

Australians at War Film Archive

Donald Dalton - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:34 **As we were saying before, we'll start off with a fairly brief version of events. So to start off whereabouts where you born?**

I was born in Bunbury in Western Australia, 26th August 1930.

Whereabouts did you go to school?

Well we lived on a farm in fact, right out in the jarrah forest south of Kochina [?].

01:00 My father cut the farm out of the jarrah forest with a crosscut saw and an axe if he'd got a chainsaw it would be another story. I was one of 7 boys and a girl and he had a big house, in fact my father built. We had the school in the house, a proper registered school with a live-in school teacher and a couple of kids from a neighbouring farm used to

01:30 come across and to make up the numbers and that's where we did our school work. Went from one room to the other.

Where were you placed among the children?

I was the 5th and then the girl came after me but there were 7 boys. My father and mother were pretty hardworking people in those days.

And was you dad involved

02:00 **with the First World War?**

Yes, he was in France during the First World War and he had another try during the Second World War.

Okay, now when did you become involved in the army?

Well later after we moved from the farm to Perth I went back to live in Bunbury and I finished my schooling there at the Bunbury High School

02:30 and there was a Citizens' Military Forces company there. And I got involved with it there, in fact I joined before I was quite old enough to join. And I continued to serve in the CMF right up until I joined the regular army. It just something I liked and wanted to do.

03:00 Much to the horror of my mother because during the Second World War we had my Dad and two brothers in the army both in the islands, I think one brother landed in Borneo when he was 17. My mother wasn't very keen on it but it was just something I liked and something that I wanted to do and I enjoyed it.

Did you have to fudge your way in a bit, were you a bit too young?

No, no it

03:30 wasn't a problem in those days. I think when I was finally, officially enlisted I was then a lance corporal but no I didn't have any trouble. I spent my time with the 11/44 City of Perth Regiment and it was quite an enjoyable period and probably what started me off in my regular

04:00 service.

So you were working as well with paid employment?

Oh yeah, I worked I finished work as a ledger keeper or clerk or whatever you'd like to call it for a firm in Perth. It was a health fund thing called the Bankers Health Society which is non-existent now and I worked for them right up until

04:30 I enlisted in the regular army.

And what prompted your change to the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]?

It was just something I wanted to do. My mother was horrified and I really couldn't blame her you know because during the war she was terrified that a telegraph boy would arrive at the door and I don't suppose you could blame her but it was something that I wanted to do

05:00 and I joined the regular army and I was a young soldier with an agenda. I wanted to be a regimental sergeant major.

Why?

I don't know, it was just something I wanted to do and something I wanted to achieve which I finally did. Be it right or wrong I'd do it all over again. But not under

05:30 today's circumstances.

And how so soon after in joining the regular army did you get sent to Korea?

Not very long actually, I did my recruit training at 6 Recruit Training Company in Guildford and I was only there a fortnight because I knew more about what was going on than the instructor that I had.

06:00 You know I had 5 years experience and I knew more about it than he did. So they sent me to a first promotion course which I duly qualified in and from there I went direct to the 1st Battalion at Ingleburn and from there the whole battalion was warned for overseas service and in

06:30 1952 early we sailed for Korea.

Were you sent to Japan before Korea?

Yes, yes we actually went on a troop ship called Her Majesty's Troop Ship Devonshire which was top-heavy fool of a thing. We went to Japan first to Kure where we underwent

07:00 training and playing up and all those sorts of things you know and we were there for probably a month. You know I just can't remember those things and when we sailed for Korea on the most dreadful little ship you could ever think of but it got us there.

07:30 We arrived at Pusan and went north to a place called, they used to call the Kansas Line, where we spent quite a long time - what familiarisation - cold.

08:00 No one was supposed to have known we were there, probably even us but no one else was supposed to have known we were there but strange as it may seem over the radio came a musical interlude from the North Koreans dedicated to the 1st Battalion on the Kansas Line, that was the way it was.

I definitely want to talk about Korea in depth later on, just what did you come back to in terms of work in Australia?

08:30 When we came home I went to the west of course for my leave, and I was then posted to what was then the 17th National Service Battalion in Swanbourne in the west, and we used to put the boys through those 98 day National Service training. In

09:00 fact I put my younger brother through. And I was there for - right up until about 1953, no it would have to be longer than that 57. By that time I had reached the rank of warrant officer class 2 so I was only one short of my goal and I had only been in the army a couple of years

09:30 and we spent quite a long time at National Service and then I was posted to the army Apprentices School at Balcombe and I spent a number of years there and it was a very satisfying time.

What were you doing there?

Well I was a company sergeant major and we were responsible for the military side of training of the apprentices

10:00 and you know they would come in 16, 15, 16 and it was magnificent just to watch them grow and develop and what have you. And I still see a lot of them. A very nice time and it was just at that time too that I happened to meet my wife. I left there

10:30 59 probably, somewhere there, it's a bit hard to remember all the exact times and I was posted back to the 1st Battalion at Holsworthy in New South Wales as a company sergeant major and I spent quite a lot of time there. Before suddenly finding that I was doing all sorts of odd little courses and

11:00 training programs and things like that and low and behold off I went to South Vietnam. Actually, I thought I was going to the United States but I went the wrong way. And I went there in 1963 with the 2nd Training Team [AATTV - Australian Army Training Team Vietnam] that was ever to go to Vietnam. There was only

11:30 about 30 of us in the country at that time all with a price on our head by name. And I spent 13 months

in Vietnam the first tour.

And who exactly were you training?

Well I probably had a cushy job in comparison to some of the fellas that were there,

12:00 but I was with the Ranger Training Centre and the Vietnamese rangers were the elite of the Vietnamese forces and I was involved with the training in their mountain jungle and swamp schools. It was a pretty trying experience.

12:30 I came home grossly underweight, fell in a heap, my whole nervous system just collapsed and that was that. But it was, it was a very trying experience and very hard on your system. Unlike other times that I've been away with your own fellows it's sort of different. You know I can

13:00 remember wandering around the jungles at 2 o'clock in the morning with a whole battalion of Vietnamese and I'm here all by myself and I often said to myself, "What the hell are you doing here all by yourself with these people who can't communicate yet?" But I did learn after a while to communicate with them with a bit Vietnamese that we learnt and a little French that I learnt at school and they were keen to learn English and a bit of drawing in the sand.

13:30 We had interpreters but they were hopeless cause they used to translate whatever you said into French and then they'd translate it from French to Vietnamese and by the time it had got to where - it had lost its meaning. You know, so I used to do without them, I found it was better.

And so when you got back did you have to take an extended period of leave or?

No,

14:00 I had my normal which I spent in Western Australia and my mother trying to feed me up and get me back to some semblance of weight but I only had a month or something. It was two years worth of leave that - and then I was posted back to the

14:30 1st Battalion for a short while. Then the 1st Battalion were warned for service in Vietnam. Now at that stage you had to be home for at least for 12 months before you could go back again. So I couldn't go back with the 1st Battalion, so I then went and helped establish the 5th Battalion.

15:00 Because of the build up of the number of battalions with the extended war in Vietnam, in mind. Mind you when we were up there with the training team I'm sure we knew we were never going to win that little war. However, and I helped establish the 5th Battalion...

Whereabouts were you training then?

That was in Holsworthy,

15:30 in New South Wales. So then we had to establish the 3rd Training Battalion to train the National Service boys. So I was then involved with the establishment of the 3rd Training Battalion at Singleton New South Wales. In fact at one stage, I was a company sergeant major in 5RAR [Royal Australian Regiment] and the regimental sergeant

16:00 major of the 3rd Training Battalion at the same time.

Does this mean you get double pay?

They used to tend to pay us a few problems. But after that was sorted out we got the battalion, the training battalion organised and running, up and running, and then I, at that stage, I was then a temporary WO1 [Warrant Officer 1st Class]

16:30 I got almost where I wanted to go. But I had to go and do a course at the infantry centre to qualify for my substantive rank you see and the commander at Singleton wouldn't let me go unless he had a replacement while I was away. So the good old army, in their usual form, they posted another RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] there so we had two.

17:00 I went to Canberra and the Director of Infantry, who I knew well, offered me all sorts of things but that weren't available and things I didn't want and whatever I did want I couldn't have you know all that sort of stuff but I was a bit of a step ahead of him because I knew the 1st Battalion were coming home from

17:30 Vietnam and they didn't have a regimental sergeant major so I suggested that'd be the job. And he had to give it to me. So I went back to the 1st Battalion as the RSM and I stayed with them went back to Vietnam with them as a matter of fact we went back on the night of our first wedding anniversary,

18:00 I left Sydney. But my good wife she knew she'd married a soldier so that was that. So we went back to Vietnam and...

Were you yourself patrolling and doing operations?

Well we did, we most certainly did, I don't know you never seem to be in one place for five minutes. The battalion was

- 18:30 constantly on operations of various size type things. The biggest one I think we were involved with was the Battle of Fire Support Base Coral which went on for weeks and weeks and it was just something else. We lost a lot of young soldiers.
- 19:00 What it amounted to we were in the raid of Vietnamese regiment who were going to Saigon and we were in their way and we weren't about to budge and they – so they lashed into us with a whole regiment of Vietnamese, North Vietnamese regulars. It went on for about 25 days
- 19:30 and some of the events that took place were just unbelievable with the aircraft and the guns and all that sort of stuff. Our CO then was Colonel Bennett who's now Lieutenant General Sir Phillip Bennett. He directed operations and
- 20:00 he did a magnificent job but we did, we lost a lot of young soldiers and a lot of Vietnamese and it was pretty hard on the system. It was the most prolonged operation and prolonged battle of the Vietnam War. I mean they all talk about Long Tan and I'm not knocking that but that was an overnight thing, sort of thing a couple of days. Fire Support Base Coral yes that was something else. Probably

- 20:30 the worst one but we were involved in a lot of other operations and company operations but I was with the headquarters but we still went out into the woods.

And you brought 1RAR back again?

