

## **Clem Jones Oral History Project**

**Interviewees:** Geoff Morton and Dianne Morton

**Interviewer:** Lindsay Marshall

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**LM:** This is a recording being conducted for the Clem Jones Oral History Project by myself, Lindsay Marshall and I'm interviewing Geoff and Diane Morton at their home at Buddina on the Sunshine Coast and it's Wednesday, 20 March 2019. Look thanks very much to both of you for taking part in this.

**DM:** Pleasure.

**GM:** It's our pleasure.

**LM:** Look if we can start probably with both of you in looking at your early life and just to fill in for people who are listening to this, Diane where did you grow up and what was your family background?

**DM:** Well I was born and bred, grew up in Warwick and went through all my school days there. My father was teaching at the Scots College. I was born six months after he took a job there as a science master. I had three other siblings, younger. We were all born there. All grew up there. All went to school there.

**LM:** And it was through your father that you met Clem which we'll probably talk about a little later on but your father was the connection with Clem?

**DM:** That's right. Yes.

**LM:** Geoff, your background, your family circumstances?

**GM:** Yeah I was born in Brisbane and my father was a produce merchant. We lived in Brisbane until I was about 11. Moved out to Boonah and then we went to Murgon. I have a brother and he is younger so that makes us both elder. I stayed in Murgon until I joined the Navy in 1961, at the Naval College at Jervis Bay and spent the rest of my formal working life anyway until 2000 in the Navy.

**LM:** At the time you retired from the Navy you were pretty senior. You were working in Washington for the Navy.

**GM:** Yeah I was the Naval attaché in Washington and I was a Commodore when I retired from the Navy having commanded ships at a more junior rank.

**LM:** One of the ships you've told me previously was the HMAS Brisbane.

**GM:** Yes it was. I commanded HMAS Brisbane which is now sunk off here off the Sunshine Coast and of course had a close relationship with Brisbane, well I brought it into Brisbane. I also commanded the HMAS Tobruk which was based in Brisbane. So I've had that real connection with Brisbane.

**LM:** The name HMAS Brisbane has been used before and since?

**GM:** Yes it has. That was the second and now the new one, HMAS Brisbane number three has only recently commissioned. It's been making its first visit to Brisbane in the next couple of weeks.

**LM:** What was the difference between the three Brisbanes in terms of what they did?

**GM:** Well they were all destroyers, the first Brisbane was a light cruiser, the second was a guided missile destroyer for missiles, and the third one is a similar guided missile destroyer with even more missiles. They were significantly different in terms of power plants and working capability and guns, but they were all surface combatants.

**LM:** And the HMAS Brisbane you commanded, there was a connection with Clem and Sylvia Jones.

**GM:** Yes. Clem came down to Brisbane. He knew me through Di and he was able to come onboard the Brisbane.

**LM:** Sylvia Jones went to America at some stage to?

**GM:** Yes, to commit to being the commissioning lady for, sorry the launching lady for Brisbane.

**LM:** Yes, yes. What year would that be? That would be in the '60s?

**GM:** That was in the '60s, that was in the '60s.

**LM:** So that was a big event in those days, to have a warship named after the city?

**GM:** Absolutely. It was a big event and it was very big thing for Sylvia to be asked to be the launching lady and she would have had lifelong connection with the Brisbane and we had plaques on the wall and her photograph even.

**LM:** And is it like we see in the movies or on TV, do you actually bash a bottle of champagne over the bow?

**GM:** Bash a bottle of champagne on something. In this case the Brisbane two, the one I commanded, which was the one Sylvia was the launching lady for was launched sideways in Defoe Shipyards in the USA, so the ship was quite spectacular in going sideways in to the water.

**LM:** Yeah I've seen vision of not that one but of others doing sideways and for such a big vessel that's quite a spectacular event isn't it?

**GM:** Very spectacular. It's always fun to be at launching.

**LM:** Yeah but it must take a lot of planning so things don't go wrong.

**GM:** You bet.

**LM:** Do they still use that technique depending on the ship?

**GM:** These days more often than not they're launched down ways – the slips – or increasingly they also build them onto a synchro lift and actually lower them into the water as submarines are built like that.

**LM:** Right, okay. Now Di, just going back. We mentioned the connection with Clem and your father, just explain that to us.

