.

Interview ends