Yes, we came back from Vietnam and had time to scratch our ear sort of thing and

- 21:00 then we went to Malaya or Malaysia as they call it. Helen came with me and our little bloke. He'd been born 12 days I might add in Vietnam before we even knew, I even knew about it. We went to Malaya but I was only allowed to go to Malaya for six months.
- 21:30 We stayed – we were at the Teranak Garrison at Malacca and then we moved the whole battalion down to Singapore. We were at Selarang Barracks which is just opposite the Changi prison. And from there I left there to come back to Australia as – back to the Army Apprentices' School as the regimental sergeant major.
- 22:00 And I stayed on there till 1973 when I decided for the benefit of my family and that I had had enough. I'd achieved what I wanted to do. Well I did that half way through my tour of service anyway but at that stage discipline was an unheard of thing in the army and when I
- 22:30 first joined the army if a lance corporal said jump, you jumped and kept jumping till he told you to stop but by 1973 discipline was starting to disappear out of the services and probably I was a bit set in my ways and I wasn't about to let my standards fall so I gave it away.

Thanks for that overview that's just

- 23:00 **about perfect. That's just about perfect of the overview we're after. I'd like to know what your recollections are of the Second World War as a young boy?**

Well probably not a lot except that I knew it was all going and I knew that I had two brothers somewhere up in the islands and

- 23:30 a father who was trying to get back up into the islands but unfortunately they were a little bit a wake-up to him and I probably didn't sort of take a lot of it in. I do remember my mother and her you know if the front doorbell rang and there was a telegram
- 24:00 boy that was – cause that's how they used to tell you in those days if someone was killed they would send you a telegram. I remember the end of the war because of all the jubilation and all the stuff that was going on but I suppose basically at the age I was then you know there was a war on.

Was there,

- 24:30 **can you describe that jubilation? What happened at the end of the war?**

Well I was in Bunbury at that time and people just went mad. You know they were out in the streets shouting and dancing and drinking and all of that sort of stuff. Everybody was terribly excited and I don't suppose you can basically blame them for that.

How did your mum react at the end of the war?

With relief. With relief.

- 25:00 Because my two brothers came home, unfortunately a lot didn't. But yes she was relieved and at this stage of life I can understand it. I can understand better now than I could in those days.

When you're a kid you're pretty oblivious to things like that aren't you?

I think so you know you're 14 or 15 or somewhere there

- 25:30 and there's all sorts of other things take up your time, isn't there. Yeah, yeah you are.

Did you have mates whose families were affected? Did they lose brothers and so on?

Not that I can think of at this moment but no doubt we did but I can't think of any at this particular point of time.

How did it affect your family in terms of rationing?

26:00 Yeah, we got through you know tea was rationed and sugar was rationed and petrol was rationed and Mum used to handle all the ration cards you know we got through. And I'm sure most other people did as well. You know your meat rations and all that sort of stuff. No, we got through that.

26:30 **I'm not sure where Bunbury is, is that anywhere near Perth?**

That's about 119 miles south west of Perth, on the coast, a port there. Quite a big town, it was in those days, much bigger nowadays of course. Yeah, a nice little place, I was born there, went

27:00 to school there.

So did that area see much of the influx of troops coming through there?

No, no.

Okay.

The odd submarine used to come in there and matter of fact it was the first time I saw a submarine and went in one and I was quite determined that there was no way they were going to get me down in the submarine.

You were allowed to go in one?

We did actually go in one, yeah but not for me.

Well your father was in the First World War as well,

27:30 **what did you know of his service there when you were a boy?**

Well very little actually, because probably like nowadays he never used to talk about it a great deal and in fact he never used to talk about it at all. We really didn't hear a lot about his First World War service.

28:00 I did find out more when I tried to find all his medals and things like that but he was in the Engineers in France. But that's about all I do know.

Were his buddies a big part of your childhood, would he have reunions or get-togethers with his old ex-servicemen friends?

What in Perth?

Yeah.

Yeah well see,

28:30 we all used to have get-togethers, yeah, but you know I haven't lived in Perth since 1957 and nowadays all I know is what's left of my family.

And your father when he was a boy would he have reunions with his World War 1 friends?

No, no.

I'm just sort of trying to gauge what sort of influence his service history

29:00 **had on you as a young man?**

Well you know my Dad was a big fellow, a big strong man. We were disciplined to grow up probably and do the right thing and all that sort of thing otherwise you get a flick in the ear but we were all good mates with my father. Actually,

29:30 my father died when I was in my first tour of Vietnam. But no I really don't know what sort of got me involved with the army. And it obviously had no affect on my son because all he wanted to do was fly.

What services were your brothers in?

30:00 Look I really couldn't tell you the units. One was in the unit that was captured in Singapore but he was lucky, I suppose you could use the word lucky but he wasn't very impressed. But the younger brother, according to military records was older than the older brother. And

30:30 the older brother could always claim the younger into the - which he did. And the younger brother claimed my older brother and so he didn't get caught up in the Singapore - the fall of Singapore.

Well back home how much did you know of where they were and what they were doing?

Not much, you didn't get you know it's different to

31:00 nowadays you didn't learn much at all because even their mail was censored to be sure that they didn't sort of tell you things they weren't supposed to be telling you so really you didn't know much at all.

Those letters must've been a bit of an event for your mother at least?

Yes they were and you'd find bits cut out of them and you know they used to snip bits out but they most certainly censored

31:30 them.

What do you remember of the men coming back home and back into society?

Probably not a lot, you can remember it happening you know with your brothers and that it was just an event to have them back and I suppose

32:00 all over Australia families felt the same way that you got them back alive.

And what do you remember of seeing wounded men coming home and amputees?

Well there was a lot of fellows that were wounded and came home and unfortunately some of them bore the brunt of angry people. In those

32:30 days they used to - if you had someone who was a conscientious objector or didn't want to go they used to give them a white feather and quite often soldiers would come home wounded and would get the same treatment. Yeah, white feather.

33:00 **I'm not sure I understand, why would they think that they were cowards?**

Well because they were home weren't they and they were back in civilian clothes and things. You see in those days too they used to wear on their sleeve a stripe like sergeants stripes only upside down little ones and that would denote the number of years service they'd had overseas

33:30 but if they were wounded and discharged out of the army they were in civilian clothes and people didn't know. And the white feather treatment was pretty bad.

Now I'm not sure about the times but you must've been entering the workforce by now - end of the war?

Yeah, when did the war finish, 1945, I was 15 yeah I was just starting.

34:00 **Did that affect the working world all those men coming back and looking for work or?**

Yes, there was a lot of people spent a lot of time looking for work. You know the work wasn't there to be had so yes I suppose it did.

And as far as I know a lot of men had their jobs guaranteed upon return, how did that affect the guys who had those jobs?

Well I don't really know to be quite honest with you.

Okay.

I don't know.

34:30 And at that age I probably wasn't interested anyway.

What were you into when you were a teenager?

What was I?

What were you interested in?

The army I think, cause all my spare time was taken up with the Citizens' Military Forces, all of it. Yeah, army.

How old were you when you first joined the CMF?

I would've been 16.

35:00 Yeah, 16.

So how does that work, do you spend time with them nights and weekends?

Yeah, yeah. In Bunbury, the company was just up the road from me anyway and yes we spent a lot of time there. A lot. Later when I went back to Perth,

35:30 you know weekends, holidays, everything was spent CMF wise.

A lot of those - I'm wondering what sort of contingent of your training officers had seen action?

Oh quite a few of them, I couldn't tell you how many but quite a few of them. When I was

36:00 with the unit in Bunbury the chap that used to virtually run it was a regular officer, a regular warrant officer, a warrant office class 1, a regimental sergeant major I think that's what sort of - and he was good soldier. And I think that's probably what sort of got me going.

From your point of view what made a good soldier?

36:30 Dedication - yeah dedication. If you were going to do it do it properly or don't do it all. And that's what we used to do, I used to do it any rate. I mean I've always believed if you're going to do something do it properly or don't do it at all.

What sort of training did you do with the CMF?

I was with what they called the anti-tank

37:00 platoon and we used to have these 6 pounders anti-tank guns which were sort of going out, if I could use that expression, we used to train with - we used to do other infantry training too but we used to drag these things all over the countryside and train with them. Shoot with

37:30 them and all that sort of stuff.

How much chance did you have to shoot them off?

Every opportunity we got particularly when we went on annual camps and things, we had to go to the right place because you don't go shooting 6 pounders all over the place. I do remember giving a demonstration on the beach at Cottesloe one night and we were firing

38:00 these guns and breaking windows all round the place and the Himalaya sailed out in front of us like that. No we spent a lot of time but you had to go to the right place. You just couldn't go down to the rifle range and shoot them.

I was just wondering about the availability of ammunition?

No, it wasn't a problem then.

Okay, we might just change tapes.

Tape 2

00:32 **Well your transfer over to regular army besides your mum's objections was that relatively easy for you?**

No it wasn't, my Mum was dead against it, I think both my mother and father were dead against it but her attitude was that the family had done enough during

01:00 the Second World War and it wasn't popular as far as she was concerned. But at times I can be a bit stubborn and I made up my mind I was going to do it and went and did it.

She must've seen that look in your eye?

Probably, probably yeah.

What did you know of Korea when you joined the regular army?

01:30 Not a lot except that the war was going on up there and you know it didn't dawn on me that I would finish up there quite as quickly as I did but in hindsight I'm glad it worked out the way it did. Because you know I was 'as fit as a Mallee bull', as the saying goes, but I knew

02:00 the war was on but it didn't really have any bearing on my joining the army until later.

But did you basically expect to be sent?

I don't think I was really all that interested I was too busy doing what I wanted to do. As I said I was a young soldier with an agenda I knew what I wanted to do

02:30 and you know when I went to the first promotion course which qualified me for the magnificent rank of corporal that had to be done and I had to get that done see. That was within my first 4 weeks of being in the army, regular army.

What does that involve, that promotion course?

Mm?

What did that promotion course involve?

Oh you know your various infantry tactics and drill and administration

03:00 and military law and - as it turned out military law was a favourite subject of mine, all those sorts of things that you had to do.

And so - just how long was it exactly before you were sent to Korea, not exactly but in terms of months?

Well I joined in October and we went to Korea in March.

It's a pretty quick turnaround isn't it?

Yes it was.