**DM:** Well from my memory, Clem and my father, Colin Estwick, met at Queensland University. They were both doing their – well daddy was doing a science degree. Clem was doing surveying and they were in the University Cricketers Club. Quite often after a cricket game, my parents were newly married and Clem would go after the cricket game or any other time I think, he would just call in say hello, have a few beers or whatever and became quite good friends with my parents.

**LM:** This is obviously well before he entered politics?

**DM:** Definitely.

**LM:** Yes. Did you have any indication there of your early memories of him, of what he might go on to achieve later on? Was he the sort of person who you thought would sort of be somebody or achieve something?

**DM:** He was always very ... upbeat. He was always very kind, very interested in my brothers playing cricket. He would perhaps come through in the middle of the night on his way driving south to Sydney or wherever and bring the latest cricket ball or two or three that he'd been playing with to give to my brothers. That was always something special and we did think that Clem was a special person. Then when we met Sylvia she was equally special.

**LM:** Now you've told me previously you came to Brisbane to train as a kindergarten teacher.

**DM:** I did.

**LM:** And that was at the Kelvin Grove the then teacher's college.

**DM:** That was at Kelvin Grove, yes. It was opposite the...

**LM:** What's now the university up there?

**DM:** What's now the teacher's training college, yes.

**LM:** Yes. So you kept contact with Sylvia and Clem?

**DM:** Indeed. We did. I did. Quite often I would catch a tram into Brisbane, into the city and call in on Sylvia in the City Hall. I never quite knew which afternoon she was having bridge but she was always very gracious. She would come out. She would bring me little cakes and sandwiches and we'd have a chat and then she'd go back in to play bridge.

**LM:** So in terms of when someone becomes Lord Mayor their partner's expected to have a public role.

**DM:** Very much so.

**LM:** Yes, it doesn't seem to happen in other levels of government here in Australia at least but with Lord Mayors there seems to be an expectation. You get this title of....

**DM:** Lady Mayoress

**LM:** .....Lady Mayoress if you're a female. I'm not quite sure what the equivalent is for a male partner, but there is that sort of expectation. How did you see her fitting into that role?

**DM:** Oh, absolutely brilliantly. She was the most gracious, beautiful, calm-natured person and she just fulfilled that role in the most wonderful way, wonderful, yes.

**LM:** Would you see Clem at that stage too if you were visiting Sylvia? Was he around?

**DM:** Not a lot. I did see him sometimes but he was always busy. Always busy. It might be, "Hi, hello Diane", that sort of thing and he'd carry on. But Sylvia always sort of gave me time which was wonderful. She was gorgeous.

**LM:** And Geoff, your connection with Clem did that come through Diane?

**GM:** It came through Diane. Once or twice while he was Lord Mayor I would visit with her. If I happened to be in the Brisbane area I would visit maybe once or twice so I came to know him through that. Then through my naval connection with the Brisbane particularly, I got to know him. Then we came back from Washington in the early 2000s, Di had contacted him and he insisted that I could do nothing more than come down and play tennis every Wednesday afternoon. He was quite insistent that that would be good. From time to time Di would come down and watch us play. I got to know him perhaps best through the tennis group on a Wednesday afternoon.

**LM:** And this was after he was Lord Mayor?

**GM:** Well after he was Lord Mayor. Most people his age would have been retired and doing nothing but that wasn't Clem's style. He was busy with many other things, partly including the Tennis Centre at Teneriffe. He was showing me plans of what he thought should happen.

**LM:** At Tennyson?

**GM:** Yeah at Tennyson. Sorry Tennyson. And he was always very interested in what might be done. He was obviously interested in his charities or Leukemia Foundation and that the houses he had around by that time acquired around the residence where we'd sometimes hit the tennis balls into. So he was always doing something. Occasionally he'd make time to come and play tennis but by then his eyesight was failing a little. He used to tell me that the net looked like wriggly worm. He described it as a wriggly worm. But it didn't stop him trying to get out and have a hit.

**LM:** No. At a social level of tennis, because he was very good at cricket as I understand, at the University Club level, but was he good at social tennis?

**GM:** Yes he was. Even at the stage where his eye sight wasn't as good as it should have been he still had a wonderfully smooth stroke and great timing. I think he was a natural ball player. He gathered around him interesting people of all walks of life to play including some very famous tennis players. That was a grass court and that was a rarity in Brisbane in those days.

**LM:** Certainly in a backyard.

**GM:** Yes in a backyard.

**LM:** This was out of his house at Camp Hill?

**GM:** Yes.

**LM:** You touched on there the people who were there. From what I've understood from other people I've spoken to for this oral history that those Wednesday afternoon tennis days were quite an institution.

