

[Music]

Female: I just always remember running up to the windows, pressing my nose against the glass and watching the planes come in.

Male: My mum, she's a very loving natured person so you know when she's serious it means something.

Male: Wanted to be a part of something bigger than myself.

Female: That's pretty much when my whole life changed.

[Music]

Female: What we do day-to-day for each of us is our own contribution to the world, regardless of your occupation. But can each of us find something that we are truly passionate about, that we can be proud of, and that can make us excited to get up every Monday morning? In this series we chat to people who are out there doing just that, doing what they describe as exactly what they love to do.

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Brendan: When I discharged out of the Army, I had my mind set on getting an apprenticeship in the electrical industry. I had my resume, which I thought was pretty good and ready to go. I quickly found out that I wasn't just going to walk straight out of the Army and into an apprenticeship. I put in a heap of applications everywhere and realised pretty quickly that I wasn't going to get an apprenticeship that year. I didn't hear back from any of them.

Female: Brendan is hardworking, humble and determined. He's now an electrical instrumentation technician who works offshore in Western Australia. But gaining his job and his qualifications was a hard one. We talked to Brendan about life in and after the Army, forging friendships through work and his take on what progressing forward in a role can look like.

Brendan: My name is Brendan Carlson and I'm an electrical instrumentation technician within the oil and gas industry.

Female: Thanks so much for chatting to us today Brendan. We know you spend more than half your life offshore so we really appreciate you taking the time out to have a chat with us. Can you tell us a little bit more about what you do and what going to work every day looks like?

Brendan: Basically we segregate the gas, water and oil and then send the gas and oil back to the mainland where it gets turned into liquefied natural gas. The platform itself, it's not the biggest place in the world. Your living accommodation – where I suppose go to sleep is 30 metres away from the

workshop and 30 metres away from the plant itself. So you never actually leave work. You're very isolated out there.

Female: And where is out there? Where are you based?

Brendan: It's in the middle of the Indian Ocean, there's nothing around. You see whale sharks on a daily basis, heaps of wildlife, heaps of fish, and these are all the nice things about it. It's a really good group of people that I get to work with but you are at work 24/7. And even though you're doing 12 hour days, there's a lot of the time where you'll do a 12 hour day and you need to maintain the facility so you'll continue working through that. All the guys and girls that I work with are a great bunch of people. Because you're away with them for so long, I always associate it the same as being on deployment in the Army because you're always – I share a bunk with another guy. I know it's a bit odd but it's just such a close knit community. So living away I love that aspect.

Female: That's so interesting that the closeness is part of the appeal to you. I think living and working all in one space with the same people day in and day out would actually drive me insane. You said that it feels familiar because of your time on deployment. Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

Brendan: I used to be in the military for six years, so I was in the Army as an infantry soldier. I still do that today but in a more part time Army Reserve role. I loved school but probably more for the social side of things, never really for the theory base and the actual learning of it. So when it came to finishing school I had no idea what I wanted to do. I laboured around with a myriad of different jobs for quite a while, just labouring different jobs, working in abattoirs, shelving places, got to the age of 21 and I decided that even though I was having a lot of fun I really wanted more out of life. Basically I saw a recruiting ad for the Australian Defence Force for the Army, I called them up, went in for an interview and four weeks later I flew out to Kapooka in New South Wales to join the Army. I completed my initial training and then my infantry initial employment training and was posted up to Darwin. Six months later I deployed to Iraq for seven months with the Overwatch Battle Group 3 Rotation.

Female: That is an incredibly fast turnaround time, such a huge change in a short period. Are you willing and able I guess to tell us a little bit about the experience of serving in Iraq?

Brendan: We had people that obviously got injured and some guys and some mates that were shot but at the same time we didn't lose anybody. So I've got fond memories because everybody came back in one piece. Some of the relationships that I built with the guys there are lifelong relationships. I still catch up with them today and they're some of my best mates and they always

will be. I definitely grew up more in that seven months than I did the 21 years previous to that, that's for sure.

Female: So you didn't really know what you wanted to do school and you ended up in the Army, which within a 12 month period took you to Iraq?

Brendan: It was after about six years or just under six years I decided that even though I loved the Army I wanted to try something different that probably challenged me more intellectually and technically. So in my role in the Army I was infantry so it's more physically demanding. I got out and I wanted to try something different. My father is an electrical instrumentation tech by trade and naturally he's got a fairly big influence on my life so from that I wanted to go down that avenue and once I finally did get an apprenticeship, that was my first introduction to VET.

Female: So you say you finally got an apprenticeship, it sounds like it wasn't a very straightforward path for you. Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

Brendan: So when I discharged out of the Army I had my mind set on getting an apprenticeship in the electrical industry. I was pretty confident in that. I had my resume which I thought was pretty good and ready to go. I quickly found out that I wasn't just going to walk just straight out of the Army and into an apprenticeship. I put in a heap of applications everywhere and realised pretty quickly that I wasn't going to get an apprenticeship that year. I didn't hear back from any of them.