03:30 In those days they used to grade your service depending on how long you'd be in the army by - with a star rating. If you'd been in so long you'd be a private 1 star or private 2 stars or whatever it was, and I was in Korea as a private, no stars, and that was not the way the system

04:00 should've worked. In fact we had a brigadier of some sort from army headquarters up there one day talking to us and said to us do you have any questions. And I said to him, "I would just like to know how come I'm a private, no stars, and here I am in a war zone?" "My goodness," he said, anyway he fixed it all up but

04:30 it wasn't very long.

Well before you were sent overseas what were your thoughts on your battle readiness?

We were pretty well trained, yeah we were pretty well trained. We were all fit and ready for it. Yeah there was no problem there. I was with, at that stage, the 3-inch mortar platoon

05:00 and we'd done extensive training on our 3-inch mortar. The boys in the rifle companies had a variety of names for it.

Such as?

Well I'd better not tell you that but one was 'shoot shoot and scatter', 'regularly drop shorts', because the 3-inch mortar had a beam zone where a bomb could land 600 yards long and 300 yards wide

05:30 but the majority would land where you wanted. We did drop the odd one in the wrong place I suppose. But that's the way it goes. But we were pretty well trained, yeah, we knew what we were doing.

What names did you have for them - the riflemen?

I don't know that we had any specific ones. No I don't think we had any specific ones that I can think of at the moment.

06:00 The boys in the rifle companies were to be admired they did a good job. But there was always a lot of friendly competition between the soldiers and even between units, always, still is.

06:30 In a 3-inch mortar platoon, how many men per mortar?

There was 3 operators on each mortar, 6 mortars to a platoon. You had all the other people there too, signallers and you know all those sort of people.

Did that mean you spent your free time with your other mortar men as well or? I mean who did you mix socially with?

I suppose mainly

07:00 with your own lot, yeah mainly with your own lot. I mean when we were in Korea there wasn't a lot of social time. We all went to Japan for 5 days' R&R [Rest and Recreation] to Tokyo but you basically mixed with your own.

So before you were sent did you get a final leave?

07:30 Yes. That occurs wherever you were, went in those days. You had 7 days' pre-embarkation leave.

What did you do with your 7 days?

Went back home. And did all the things people do on those sort of things. Probably drank too much beer, you know, all that sort of stuff.

Do people say things like you know words of advice or last words or?

Oh you know

08:00 the brothers used to say keep your silly looking head down and all that sort of stuff. No not really

because things were changing in the services and even the type of warfare was changing in comparison to what they did. You know when we went to Korea helicopters were

08:30 in the deal and things were changing but you know they used to always come up with the odd bit of advice how to keep yourself in one piece.

And what did your mum say before you left?

Well I can't remember exactly what she said but she wasn't happy. She wasn't happy.

09:00 And that sort of progressed every time I went away with the same result. I can understand, I can, I can understand it.

Before you went to Korea did 1RAR have its identity then, or some sort of sense of identity?

Well yeah, at that time there was only 3 battalions in the Royal Australian Regiment,

09:30 1, 2 and 3 Battalion, and they were formed after the war. 65, 66 and 67 Battalion they used to call them. And they were formed as I understand it prior to coming back to Australia after the war. Oh yes they were - but the identity went on

10:00 sort of from there. You know when they were first formed they were 65, 66, 67 Battalion and probably it wouldn't have been until the Korean war that people would've even known there was battalions like that.

Before you went to Korea, what did you know of the cause

10:30 **of that war?**

Not much and probably didn't care much. No probably didn't care much. I mean even though we really know what the war was all about it was just another war, wasn't it.

Did the army educate you

11:00 **or sit you down and tell you...**

Oh yes, yes and you know you went to all sorts of boring lectures on North and South Korea and all of that but you really weren't very interested. Your interest was mainly getting into the action bit of it all.

So

11:30 **where did you leave from?**

Sydney. Yeah we left from Sydney on this confounded top heavy troop ship. We had to, the army had to load all our own guns and those days we'd gone from 6 pounders to 17 pounders. I don't know the wharfies had one of their usual efforts on and wouldn't load the damn guns or some -

12:00 I don't know what their reason was and it doesn't matter. We went then up through the Coral Sea to Manus Island. We ran into the tail end of a cyclone the other side of Manus Island. That was the time the army decided that they would give us our needles. But you know it was an experience

12:30 I'd never been on a ship before I'd spent all my life, my young life on a farm where the nearest shop was 12 miles away. It was all an experience and took it all in as you went along. There was blokes seasick and oh God...

Did that affect you, seasickness?

No, never has. Never has. Fortunately. Apparently when you are seasick,

13:00 you are sick.

It's just hell isn't it?

So I understand it, I don't know I've never been seasick.

How well was discipline maintained on that ship?

In those days?

On that ship I mean.

Oh good, oh yes there was no - mind you it wasn't a cruise liner. You slept in hammocks and the mess nets and all that sort of so. Oh no, the discipline was still there. As it was

13:30 as you progressed through the whole thing, oh no, there was no lack of discipline.

Even with seasickness and the cyclone?

You sort of I suppose got a little bit better treatment when you were like that. I mean it didn't last long, it only lasted for a couple of days and you're back into the

- 14:00 sunny water looking over the side looking at the dolphins jumping ahead of you. Quite an experience, and to go come into the Inland Sea and Japan, you know you couldn't take your eyes off what you were looking at because it was something you'd never seen before. Yeah, but when there was work to be done, there was work to be done it had to be done.
- 14:30 **What were your first impressions of Kure?**
- Kure?
- Mm.**
- Oh you know the occupation forces had been there since the end of the war. There was all the usual entertainment places and beer halls and bars and
- 15:00 you know all that sort of thing. It was quite interesting. I went to Hiroshima which was most certainly an experience which was flat and you sort of thing and looked at the devastation and thought, "God, how did this happen?" sort of thing.
- 15:30 I liked Japan. I found the Japanese people regardless of the war situation to us as young people we got on well. Japan was nice, it was good.
- Seeing Japan and the aftermath of nuclear weapons, how much did you fear that they might be used in a war that you were about to go into.**
- 16:00 I suppose the fear was there, I'm quite sure it would've been there but to look at the place and just stand there and look it sort of you were a bit
- 16:30 awe-struck or whatever the word is but yes I suppose the fear was there. Even though you mightn't have realised it.
- Did the army make any mention of a potential of nuclear weapons?**
- No not really, not down to my level. You know I was just a young soldier they might to the upper
- 17:00 groups but not down to my level.
- Because they had those hilarious duck and cover films in the '50s in America at least,**
- Oh no.
- Did they sort of offer any advice what to do?**
- No we never - I don't think they really got to making those sort of films until after probably the Korean War. I never watch them anyway they're just as painful now as they were in those days.
- 17:30 Cause if you'd been around you'd know half of it's all rubbish anyway.
- So in Kure more training?**
- More training.
- How did that differ?**
- Snow, cold.
- Did the training differ in anyway from what you had in Australia?**
- Only to the extent that it was cold you were in the snow
- 18:00 mountains, different climate. Different climate.
- How well were you prepared for the different climate?**
- Oh I think we were pretty good. Probably we weren't kitted out for want of a better way of putting it as well as we could've been. The 3rd Battalion who were there in the days before us in the days of Kapyong, I mean those guys were there
- 18:30 virtually in the same sort of boots and gear as we wore in Australia and pretty cold. But as time went on that sort of got better.
- What extras did you have to deal with the cold?**
- Extras?
- Apart from the standard army kit out?**
- Oh well we got boots with soles that thick and great parkas and gloves, I mean in Korea
- 19:00 you wouldn't dare put your hand on anything metal otherwise your hand would stick to it. But yeah we

were provided with all the appropriate underclothes and stuff but it was still cold. I mean let's face it, when it gets down to 20 degrees below zero it's cold. And of course in Korea it goes from the sublime

19:30 to the ridiculous. In summer time it's 110 in the water bag and in the wet season it's wet. I saw it rain there once for 13 days and 13 nights it poured and the tempo of the downfall never so much as altered. You know we used to look at Korea and say, "God."

20:00 You'd wonder what you were fighting for of course it's a different story now. When we first arrived at Korea, Pusan and Seoul they were flat, wrecked. And you know to young fellas it all looked so,

20:30 you know, you were sort of speechless you know what's happened and little Korean kids running around in bare feet and they'd pinch the eye out of a needle too I might add. But of course they during the progress of the war running up and down the peninsula, which it did three or four times or however many it was. The big cities

21:00 like Seoul and Pusan really took a thrashing.

When you first arrived what did you see in the way of refugees or?

No I didn't see many, didn't see many. They're funny people, you know, where we went to there were just the usual villages and village people you know

21:30 there's probably a few refugees here there and everywhere but we really didn't see them, no.

The little kids you just mentioned, would they beg as well, would you give them things?

Well you did but it wasn't wise because they would, they were dreadful, you daren't take your eyes off anything. But that was only in Seoul and Pusan when we went up,

22:00 further up the situation was different.

What did they pinch?

What, the kids?

Yeah.

I don't know, I suppose they thought here's some easy pickings from a bunch of blokes who wouldn't know any different. But it didn't take long to wake up and take your eyes off anything.

If you had something pinched by one of the locals would you get into trouble from your superiors?

Oh no,

22:30 as long as it wasn't a weapon, they'd probably say it serves you damn well right for not looking after it.

So it wasn't negligent loss of...

If it was equipment or anything like that or weapons, that was a different story.

Just to go back to Japan for a second, you mentioned the cold was a real problem, did they have any procedures to counteract that in terms of your weapons?

23:00 Not so much in Japan as in Korea. In Korea trucks, water tanks used to freeze up and on a 3-inch mortar you have an elevating screw that raises the barrel up or another one that takes it from side to side and during the night you'd hear 'crack' and they'd just crack,

23:30 just break. You had to use a lot of anti-freeze stuff on our elevating screws and traversing screws on the mortars we used to use Johnson's baby oil because it never froze. You put a mortar base plate in the ground and you had to get it out you'd have to hook a GMC [General Motors Corporation] truck up to it and pull it out. You couldn't drive a pick in the ground. It was cold.

24:00 I actually saw a case of beer, bottles of beer go 'phew' just explode. Oh no Korea was much colder than Japan, it was dreadful country.