**GM:** Absolutely an institution and moreover....

**DM:** They went for decades.

**GM:** Yeah they went for decades and they'd been running long before I was there. Ashley Cooper was one of the fellows who actually played with me on the Court because Clem had got him down and a few others.

**LM:** That's some competition.

**GM:** Sorry?

**LM:** That's some competition to have on your side.

**GM:** That's some competition. He and I used to describe ourselves as one complete player because he had bad hips and I had a bad knee. [laughs] But Clem fostered that and it became, as you say, an institution and always every afternoon he'd ensure that there were plates of ham sandwiches available for afternoon tea. Even if he had to be away he made sure that all of that catering was organised and then after the game he'd have some beers in the fridge. We'd have a beer before we all headed our own way.

**LM:** So the tennis was still on even if he was out of town?

**GM:** Absolutely. He insisted. I always knew that if the weather fine and I drove down from here in the afternoon, play tennis and then drive back because I think it was worth it, to show him the respect he deserved in making sure that I felt welcome in that group.

**LM:** From what I understand from others as well, that there was sort of a lot of, maybe not so much like hard business but connections made there and networks made there and people asked to do things for various causes.

**GM:** He uses it as a networking if he wants something done.

**DM:** Definitely. Yes.

**LM:** Did you go to these as well Di?

**DM:** I sometimes went down too yes.

**LM:** Did you play?

**DM:** No. It was men only.

**LM:** Oh okay, right. Oh.

**DM:** I enjoyed watching them play but I enjoyed it more if Clem was there I was able to have a chat with him.

**LM:** Yes, yes. You mentioned the catering there Geoff, that he was insistent, he was that sort of bit a hard taskmaster in terms of even the little things?

**GM:** I think he paid close attention to detail. One of the details was there was always afternoon tea and it was always ham sandwiches. So he.....

**DM:** Or ham and tomato.

**GM:** Or ham and tomato. Yeah.

**DM:** Lovely fresh bread.

**GM:** So he made sure meticulously that things were the way he wanted them. I mean, he had a view of how things should be and I think his vision was always made to happen.

**LM:** Did you get to know through playing with him or against him or with him on your team, if it was doubles or whatever, did you get to know him fairly well through that tennis?

**GM:** Yeah I believe I got to know him quite well. He'd often talk about what I'd been doing, what the Navy had been doing. He'd ask me questions that were relevant to things going on and I certainly know that he had a sharp and enquiring mind and I got to know him quite well. He'd invite us to his Christmas parties and one of the characteristics of those Christmas parties held on the tennis court, in my view, was the broad church that he brought together. Jim Killen was a mate of his and they'd sit down and talk. They came from opposite spheres of politics but that wasn't his main issue. It was are you somebody who can add value, who knows something and I want to be a friend.

**LM:** You would have dealing with Killen when he was Minister?

**GM:** I did indeed, yeah.

**LM:** Minister for the Navy at that particular time.

**GM:** Yes.

**LM:** Yes. Now I mentioned that the Wednesday tennis was an institution but then so was the Christmas party wasn't it? It was quite a thing to look forward to and be at.

**GM:** Oh yeah.

**DM:** Oh definitely. Yes. Probably for about 300 to 400 people. Mm.

**LM:** In his backyard under a marquee.

**DM:** On the tennis court. Yes. The marquee covered the tennis court completely.

**LM:** Right, and when you turned up what did you do? Was it structured in any way or did you just mingle and mix and mingle and meet different people?

**DM:** Mostly a mingle I think.

**GM:** Mix and mingle. We knew people.

**DM:** Uncle Clem did have words to say, welcoming everybody, talking about people. He would bring up some friends who were there beside him who helped him in his various charities, those kinds of things. And thanks them for their work that they were helping him with. He was just very spontaneous in that respect and very generous.

**LM:** And people's children were there as well?

**DM:** Absolutely.

**LM:** And was there like a Christmas presents or Santa or something there?

**DM:** No. Not that I remember.

**GM:** Not in our time anyway.

**DM:** No.

**LM:** Okay. Rightyo. Okay. But again it's an opportunity not just for celebrating the end of the year or the coming new year it's an opportunity to network and meet other people.