At this stage I was running out of money pretty quickly, as you do when you've got a few financial burdens and that, but I was 26 at the time, you obviously do have, and I didn't have a job. My dad actually helped me get a job as a furniture removalist a few months after I got out and that helped me a great deal. But it was a bit of a fall from grace in my eyes in the fact that I'd come from the Army where you do walk taller and you feel like you are respected and you've got a lot of pride in yourself, to transitioning out and then realising you couldn't get a – OK, the job that you want but not just that, any job. And yeah, your old man had to actually go into bat for you to get you one.

Female: That is pretty unbelievable really isn't it? Six years of service and you're then unemployed. It must have been incredibly tough.

Brendan: It does make you question your self worth a fair bit and it can be quite depressing. I struggled with it to be perfectly honest but I had a really good support network in my family as well. It's about this time that I sort of had to change tactics almost and instead of going for more apprenticeships I thought I'd try and up-skill in a way that would get me a gig next year. And I had two

options in my mind, one was a pre-apprenticeship and the other was to basically get work experience for a company, whether that's as a trade's assistant or labouring.

The pre-apprenticeship was a little bit difficult because I obviously had financial burdens that you have. I was 26 at the time. So I chose to put in for trade's assistant roles for electrical companies. After a couple of months of putting in I had a friend that came through for us and he really helped us out and put in a word for me and I got a gig. So I was doing two weeks on, one week off, around the state of W.A. as a trade's assistant. Twelve months later with that experience, and I tailored my resume towards the electrical field, I put in for a lot more apprenticeships and I was fortunate enough to get the one that I had in the oil and gas industry. I had a few choices really which was very surprising.

Female: The whole experience must have taken a huge amount of resilience from you to just not give up. Would you describe yourself as a resilient person?

Brendan: I don't like trying things just for the sake of it. If I want to do something I'll give it my best shot, regardless of what that is, if it's footy, obviously my work, and another day-to-day. So somebody who just goes and has a go really.

Female: Your story is really interesting for a lot of different reasons I think. Some people might consider the vocational education and training pathway is in some way easier than university. But your experience I think is really showing us that it can be a really competitive avenue. So how did you find it once you got your apprenticeship?

Brendan: So my apprenticeship as a whole was a pretty amazing and I suppose challenging experience at the same time. I'd been ten years out of school so it was a little bit difficult getting back into that school based learning in a way, and especially in the first few blocks of training that I went to there was more focus around the maths theory of things, so yeah, geometry, trigonometry, algebra. For me, that was a little bit difficult and I had to get a tutor for the first few months just so I could actually pass those subjects. What I loved about it the most and where the penny sort of dropped and I knew this was for me is when you're putting that theory that you've learnt into the practical application and the penny drops, you know what you're doing, you're contributing to the team and you're actually fixing things. For me, that was – I was sold on it and that's where I knew that I wanted to be an [inaudible 0:10:42.6], an electrical instrumentation tech, and yeah, I loved my four years throughout my apprenticeship and it set me up for so much success post my apprenticeship too.

Female: So speaking of being set up for success, what's next for you?

Brendan: There's so much to learn. There's so many different avenues that you can go into, whether I want to be power generation distribution, control systems, quality metering instrumentation, there's so many different areas you can specialise in. And you'll never learn it all and you never can. And with technology and the advancements there, everything just keeps on getting – we've got new technologies coming in so then you have to learn that. It's an evolving workplace and I just love the challenge of it. I know this is going to sound odd but I just want to try and learn as much as I can for the next probably two to four years, just so I can feel very comfortable and confident in everything that I'm doing. From there, I'd like to move into sort of a supervisory role of some sort and start leading my career that way. I don't think it's appropriate for me to try and go that way yet until I am confident and competent in everything I'm doing. So at this stage I'm just focusing on the basics and trying to get them down pat.

Female: Well that's very humble of you. You're focused on doing what you do really well rather than perhaps forcing change. You sound very happy and content in where you are now.

Brendan: I'm extremely fortunate in the fact that I do actually love my job and I enjoy going to work each day. Not many people can say that. I'm in one of those fortunate positions that I do get challenged every day and it's a challenge that I enjoy doing.

Female: So thank you so much for sharing your story with us today Brendan. I just wanted to take a moment to say thank you for your service. Chatting with you today was really insightful and I have no doubt that you will continue to have great success in your life.

Brendan: Thanks for having me today.

[Music]

Female: Each person that we speak to in this podcast series is a graduate, the graduate of vocational education and training. This podcast is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training. For more information on vocational education and training please visit www.myskills.gov.au.

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