When you were in Japan, were you trained or did you have anything to do with people who'd been through Korea already?

No not really, no, no.

I'm just wondering

24:30 **what lessons they may have learnt by that stage and what was passed down to you?**

Well you know I suppose there was introduced into our training lessons that had been learnt in Korea by people who'd been there but it really didn't sort of get down to us we were busy doing our own thing, sort of thing.

On your way to Korea, how

25:00 **would you describe the mood of the unit?**

The mood?

Mm.

Oh one of apprehension I suppose. We went over on a little ship that still had the screens on it to keep the pirates off and when you got into the bunk that you slept on you had to decide whether you were going to sleep on your back or the other because you couldn't turn over they were only about that wide and it was a horrible thing, God.

25:30 Yeah probably one of apprehension, it's you know wondering what's going to happen next but not to the extent that it worried anybody. We knew where we were going, yeah we knew where we were going.

Is there a degree of excitement as well?

Oh yes, yeah, yeah, yes.

26:00 In any, I think in any war like sort of situation, I don't know whether you call it excitement but yeah there is - we'll use the word excitement and apprehension yeah. Because you wonder too, what your own reactions will be

26:30 under fire. And it's a frightening experience, I'll tell you.

Disembarking in Pusan what did you notice first?

How wrecked the place was. You couldn't help but notice it. We weren't there very long, long enough to - we had dreadful black coffee and a donut. I hate donuts but still you ate

27:00 them in those days. We weren't there terribly long a matter of hours and then you were on the trucks and on your way.

Where were you sent to first was that the Kansas Line?

Yeah, we were there for a period of time, I just can't remember how long it was it seemed forever and see the Kansas Line was a

27:30 fall back line if you sort of get my drift but we trained there and all those sort of things until we moved forward into the front line. We went into a number of different front line positions you know I can't remember them all but we went into quite a lot. You'd spend a period of time

28:00 in the front line then you'd come back out again to the rear somewhere and have a bit of a rest and we spent a fair bit of time on the famous Hill 355 which shuttered out on the Commonwealth line like that and it was big and steep and horrible but

28:30 still but every position that you went into you sort of produced different circumstances and different situations and different actions took place and we as with our mortars we were there to support our infantry friends up front or anybody else who wanted support.

29:00 So wherever there was action we were involved one way or another. We even got mortared ourselves once.

So can you tell us about that first time you moved up into the front line, towards action?

Yeah, well in those days it was static they were all in big trenches and

29:30 deep trenches and you sat there and you looked across the valley to the hills on the other side and the Chinese and North Koreans were all sitting there doing precisely the same thing. It consisted of patrolling at night what they call no-man's-land, the piece of territory between us and them.

30:00 **So the mortar men patrol as well?**

No, not generally, if there was a major thing, didn't probably - a mortar fire controller would go with them. It was one thing I never did in fact, never had to do.

30:30 I spent a lot of time with the forward companies as a static fire controller - as a matter of fact it was the first time I ever found out what it's like to be on the receiving end of things but sometimes they did but generally if there was a company were going to attack a feature a fire controller would go with them

31:00 a mortar fire controller as there would be a gunner and you know people, supporting arms.

So when you're moving up into a front line with a mortar can you describe to us the physical setup what do you look for, how do you set it up that sort of thing?

They were usually set up on a re-entrant,

31:30 3-inch mortars were pretty heavy things, you had to carry them plus everything else you had and a mortar base plate is a hunk of steel something like that and then there's the barrel which is 3 inches long, 3 inches in diameter, heavy

32:00 a bipod which is an awful thing to carry. Each round weighed 10 pound.

How many rounds would you carry?

In that sort of situation you didn't carry many because being in a static position most of your stuff was brought up by vehicle

32:30 and then you had your headquarters of your mortar platoon with your signallers and hanger on-ers and all that sort of thing.

So is a mortar, do you put in a dugout or a trench or...?

Yes, you put it in a pit that's probably 2 - depending how long you know

33:00 you were sort of going to be where you were. But ours, we were usually in a pit about probably 2 feet deep fairly round in some parts when we were in a position for quite a long time we'd probably have a 1,000 mortar rounds in each pit all ready to drop down the barrel but

33:30 in a mobile situation that wouldn't occur. But Korea was basically static unlike the early days when they were running up and down the Peninsula chasing one another.

So how far apart would each mortar be say?

They'd be virtually side by side. You'd probably have 3 and then three

34:00 behind depending on what space was available.

So can you tell us about the time you had to fire one off at the enemy?

Well I suppose it was the same as firing one off in training when you come to think of it. The chaps

34:30 operating the mortar were told what their range and line and everything was and drop it down the barrel and off it goes you hope.

What can you see from where you are?

Nothing, because they were always as I say in a re-entrant or behind because mortars are pretty nasty pieces of gear so you didn't

35:00 want them to be in a position where they - they had to be in a sort of semi protected position from direct fire.

And who tells you exactly the range and elevation and so on?

Well with each of the companies there was a mortar fire controller or it would come through the

35:30 battle headquarters direct from a company there were probably a couple of directions you'd get it from. But generally it was from a fire controller. It was usually a corporal, I wasn't anyway.

So you were fire controller at that stage?

I was yeah, I spent a bit of time out there, yeah.

And what would you be told of the actually enemy

36:00 **movements or capacity or size when you ...**

They used to have daily briefings within your own group, our platoon commander was a captain and you were briefed each day on what was expected to happen or what had happened and what hadn't happened or what was supposed to have happened. Yeah, yeah you were always kept

36:30 pretty informed of what was on.

So when you were given like technical details of range and so on you were also given logistical and strategic...?

Oh yeah you had to know where everybody was and hoped they were where they were supposed to be. Even some would finish up not where they were supposed but generally speaking they were pretty good, they were pretty well trained and you had to feel for the infantry

37:00 blokes that were out wandering around in it.

You mentioned before that receiving fire was a pretty unpleasant experience. When was the first time you came under fire?

Well I was out with one of the companies and I just forget which one but it doesn't matter, as a fire controller and I

- 37:30 was in my little pit thing which is fairly deep you know and there was enemy gun firing at the company next to us and I thought well I'll give this bloke a bit of a shake up. So I fired a lot of mortar rounds at him
- 38:00 and I made a big mistake and I used a pair of binoculars to spot and he saw the flash of the sunlight on my binoculars and he got to work on me with a recoilless, what they recoilless rifle, which just goes 'bang wish boom' and you've got him. And he gave me a pretty hard time for a little while until
- 38:30 he got tired of it. It went on for quite a long time. I just sat down on the floor of the tent and let him go because they're aiming straight at you. I've been knocked over by the odd mortar bomb or two. One landed right beside us once and knocked two of us. Had it been a 3-inch mortar
- 39:00 I wouldn't be here. It was an American 81 millimetre mortar and it just peeled back like a banana. And it was purely the blast that knocked us over. But we you know you'd have your times when the Chinese'd decide it was time to give you a work-over with their artillery and stuff like that and our chaps
- 39:30 would do the opposite and our gunners with their 25 pounders were good. That'd make you duck your head. They were very good and I suppose the whole period of time was spent with these sort of skirmishes and companies running up hills and we had one company where our A Company attacked a hill called 227...
- 40:00 **If you don't mind I might just pause there and get that on the next tape.**

Tape 3

- 00:33 **And also just to clarify did you go into Korea as the fire support officer?**

Yes, I stayed with mortars all the time.

So before the story about being a private no stars in Korea I wasn't sure if you were a corporal in Korea?

Well I went there as a private, then I got promoted to corporal and then

- 01:00 I got promoted to sergeant and I came home as a substantive sergeant which wasn't bad in the first 12 months. At one stage, I was one of the youngest warrant officers in the Australian Army.

Some achievement.

Yeah, but I knew what I wanted. My conduct sheet for want of a better word was as clean the day I came out of the army as it was the day I went in.

- 01:30 **What's the secret?**

I suppose the old saying the crime's not committing the crime it's getting caught isn't it. And but the job always came first, always came first and it was I was never ever penalised in any way shape or form while I took 22 years in the army.

- 02:00 But I still did you know all the things that young soldiers do.

What was the procedure to becoming a corporal in the field?

Well you had to be qualified to start off with you see but I was qualified before I went to the battalion. You had to pass your subjects in military law, and drill and administration and all that sort of stuff and

- 02:30 then I suppose it amounted to the fact that how you performed during the course of time. At one stage in Korea I was commanding a forward section of mortars. A section is only two but for some strange reason I had 4 and

- 03:00 I was commanding this forward section as corporal. I don't know where all the sergeants were they were back on the mortar line I think and I was there for quite a long time.

How long say a matter of weeks or days?

Oh no, it'd be weeks a month probably. You know it's a bit hard to remember how long these things lasted but

- 03:30 I managed quite well obviously.

We saw that photo you referring to that your mum saw so there's a pit with 3 men in, how

nearby are your living quarters when you're up the front line?

Right close by, right close by, yeah, yeah. You see those - a 3-inch mortar bomb has to

04:00 go a certain distance before it's charged if you sort of get my drift and then around the tail fin of the 3-inch mortar bombs is what they call secondary charges and depending on how far you want the bomb to go as to how many of these secondary charges are on there but the bomb has to go quite a distance and don't ask me how far before

04:30 a little marble or something drops into place or something an armature thing because when our A Company attacked Hill 227 up there I think with our mortars we fired and in the time they were up there 2,800 and something mortar rounds

05:00 and when you have a sustained thing like that the barrels get very hot and these secondary charges and in only what a little plastic, cellophane sort of thing, and so you drop the bomb down the barrel and of course the secondary charges ignite before the bomb gets to the bottom. See when it comes down it's got a

05:30 thing like a shotgun cartridge up the middle of it and it come down that and it hits the bottom of the barrel and that sort of starts it going and the secondary charges when the barrel would get very hot would ignite before it got to the bottom of the barrel and the bomb would just fall out into the pit with you. Quite safe because it's not armed see. A bit frightening the first

06:00 couple of times it happens.

That sounds like an understatement...

And in this particular action it did happen a lot, I remember one sank itself into the sandbags the little command post we had and if it'd gone straight through it, it would've hit the signaller fair in the face but it didn't and that used to happen

06:30 at times but that was one of the idiosyncrasies of the particular weapon I suppose.