**DM:** Yes.

**GM:** And for him to acknowledge people who'd contributed to his various interests and helped him.

**DM:** Over the year.

**GM:** So it was a thank you, have a great Christmas time and we'll see you next year.

**LM:** You mentioned there Jim Killen before but you would turn up and you would see people you may not have expected to see?

**GM:** I think so. I think that's right. As I said it was a very broad church that he brought together both in the tennis and in the Christmas party. He had members of the Brisbane soccer team there one year we were there.

**DM:** PCYC.

**GM:** PCYC of course was a big thing.

**DM:** While he was alive we were invited to the PCYC ball or dinner that was held at the Entertainment Centre and that was a very big event.

**LM:** You've also told me that he invited you to a lunch that the Governor Quentin Bryce put on.

**GM:** Quentin Bryce put on a lunch to acknowledge his upcoming 90<sup>th</sup> birthday and she felt he was not going to last much longer. He must have been asked who he'd like to have along and it wasn't a very large lunch but we were honoured to be invited to that which was probably the last real interaction we had with Clem.

**DM:** The last, yes probably.

**LM:** And that was at Government House up at Bardon?

**GM:** That was at Government House.

**DM:** Government House, yes.

**LM:** How big a function was that? Was it a big room and big table?

**DM:** Well it was in the dining room it was perhaps 20 people.

**GM:** Twenty or 30 but no more than that. From that point of view it was quite a small function given Clem's range of people that he knew.

**LM:** Yes. So to be invited to that, a pretty small and select group. Did you feel privileged for that?

**DM:** Exceptionally.

**GM:** Very much so.

**DM:** That was a very nice invitation.

**GM:** And that stands out in my mind as an indication of the sort of things that Clem did. The fact that the Governor wanted to invite him and wanted to do that and get together a fairly select group. I suppose I certainly was the only military person there because of my military background and rank, I suppose it might have been appropriate and of course the Governor's husband was a former military fellow. Air Force.

**LM:** He was from the RAAF wasn't he?

**GM:** Yep.

**DM:** Yes.

**LM:** So the sort of character of Clem, now that he's not here and if you have to describe it to other people, how do you sort of describe him?

**DM:** Oh my goodness. He was..... I would probably describe him larger than life, wonderful personality, very direct, always..., never really thought that anything was not worth doing or couldn't be done. If other people felt it couldn't be done he would find a way to do it. He was very, very positive, proactive in that way. He made sure that things happened basically.

**GM:** He lead by example.

**DM:** He did.

**LM:** So was he hands on?

**GM:** Very.

**DM:** Oh yes, absolutely.

**LM:** And I think Di you've told me about a story about the Crackerjack Carnival when he was out digging trenches.

**DM:** Yes. He was I guess hosting the Crackerjack Ball that night and torrential rain fell and there was a danger of the whole ground under people's tables and feet being flooded. So he got out, I don't know where he found a shovel but he started digging a trench on the outside of the marquee and this was in his black tie and when he'd had enough he called Kevin Rudd over and said: "Come on Kevvie my boy it's your turn now, you start digging."

**GM:** Very direct.

**DM:** Yes he wasn't backwards in coming forwards at all.

**LM:** So he wouldn't ask someone to do something he didn't do himself.

**DM:** Exactly.

**GM:** Exactly.

**LM:** He was a political person. He left his business behind to run for politics for the Labor Party.

**DM:** He did.

**LM:** He was a lifelong supporter, adherent of the Labor policies.

**DM:** He did.

**LM:** Did you see him as sort of a political person? Was he like party political to you or just a person who was doing community service through politics?

**DM:** That's a good question.

**GM:** I never saw him as being overtly political. He wasn't waving a red flag or going out preaching. He was more about doing good things and it was probably a way, in my mind, that he could contribute beyond just being a businessman. So he took that on. I think... and that's why he was in many ways apolitical. He had friends across the whole political spectrum and people respected him

because he was honest, hardworking, and what he said he did. So I saw him more apolitical than just a dyed-in-the-wool politician.

**LM:** Because it occurred to me that events like the tennis afternoon that I imagine even when he was Lord Mayor he wouldn't be there holding forth about Labor Party politics.

**GM:** Never.

**DM:** I don't think he ever brought politics...

**GM:** I don't think I ever discussed the aspect of political policy with him at all.

**DM:** No.

**GM:** It was more about what things we're doing.

**LM:** At those events, like the Christmas party and the Wednesday afternoons and other events, do you think he was a person who was sort of identifying other people to where they could slot into his plans for doing a project or reaching some goal or doing some service?