For it to get that hot how many are you sending a minute or?

Well it depends on the type of fire you're producing see, if you're firing rapid you know each mortar'd probably send off

07:00 5 rounds one after the other. It would just depend how it was going. At night-time we used to fire what we used to call 'harassing fire' and you'd be given specific targets to fire on it. Being young soldiers and stupid I suppose, we used to tip

07:30 a little C ration full of petrol down the barrel and say we'll send this one off to the Manchurian border. It was just one of those things you know, God knows where it used to go. But it would depend on the demand as to what was required but barrels get very hot.

What are each of the 3 men's roles?

One

08:00 lays the mortar, in other words, sets it all up and you know all that and another one who is number 2 assists him and needs to really hold the bipod and the other one is the ammunition man. But you have to be able to do all three jobs. Yeah you have to be able to do them all.

08:30 **When you were saying before it depends on how far you want it to go for how many charges, so do different mortars have different amounts of charges or do you set them yourself?**

They all come with the same amount on when they - around the tail fin there would be - it would come with I think it was six and that was what the thing was set up for what they called charge 2

09:00 and for charge 1 you used to knock 3 off. I think it was 6, it was a fair while ago, it was 50 years ago.

And so you get the order of where to fire upon, how do you work out elevation and so on?

Well it's given to you. See the fire controller gives it to you.

Is there a lot of trigonometry involved?

It would come through into your own little command post in the mortar line

09:30 and whoever was in charge at that time would come out and give you your range and elevation and your line and all that sort of stuff and the type of fire that was wanted and yeah.

As fire controller did you have to work that out yourself?

Yes, yes you did. I mean you were pretty well briefed,

10:00 in fact you were well briefed on where the fire was required and you had your maps and compasses and

protractors and all that sort of stuff. Doesn't take that long, you know. It's just something you're trained to do, isn't it, just like driving a car.

How do you factor wind in?

You had to take that into consideration

10:30 depending on which way the wind was blowing and all that sort of stuff, yeah.

Did you have some sort of mechanism to work that out?

Oh no, you'd have to have a bit of a guess at that otherwise you'd be carrying so much stuff around you wouldn't know what to do with it all.

You were just about to tell us about A Company going up Hill 227?

227.

Can you run us through in sort of point by point the stages of that, when did you find out something was going on.

11:00 Oh well it would've been some days before and what happens basically I suppose the company that's going to do the job goes to a certain point which they call a forming up place and they have a start line and all that sort of stuff

11:30 and that whatever times an hour is they're on the way and supporting arms like mortars and gunners and things would've been previously briefed as to where to apply their fire to assist in the movements of the troops

12:00 and pound the hell out of the top of the hill of course where they were going to keep them occupied up there. So everybody knew what their respective jobs were in connection with any particular attack. You see a lot of those places we had the big American 8-inch guns down the back, they used to call them the 'persuaders'

12:30 and of course the Yanks had names for all these things. But it used to fire a thing that sounded like a jet plane going over and you could actually watch the projectile going through the air but when it got to the other end there was quite a performance of course. And they would wail into a piece of territory and probably during the night you'd hear 'clink clink

13:00 clink clink clink' of bottles and the next morning you wouldn't think anything had happened but the night before they would've wrecked it with these 8-inch guns, yeah because the Chinese used to bring people up from the front, from the back to do all that sort of work dig tunnels and things. But everybody always knew their responsibilities, you'd have a company

13:30 would form up in it's forming up place and cross the start line at whatever the prescribed time was and the supporting arms would help them on the way up and help them on the way back.

So when A Company went up that hill, for how long would you be going up the hill?

Oh it lasted, I

14:00 don't really know how long it lasted, it seemed like an eternity but it lasted a long time, hours and hours, I was supposed to have gone with them in that particular case with a flame thrower. For some reason or other I didn't, probably mainly because I didn't know how to use the flame thrower anyway so. I didn't like those things though a bullet hits them and you're gone. But it would last

14:30 hours, it would just depend and I really can't remember how long this lasted but it seemed like an eternity.

Could you see that hill from where you were?

No.

And what sort of information was getting passed down to you of what was happening as they were going up the hill?

We were too busy we didn't know what had happened or anything until it was all over.

As they're going up the hill are there still places you can fire

15:00 **upon that won't get them?**

Oh yeah, yeah. Their achievement, their job to get up the hill was to get a prisoner and the only prisoner that looked like coming, getting came out and threw a hand grenade and their hand grenades were pretty unreliable for starters but they had a handle on it and they threw - this Chinese bloke

15:30 came out and threw this hand grenade at the company sergeant major and that's what he shouldn't have done because the company sergeant major fixed him up there and then on the spot the only one they ever looked like getting. No, and things go wrong and situations change as they're going up a hill

for instance. They come across problems that really they hadn't

16:00 considered or something but it's all very well planned.

And afterwards what sorts of indication are you given on how what sort of effect your mortar platoon have?

Well there's always a debriefing and you find out basically what it was all about and you get a debrief on exactly what did happen, what didn't happen and

16:30 how many casualties there were all that sort of stuff.

How much can they tell of the effect of the mortars? I mean can anyone gauge that?

I suppose they can, in fact I'm sure they can, they can also tell you how many went in the wrong place. They can tell you that without any bother. They can tell you what the result of

17:00 softening up fire be it mortars or guns or anything else, they can tell you what sort of effect it has, yeah. Whether it was effective or whether it was a waste of time.

How would they pass on the news that one went the wrong way? I mean during the debriefing but with what sort of tone?

Your mates'd soon tell you.

17:30 They'd let you know. But you would find you'd get all that information in a debrief. And everybody involved in one way or another, I mean the debriefs would start at command level and work their way down so you'd find how things and how things should've went and

18:00 it would probably be next day effort sort of thing.

Did you ever find out that you hit one of us?

No I don't think so, no I don't think so. It's something you never really know. I mean you're on the end of mortar or an artillery posting you fire

18:30 where you're told to fire and you can only assume that it's safe to do so. If somebody else has made a mistake then you would hear about it eventually. But no I don't think I can ever recall hearing of anybody being injured by our 3-inch mortar fire regardless of some of the accusations that were made.

All names that were bandied about?

Yeah, yeah.

19:00 **You mentioned before that you would go up to the front line periodically, so how often are we talking and for how long?**

It would all depend what requirement it was. You know I would've spent 4-5 months of the time in a forward position.

19:30 Yeah probably 4-5 months. As I say, it's a long time ago, I spent a lot of times dropping the bomb down the barrel too and holding the bipod and passing the ammunition and sitting in the command post on the radio and all that sort of stuff.

When you were dropped back from the front line, where would you drop back to?

Well they had various rest areas and

20:00 it was the first time I saw an American plane came in just near us, it had been hit and it was one of these aircraft that had two people in it, and it exploded and you couldn't do anything to help the two guys that were in it. You heard them but you couldn't do anything to help them

20:30 but they had various rest areas and they had names for all of these places. I can remember at one stage the Black Watch got into trouble and myself and a couple of others had to run up to the Black Watch waterline at night-time in a jeep and we -

21:00 charging up the road went round the corner too fast and finished up in the middle of a minefield. That was a bit of frightening experience too. You tend to tippy tippy toe your way around the place. But still we got out of it all right.

Did you set any off?

No. Because you know even though it was marked as a minefield there probably mightn't have been any there. Because they were pretty good the enemy, pretty good at pinching them.

21:30 They used to use at one stage, they used to use little bears and herd them through the minefields and then follow them through. There were all sorts of capers. The first time I ever heard Johnny Ray singing 'Cry' was played to us from the Chinese.

22:00 That's the first time I ever heard it.

What reason - why would they do that do you think?

There was a lot of that used to go on they used to with loudspeakers say, "Why don't you Australians go home?" and all this sort of stuff you know. Christmas time - where were we 355, I just can't remember, everything

22:30 stopped. We never fired a round, they never fired a round everybody sat around on the front of their weapon pits and you know spent Christmas Day and had a... Christmas Day over, it all started again.

How secure did you feel on that Christmas Day?

All right, they said they wouldn't and we said we wouldn't. And a number of occasions, if any of our guys got wounded they would let the

23:00 stretcher bearers go do and get them, wouldn't fire on them. But they could be pretty nasty people just the same particularly the Mongolian part of them. But a lot of that used to go on, they'd play all sorts of music and that but I always remember that was the first time I

23:30 heard Johnny Ray signing 'Cry'.

What did you make of the Chinese music?

Not much at all, screeching rubbish. But they generally played our own stuff because the idea was to what, get you to feel that you'd like to be home or something, I don't know. But sometimes it could be

24:00 quite amusing.

Did it make you homesick?

No, didn't make me homesick, I mean you were only there a year. No I don't think so.

Well it's interesting, knowing you're only going to be there a year, do you mark time when you were?

Did you what?

Well did you mark time, did you count down the days?

Oh, I suppose you did, yeah I suppose you did. You'd used to say well

24:30 I've got 123 'wakies' left sort of things. Probably did that in Vietnam too. Always sort of gauged it on wake ups, how many you had left.

Do you start to get nervous towards the end of a year?

No I don't think so. After the first time you

25:00 get a bullet past your ears for want of a better expression that does tend to be a bit startling but it's sort of something that you get used to. I can remember when we got mortared, the mortar platoon got mortared you know what the hell's going on here, this is not right, but it should be going the other way

25:30 sort of thing you know and it's something that you get used to. Probably not get used to but your training sort of controls your thoughts in your mind. See in the army, particularly in the infantry, you rely on your mates a lot, you all look after one another

26:00 and I suppose there are occasions when you do get a trifle nervous say it wouldn't be right. Some people, are born mad. That's probably an odd expression but you get some of these VC [Victoria Cross] winners

26:30 you know I know 3 or 4 of them got the VC in Vietnam and they were always field soldiers cause I mean back in barracks they were a pain in the neck you know sort of thing and some of them just relished in that sort of environment where the average bloke just went about his job and did what he wanted to do and I think some of them probably did what they did

27:00 on the spare of the moment. I don't know, only they know.

How did seeing your first casualty change your attitude?

Well our first casualty actually was the batman - the commander his batman and we were mortared and for some reason or another he

27:30 jumped out of the trench and run across this hard ground and we called him to come back and he didn't, that was very early in the piece. He was really the only casualty that the mortar platoon had. That's a bit stunning, you know just watch it happen. But as life goes on in the army you watch it more times than you care to think about it.

28:00 **Did you know that man very well?**

Yes I did, he was one of us. He was one of the mortars, of the mortar platoon. Been with us all the way through training and stuff like that. What possessed him to do what he did, I don't know but you always do some – I don't care who you are, you do some silly damn things. I did a couple in Vietnam

28:30 but it cost him his life, didn't it.

I mean life does go on, you've got a lot to do but how do you mark the passing of someone like that?

Well pretty sadly I suppose, yeah, I mean you've just lost a mate. But then again I mean within your training you are

29:00 subjected to the knowledge that somewhere along the line you're going to lose a mate. You know instilled in you and when it first happens, yeah it's a shock. And I suppose you could say, well it could've been me. But it's all got to go on.

29:30 **How soon into your tour, was the phrase tour used for Korea or was that just a Vietnam term?**

Is it what a tour?

Did you call it a tour in Korea?

We used to call it a lot of things, but yeah it's a tour of duty.

Okay, how soon into that tour did you have leave?

Usually about the half way mark

30:00 or two-thirds way mark there, yeah.

Do you have any say in that?

No you were told when to go. And it was a sort of rostered thing and we went to Japan to a place called the Ebisu Leave Centre up in Tokyo and it was a special place set up for this

30:30 and you had to go in and everything was disinfected, you included. You used to get pretty dirty, let's face it and you'd get clean clothes and get a leave pass and go and find the nearest bar I suppose sort of thing. But you looked

31:00 around. We spent the first 5 days touring round and looking at various things but you know we spent a fair bit of time in the bar too I suppose.

Had it changed much since you'd been there briefly before?

No that was the first time I'd been to Tokyo.

Okay you hadn't been in various...

You know it was a big city. And it was all planned out you could get a taxi

31:30 from the Ebisu Leave Centre and the taxi – the trip into Tokyo proper was signposted so that you could see that the taxi driver wasn't driving round and round and round in circles and the trip home was signposted too so that they knew that they had to go that way. It was pretty well organised and you know you were pretty well looked after. Of course 5 days

32:00 doesn't last long and we had plenty of money I suppose.

Did you buy anything?

I used to buy all sorts of things and send them home yeah.

What like, what sort of things would catch your attention?

Oh, souvenirs more than anything else.

32:30 Yeah, scurvier type stuff. And I suppose really at that stage, see we were paid in those days with what that called BASV money, which is British Army Service Vouchers, but it was money but,

33:00 and if you ran out you could go down the street, when we were down in Kure with a block of chocolate and make a handful. No trouble at all until the Brits got wise and started putting wire in the money and things like that. But yeah we used to you know you'd buy all sorts of silly damn things and send home I suppose.

They started putting wire in the money? What do you mean?

Well you know

33:30 Australian money always had a strip through it but this British Army Service Voucher type money didn't have and the Japanese could just for a block of chocolate could make a handful of it. So you were

always, over and above that we were pretty well fed, pretty well paid anyway, yeah.

The BCOF [British Commonwealth Occupation Force] fellas had some rules about fraternising with the local women,

34:00 **did you have rules on leave about that?**

Yeah, yes, it used to go on. There were typical bars and beer halls and things you know a lot of them in Vietnam.

Is that one of those rules that is sort of there but you never expect it to be...

Nobody took any notice. In those days they had to be pretty careful because the

34:30 Pommy [English], I'll use the expression Pommy, military police were pretty savage. They were called the Red Caps, they were called a lot of other things too. And they were pretty savage in that if you know if you were playing up too much you'd finish up in the slot. But yeah it used to go on, yeah. They wouldn't have been young soldiers were they?

What other

35:00 **nationalities' military police where there around then?**

In Korea?

In Japan on leave?

What other nationalities of people?

Oh military police?

Oh there was a lot of them, I mean they all had their own including us. I mean there's Canadians and Yanks and they all got their - but the British Red Caps were not very well liked. Is probably the nicest way of putting it.

35:30 **What sort of presence did the Americans have in Japan at that stage?**

In Japan, oh pretty heavy, there was a lot of Americans there. A lot of American air bases and that in Japan, oh yeah. Because there was a lot of Americans in Korea you see and I would imagine that a lot of their main bases were in Japan.

36:00 I mean it wasn't very far to Japan from Korea.

When you're rostered on leave like that, who do you go on leave with? Is it the men from your same mortar?

Usually, oh no, not necessarily, although when I went on leave there were 2 or 3 of us from the mortars went.

I mean is taking a man out of a platoon, if you are one of 3 I suppose that 3's useless, is that how it works or...?

Oh no, no,

36:30 I mean you always had in the mortar platoon with the 6 mortars you wouldn't only have 6 groups of 3. There's always some extras around the place. I mean you've got to have that, if somebody gets crook or something you've got to have - you wouldn't

37:00 take that many people that it interfered with the capability of the group to operate.

5 days isn't very long is it?

No not very long.

Did you try to forget Korea when you were in Japan?

Suppose you did to a degree, yeah. Yeah I suppose you did but it was always in you mind that you've got to go back again.

How did you feel about going back?

37:30 I don't know. I really don't know I suppose you went back cause it's what you knew you had to do.

Much AWL [Absent Without Leave] after leave?

No, not a lot. I don't think I heard of anybody that didn't go back after their leave, wouldn't think so because

38:00 they'd be letting their mates down and Australian soldiers are not trained that way. You might get the odd one or two. No, I don't think I can recall of anybody not that I heard of it anyway.

In Korea you were fighting alongside a lot of other different nationalities, how do you maintain your Australian identity? Is that, how important is that?

Oh

38:30 I don't think it was hard, because you can always tell whether you're talking to a Yank or a Canadian or an Indian or a Pom you knew, you just sort of knew, I mean you didn't have to wear uniform you – most of the time I suppose you did but identifying who was with you wasn't a problem.

And in

39:00 **terms of service or duty did you feel that their Australian - not peculiarities but unique - there's a unique nature to the way Australians served in Korea, was that something that was maintained?**

I think so. You know, when you look at 3RAR at the Battle of Kapyong they did a magnificent job.

39:30 I think you know we upheld the traditions pretty well, yeah. Always have done I think.

In Korea who did you think you were fighting for?

Well it was the United Nations thing and you see particularly if you're a regular soldier

40:00 you are fighting for Australia aren't you, that's what you're doing.

Thanks for that.

Tape 4

00:37 **Well how much talk was there of the cause of the war and sort of conscience wondering why you were there?**

Probably at our level not much, really not much. I mean up in the higher echelons no doubt they're you know there

01:00 you know there was some considerable discussions of the whys and the wherefores but on our level I think we were more concerned with what we were doing and how we were doing it.

You just mentioned before off tape that your loyalty is basically with the army and with Australian,...

Yes.

...but it sometimes gave you pause made you wonder why you were there?

I think you

01:30 basically knew why you were there. But it wasn't something that you dwelled on. I think everybody would have to admit that they knew why they were there but it wasn't something in your mind that you dwelled on and thought about a lot.

02:00 You're either too bloody cold or hungry or something else you know I'm sure you all knew why you were there, one way or another. And I suppose, different individuals thought about – thought about it differently. I mean I knew why we were there but I didn't go into all the

02:30 you know I didn't want to get into all the little bits and pieces about it leave that to the people who were paid to do it. We were there to do a job and that's what we wanted to do.

You mentioned the cold again and I forget to ask, did the cold or the weather cause many casualties or?

A lot of frost bite, frost bite.

Is that quite serious?

Oh yes it can be. I know people that have lost toes and things. Yeah,

03:00 you had to be very careful, as I said before you wouldn't dare put your hand on bare metal. Your bare hand on metal I mean because your hand would stick to it. You'd get your hand off and you're skin'd be gone sort of thing you know. People in the armoured and things, tanks and things like that had to I would imagine exercise the utmost care but the same

03:30 thing applied your vehicles, you'd go out and start them up every now and then otherwise they'd all freeze. It was cold.

Did the mortar men have rifles as well?

Oh yeah, regardless of what you did you all had your personal arms.

How were they affected by the cold?

Well

04:00 probably in our case the things were sitting in your hootchie there where it was warm anyway personal weapons to the infantrymen and the blokes that were going no they would treat them with the utmost care. Because to a degree the same thing would happen so yes I would think they would take far more care of their personal weapons

04:30 than we did. I mean ours were cleaned everyday and all that sort of stuff but it's not something you generally had hung over your shoulder while you were firing mortars because they'd get in the way.

What did you have to keep warm? Did you have fires?

We used to have in a lot of cases these little - we used to call them choofers, and

05:00 it was like a little diesel fire, you made it yourself out of (UNCLEAR) or anything that you like and you'd use those to keep warm.

How do you make those?

Oh just a thing, you'd make it so - you had a diesel container and it would just

05:30 drip into a fire box of some sort there's a variety of them I can tell you. Some of them well thought out some of them not so well thought out. And of course being diesel you used to - the winter time spend a lot of time looking pretty black but keeping warm was the thing, yeah.

06:00 I was wondering if smoke would be a problem in terms of being visible to the enemy?

Oh no we were always pretty careful about that.

Well how would you control the smoke?

Because if you were in the forward areas you wouldn't use it.

Right, yeah.

You would only use it where it was appropriate to use it and you used to - what did they say - you'd get the 'choofer necks', you'd be black from there up.

06:30 So what was your role in action on Little Gibraltar?

Mortars just the same. I wasn't involved in the forward activities in Little Gibraltar, I think everybody, all the Australians that went to

07:00 Korea at some time spent time on Little Gibraltar.

What was going on when you were there?

The usual thing, it was a pretty big hill, in fact they had a flying fox that they used to bring any of the wounded guys down or bring the supplies up - pretty steep and it was the most forward position in the

07:30 line across Korea and 90% of the time it was occupied by Commonwealth forces. See you used to change over you know we'd go and take over an area that the Canadians had or the Brits had had and we seldom changed places

08:00 with the Americans. But from Little Gibraltar you could see anything, everywhere. It was a dominating feature that's what made it so important.