**DM:** I think he was very clever at that. He was very clever at finding people who could make a difference with him and for him and particularly in his charity work, particularly in the Leukemia Foundation and later on with the Brain Institute.

**LM:** The Queensland Brain Institute.

**DM:** Yes. Yes.

**GM:** That's very true and indeed one of my tennis friends I was playing with when I first joined said: "Oh you'll be on Clem's list for something to do."

**LM:** Did you find out? Did you get asked to do something?

**GM:** I only got asked for opinions. Living on the Sunshine Coast I was not readily accessible.

**DM:** We were a little bit out of that.

**GM:** But he just wanted to talk half the time and bounce ideas.

**LM:** Yes and get fresh ideas or a different point of view.

**GM:** Different point of view.

**LM:** Yeah. He had a science background, a mathematical background, and so did his father, Ted, was a very good mathematician.

**DM:** I believe so. Yeah.

**LM:** Did you see evidence of that sort of mathematical mind?

**DM:** No. But I can remember my father telling us that, how clever Clem was because he could multiply three numbers by three numbers in his head and come out with the number. My father was perhaps a little in awe of that. But being a science master and mathematics master as well, I think he admitted that in Clem. I believe his father may have taught him that, I'm not sure because I think his father was a surveyor too.

**LM:** Yes as I understood it his father trained as a surveyor but ended up sort of teaching and tutoring mathematics. I'm also told that he could also do long-chain multiplications in his head. Yeah.

**DM:** Yes. Yes.

**LM:** So there's sort of that, it's wrong to say it's not an emotional ..... a non-emotional mind but it's a very sharp precise mind I guess he had.

**DM:** Absolutely. I think so. Yes. There was no wishy washy with Clem. It was black or white. I don't think there were ever any grey areas. I don't think grey ever came into his life really.

**LM:** Geoff you mentioned before about him sort of picking square pegs for square holes and that sort of thing. Did you see him as a good judge of character?

**GM:** I think he was an excellent judge of character. He obviously liked people who were doers and who would achieve something as well. He was a good judge of character.

**LM:** So at those Wednesday afternoons and the Christmas parties, when you looked around the crowd it'd be quite a team of, as you say, doers there under the marquee or on the lawn wouldn't there?

**GM:** Yeah.

**DM:** Absolutely. Some of the guys in the tennis group were builders who were able to help him with his extension at the house particularly for the museum that he had there. Later on when he was not quite so ambulatory he was having a little lift made from the ground floor up to the main floor of the house so that he could go up and down without having to go up and down steps.

**LM:** Your linkage or your visits to Sylvia continued into that later period?

**DM:** Well no she had passed away by then.

**LM:** Right, okay.

**DM:** Unfortunately I think she may have passed away while we were in Washington.

**GM:** I think you're right Di.

**DM:** Or perhaps even earlier.

**LM:** 1999. Well you didn't come back until 2000.

**GM:** That's right.

**DM:** No we didn't. So unfortunately no. I missed seeing her actually when we came back. We did see Clem again. We were living in Canberra. No, sorry that was before.

**GM:** That was before Di.

**DM:** That was before. He used to come to Canberra when we were living there and he'd pop out and see us for lunch.

**LM:** Okay. Just to sum up now. As you go through life everyone sort of meets other people who sort of influence them or change their outlook or leave them some lessons in life. How do both of you sort of think you've come away from knowing Clem Jones?

**DM:** Oh gosh. I think he probably influenced us as children in his kindness, nothing ever seemed to be too much trouble.

**LM:** You called him Uncle Clem before.

**DM:** Well we did because he was such a good friend of my parents and Clem and Sylvia were, it was always Uncle Clem and Aunt Sylvia. We used to stay with them in Brisbane and nothing was ever too much trouble.

**LM:** Geoff, how do you think he affected your outlook?

**GM:** He affected my outlook in making me look more broadly at people than from a narrow military point of view to the wider community. He was one of those, he provided an opportunity for me to meet people well outside my sphere and I think that was a very generous thing. So his generosity. His attention to detail I can understand. His vision on life was very important and very influencing.

**LM:** Okay. Thanks very much for doing this today and thanks for being part of the oral history project.

**DM:** We were very pleased. Thank you.

**GM:** Thanks for asking.

**DM:** Thank you Lindsay.

**LM:** Thank you.

**[End of Recording]**