Did you send many mortars off from Little Gibraltar?

Oh we would've done, we would've done, yeah.

Was it just sort harassing fire or actually...?

Oh both, I mean they still used to do their patrolling and

08:30 you know if a patrol got into trouble they'd call on mortars or guns or what have you to support them and do whatever. It's very hard to be specific because different situations produced different requirements. And we just provided fire as was required, yeah.

09:00 So how long did you spend on Little Gibraltar roughly?

Well I couldn't tell you that really, too long of course everybody would tell you. It was quite a while, quite a long time you know you might've spent a month there, six weeks or but I just can't recall how long that period of time was.

When you change

09:30 **over from say the British, how does that work do they linger on and help you transfer over?**

Yeah, you didn't just all wander off it was done piece by piece so that every defensive was manned all the time. You just didn't pack your traps and head off, no.

So what was your procedure of changing over mortar pits?

Pretty well the same, pretty well the same.

10:00 We'd take over their mortar pits, they'd take over theirs. Yeah pretty well the same.

Did you have a bit of a chat and have a go at them?

Yeah, oh yeah. Yes you would you'd talk to them, yeah. It was you know they'd be -

10:30 you'd go into their place and they'd say, "Oh God, you won't like this." You'd have the usual sort of thing, yeah.

What noticeable differences were there in attitude between the forces?

Well see in Korea our troops there were all either regular soldiers or K Force,

11:00 now K Force were people who enlisted specially for the Korean War. In the American army and Brits and some of those a lot of them conscripted you know where you have to do - so probably attitudes were a little different, yeah, I would think so.

A little less willing then?

11:30 Probably, probably.

What was the attitude towards the Yanks?

Towards the end?

No sorry, towards the Yanks?

Oh it was all right, I mean the Yanks, we're always envious of the Yanks because whatever they had, they had everything. Everything. And naturally we didn't

12:00 I mean they had the helicopters when they first came out. And there was always that little bit of - what would you call it - a bit of an idea that the Yanks have got everything and you know why can't we get some of this equipment that they had.

12:30 But that's been going on forever. It really has. But they all got on all right. Yeah they all got on all right.

Well so where were you towards the end of your tour? Did they pull you out of the front line when you were getting close to the end?

They didn't pull us out of the front line and send us

13:00 directly home no. We spent a little bit of time at a place called Camp Casey, I don't know what made me think of that but probably because it's my daughter's name, Casey, and we were there for quite a while and they had a big parade

13:30 there of the Commonwealth Forces that were out on line in the ice and snow I might add too. Yeah, no, but they brought us out into Camp Casey prior to us coming home as I remember it. The old memory gets a bit wayward after so long.

It's been a while hasn't it?

Mm.

And what was your route home

14:00 **from Korea?**

We came home on a ship called the New Australia which was one of the ships that they used to bring migrants out to the country. There were no hammocks and you know it was pretty comfy really. We came home very well the same way as we went up. We came

14:30 into Brisbane and the welcome we got was unbelievable. Everything was free. Didn't matter where - you didn't have to buy a drink or anything and there was plenty of it floating about they really turned it on in Brisbane for us. Then we came on...

Sorry to pause for a second, that's unusual because the reception of a lot

15:00 **of Korean veterans was ignorance or just nobody seemed to know or notice?**

They call it the forgotten war.

Yeah they do.

They call it the forgotten war but the fact that we were coming home most certainly stirred the Brisbane people up. It was fantastic and there were heaps – they were at the wharf over and you went

15:30 to the races or you went into a pub you wouldn't buy a drink in a fit in fact there was quite a few sodden young soldiers went back on board the ship. They gave us a magnificent welcome.

What sort of things would they say to you?

Oh I suppose the usual things you know. I don't know,

16:00 but there were young soldiers even being carried back on – so they really turned it on for them, really did. And from there we went to Sydney where it was very similar but not to the extent it was in Brisbane and then trained back to Perth on

16:30 leave because they didn't have jets in those days.

It's a long time getting home isn't it?

You're right, I've done that trip a few times when they used to use ordinary old rattlers – four days you got – but still it was going home. And you know we knew all the capers where you could ring up ahead and

17:00 a bloke at the next township would turn up with another case of cold beer and stuff you know all those things used to go on. And we arrived back in Perth to some quite large crowds and things there.

Really at the station or?

Yeah, oh yeah, yeah. And naturally parents were there to

17:30 welcome you home but it was – that part of it was all pretty easy. At least you were home.

Had your mother's attitude changed at all?

No. But naturally you know she was pleased I was home and all that sort of thing but she still didn't like me being in the army.

When you get off a there's a

18:00 **crowd full of enthusiasm, what's your reaction do you maintain sort of military dignity or do you sort of...?**

Oh, you try to but it doesn't work you know it doesn't work. I mean you are probably inwardly equally excited as they are so you probably let your hair down a bit, yeah. Oh yes, but it's

18:30 an unforgettable thing to be welcomed home by such large quantities of people. Unlike later, things that happened. But they do call it the forgotten war and they have forgotten all about it really.

It is very good to hear thought that at the time you had some recognition.

Oh yeah well we did

19:00 you know we couldn't have asked for anything better than the way Brisbane turned it on. Let's face it most of the blokes would be more interested in having a few grogs and having a good time which they did.

When you come home, what's more important is it the recognition from the army or from the civilians?

19:30 The recognition from the civilian population was not unexpected. We sort of knew that you know there'd be people lots of people to welcome us home. And it was not unexpected.

20:00 You know you got your various recognitions from the army too I suppose but as we found later things differ. We didn't have anybody then to turn the people against the soldiers which did happen later. And so our welcome home was

20:30 I supposed quite expected and we were thrilled to bits over it, yeah.

Were there many WA [Western Australian] boys on the train?

Yeah but don't ask me how many. Yes, oh yes, yeah. Of course there was – you see the 1st Battalion went back twice, the Korean War – what did it last over and above the fact it was too long, but it lasted quite a few years, quite a few years.

21:00 Yeah there was I suppose quite a lot of West Australian boys. I wouldn't know how many.

How strange is it to be back somewhere like Perth so far away from everywhere else, when you'd been right up to Korea and seen action? How do you react to going back into that sort of environment after...?

Oh I mean you were only away a year.

21:30 It didn't it was no effort to fit back into the civilian situation. Not that - I mean the K Force fellows would automatically, they'd finished their time and go back into civilian life but if you were a permanent soldier you sort of waited for whatever happened next. I didn't have any bother.

22:00 Didn't have any other at all.

And next for you was training the National Service boys?

Yeah.

How did that come about?

Well I suppose it was just a decision that was made by the army that's where they'd send me.

Why do you think they chose you?

Oh I wasn't the only one, probably because I lived there.

22:30 And probably they didn't have - they had to find somewhere for me to go. And I'm glad they did. You know I spent a fair bit of time there. I got my promotion to warrant officer class 2 there. It was another line of

23:00 activity or employment or whatever you like to say training young fellas. We had them for 98 days and they came in looking like hippies a lot of them and went out looking like soldiers. In fact I had one mother came up to me in tears and said, "I don't know what you've done to him,

23:30 but whatever it is, thank you very much. He's just a different boy," yeah. They did, they come in like hippies and went out like young soldiers. It was great for their, you know for their own well being and taught them to be somebody.

What were your tricks of the trade how would you make that

24:00 **transformation?**

What?

From hippies to soldiers, how would you effect that transformation in them?

How?

Yeah.

Oh through training and discipline, yeah. You see they came from every which way all over Australia, Western Australia. They were a mixed bunch of everything

24:30 and as a result of their training their barrack room life, their discipline and all that it just makes a terrible difference to people.

How much training did you get as a trainer?

Oh got some but I just think it came naturally.

25:00 I've always, right throughout my army career regardless of what some would tell you my interest was always soldiers and their wellbeing and I've always looked after soldiers that I was training or had any dealings with. They'd probably tell you

25:30 some vastly different stories about that mind you but I went recently - not recently a couple of years ago to a reunion up on the Gold Coast and in the reunion there was a young chap who was an army apprentice and he came up to me he retired from the army as a lieutenant colonel

26:00 and he came up to me and I hadn't seen him since he left and he said, "You bugger." He said, "You shaped my life." And you know that's the sort of result that you get and it's very pleasing to get those sort of remarks. But as a general rule they would probably describe you as something different but

26:30 my attitude has always been look after soldiers. Do what you like with them but look after them and it pays.

Did the hard edged aspect of it come easily to you?

No, you see as a warrant officer, particularly as a regimental sergeant

27:00 major you have to pick the right moment to throw a tantrum if you sort of get my way of thinking and you have to select that right time to put on a performance. You're really not angry at all but you're just

doing a job

27:30 but you do it to get the result from them from the troops. No it just sort of came naturally to me but I did it my way not what I'd learnt or been told by somebody else.

So to what extent is it role playing? I mean what sort of character do you get into?

Into what?

Well as a RSM when you choose that moment you must

28:00 **draw on a few acting skills?**

No, no, it's just something you learn as you go along. You know I've seen myself on the parade at the Army Apprentices School out here, one graduation parade and I put on an act and threw my parade stick on the ground and broke it. And everybody laughed and saying,

28:30 "Righto you've all had your laugh now we'll get on with things." It was just your approach to them. You didn't have to be an actor you just had to select the right moment. Of course sometimes you select the wrong moment too. I have always thought

29:00 the soldiers come first they probably wouldn't agree with that statement but that's right.

What sort of status did the National Service have when you were training?

In the battalion? Well the only time we had them was in Vietnam.

Sorry I was talking about when you were training them in the fifties.

Oh no they only did 98 days and went back to their farms and whatever

29:30 they were doing. They were good, they were good. It did them a lot of good. Certainly more good than harm the odd one or two fell by the wayside but with the numbers that there was it was great for them. It turned them into somebody.

And how did your role in the Apprentice Training differ from that period?

30:00 It was basically the same, basically the same. We trained them in the military aspects, barrack room life, and drill and discipline and where the trades people taught them to be a grease monkey or whatever they were learning to

30:30 be we did the other part the soldiering part of the deal. But it was pretty well the same, the same thing only the kids were younger when they came in. Some of them would get very homesick and you had to be aware of this and watch for it.

31:00 And they probably took a lot more caring for because of their age. They learnt to drink beer and do all those things they weren't supposed to be doing and you'd find where they hid their beer and stuff in the barracks and they'd say, "How did you do that?" and you'd say,

31:30 "Been there, done that." You know, they'd try all sorts of capers to put things over you but they were very good to train and care for. They really were, very good. And they put on a ceremonial parade at the end of their time out here. It made you

32:00 proud of them. They used to command the parade from top to bottom you know and other parts in the army to try and find a CO [Commanding Officer], who could - a commanding officer who could do as well was a pretty hard task. But these kids could do it because they were young you could teach them anything, anything. And we used to have them for 3 years

32:30 and then they'd go off finishing their trade training with whichever the engineers or somebody you know whoever they were training with but they never forget you just the same, never forget you. Which is good. And of course they go crook because you can't remember them. But I always believed that all

33:00 I had to do was to remember the stars and the 'mon stars' and the ones in the middle, there's too many, you just couldn't remember them all. They were magnificent the boys and you were with them virtually all the time. They used to eat like horses, they had more energy than you could imagine.

33:30 They played all sorts of sports. A lot of them went on to be commissioned officers and in fact the bloke that was running the Australian thing in either Timor or it might've been Afghanistan, did we have someone down there? He was an ex-apprentice brigadier they've done well.

When did you first hear about Vietnam in terms of there being

34:00 **conflict or problems over there?**

Well it sort of snuck up quietly and then sort of - once the Americans got involved it came with a rush sort of thing but other than that

- 34:30 to us it was going on, you knew what was going on but once the Americans got involved it came with quite a rush. And you could – well you didn't have to be very clever to work out that somewhere along the line we would be involved which
- 35:00 of course we were.
- So really that early staged you figured Australia would be involved?**
- Yeah, I think you didn't have to be terribly clever to work that you could see what was going on. And of course at that time we had troops serving in Malaya there were communist terrorists there. I didn't quite expect to
- 35:30 get as involved so early but never mind that's the way it worked out.
- That's interesting so you were with 1RAR as CSM [Company Sergeant Major] have did you get seconded into the training team?**
- Well they just decided I suppose that I was a starter and that was that. I mean in the military they tell you where you're going you don't tell
- 36:00 them. And we started off doing all sorts of odd courses.
- What like?**
- Well I wouldn't tell you that because we were a top secret thing and we were all classified top secret and some of the things I've done I wouldn't even tell my wife but we did do and we finished up at Canungra and we were getting
- 36:30 cholera injections and you know that means you're going somewhere. But you don't really, you don't question it because you're a professional soldier and if the government or the hierarchy says you're going to wherever you're going well you go. Otherwise go and find another job.
- 37:00 **For such a top secret arrangement what sort of selection process was there once you were in the team?**
- Well you had to qualify, not really qualify you had to attend certain course that we went through, you know, the Jungle Warfare School at Canungra, and do all sorts of
- 37:30 things.
- And there was some sort of dropout rate during those courses, is that...?**
- Not in the early days I don't think, later – see in the early days the training team consisted of about 30 advisers with a few administrative people tucked away in some place in Saigon.
- 38:00 I don't think there were any dropouts not that I heard of. There might've been the odd one or two as you were going through Canungra that couldn't qualify some of the things that you had to do up there. Cause that was fairly physical. I can't think of one that dropped out.
- We're just near the end of the tape but in terms of secrecy did you have to sign anything or was it just a verbal...?**
- 38:30 Well you did come into a top secret classification which required you to do that, yeah. And I think as a result of that I don't know what other people think but you're bound to comply with what you agreed to do
- 39:00 as far as secrecy is concerned, yeah.
- Okay.**

Tape 5

- 00:33 **Okay, yes let's just talk briefly about when you had a teacher at home as a little wee kid?**
- Well the farm that we lived on was – our nearest town was 26 miles away and our nearest shop was 12 miles away over roads that people
- 01:00 wouldn't drive on nowadays and there were no Honda Accords and things like that we had a T Model Ford so something had to be done and Mum and Dad, don't ask me how they did it, I don't know organised it. The house was big, Dad built it himself and they organised it so that we would have the school there in the house.
- 01:30 And you had to have a certain number, and what it was in those days I don't know but we had 2 – 3 kids from a neighbouring farm used to come across and made up the required amount of numbers. And then

the teacher, which it was a properly constituted school you know. The teacher was paid by whoever pays teachers and she lived in fact she was with

02:00 us a long time. Her name was Mary Wallace and she just sort of became one of the family almost.

Did she eat meals with you?

Oh yeah, she lived in the house and was just like one of the family.

And what room was designated for the school?

Well the house was so big that we actually big room that wasn't used

02:30 at all and there was a special room set up like a classroom you know with the blackboards along the back and with the desks and all that sort of stuff and she could send a blackboard duster whistling past your ears as quick as a flash and bounce it off if you happened to sort of start to daydream a little. And she used to take part in everything the family'd do.

03:00 She was just like family.

Did the school get a registered number from the state?

Oh I suppose it did. I don't know. I was too young to care in those days, you know it was just a pain in the neck this schoolwork as it always was with me.

And what about discipline, where did you get sent for detention?

Oh we didn't get detentions in those days, you got a clip along your ear from your father if you misbehaved

03:30 yourself. But it was situation where you all made your own fun, you had to. And I don't think discipline really became a problem. She was a good teacher, she was a bonzer person and it just never become a problem.

And you were all a different age in the school so I'm just wondering how she managed all the different

04:00 **subjects, did you learn together?**

Well yes and no which is not a very sensible answer, but we were in different grades of course but she coped with it all and handled it all pretty well. She knew what she was doing obviously. She didn't turn me into any sort of mathematical genius but that doesn't matter. And it wasn't a problem to her. She was

04:30 a very capable person and very dedicated to what she was doing what's more.

And where would she go during the school breaks?

I don't know, did we ever have them? I don't know if we even had school breaks in those days.

Never got holidays?

No, no, I mean we used to go to the shops about once every six months and into town about every Christmas time. It

05:00 wasn't like it is nowadays.

Okay that sounds really fascinating and it sounds quite lovely too especially as you didn't have to walk a long way to school.

Oh well I did later because once it got down to the stage where I was the only one sort of left I had to then go to another school which was about 14 miles away through the bush and I used to ride a horse.

05:30 It was a little iron grey pony and the big problem was catching the damn thing in the morning and if it didn't want to be caught it was a problem. And I used to ride this horse to school and tie up over there at the school with its feed box and what have you and then get on the thing and ride it home again at night. And that went on for the length of time that we were left on the farm. We left

06:00 the farm just before the start of World War 11.

Beats catching a bus that's for sure. Okay, let's head back to the late '50s early '60s, I know that you've been fairly well sort of embraced by the military but I'm wondering if you had opportunities to sort of see what was going on socially outside of your work environment?

Oh yes I suppose I did,

06:30 we you know I was never one for over socialising sort of thing when I was at the apprentices' school at Balcombe here. Helen's mother and father, who had an apple orchard at Miradaki out here, I spent countless hours with them. In fact they became virtually

07:00 like my Victorian parents.

Why was that?

Oh well they were just that sort of people, magnificent people.

No I'm sorry, how did you meet them or how did you come to know them?

Oh because they – at the sergeants' mess at Balcombe, Helen's mother and father were honorary members and they used to come to all the social functions and things like that and I used to go out to the farm and

07:30 it just became sort of part of the family.

And they just happened to have a nice-looking young daughter?

Yeah, yeah.

How did you strike up the courage to make an acquaintance shall we say?

Oh that's another story. No, that wasn't hard, that wasn't hard we just sort of all knew one another and

08:00 it was just like a big family affair. In fact, her mother and father used to take a lot of the apprentices out from interstate that had nowhere to go and you know have barbecues and things like that.

I meant to ask about that did any of the apprentices ever get the better of you? Like did they find the chink in your armour?

I think they thought they did, no I don't think so look

08:30 they were magnificent there was probably the odd one or two who I could've gleefully brained but not many. No I don't think any of them ever got to me.

What was the limit of discipline that you could direct?

In those days we used to – we used to give them a hard time

09:00 but as I said before you could do what you liked with them as long as you looked after them. You had their interest at heart.

Is that what you call square bashing?

Oh I suppose you could call it square bashing I mean nowadays you'd get into diabolical trouble for doing it but we produced the results which they're not doing too well nowadays.

But when you

09:30 **say give them a hard time I'm interested to know what was too far for the army? Obviously murdering them was too far?**

Oh yeah, no, no, you didn't mistreat them but you applied a fairly high level of discipline let's put it that way because you were trying to produce good young

10:00 men in the finish. You couldn't let them get the better of you. No, square bashing refers to a parade ground...

But for example I imagine you could punish them with extra route marches and things like that. I don't mean punish but train them but was it permissible

10:30 **for example to give them a bit of a beating if they were giving you a hard time?**

Not a beating as such, not a physical one, oh no, no, but you know if they were playing up a bit you'd tend to make their work a little more strenuous if I could put it that way.

Like running around with the rifle over their head or?

Oh yeah to a

11:00 certain point but never a hands on thing, no.

Well that was the answer to my question, like was it...

No, no, no you can't do that.

Cause you said things had changed a hell of a lot and I was curious to know.

But you know they all – you used to think of God the sooner we get out of here the better but talking to them in later years they say, no that was a great time.

11:30 So there you go.

You must've bumped into some RSMs over the years who shall we say were a little bit too enthusiastic with their...

Yes, yes I have but as I said before everybody had their own way of doing things and I have seen people, senior NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] and warrant officers,

12:00 doing things that would never enter my mind.

And would the army take it upon themselves to demote men like that?

In those days not really. There wasn't a lot of it. There wasn't a lot of it. But if they went too far I would suggest yes. It all depended on who was in command of various things.

12:30 No, there were people who stretched the whole thing a little too far but not many, not many. Most of the people particularly at Balcombe most of the staff that were there were pretty well picked for what was needed because of the age of the boys.

And did they tell you what you had

13:00 **when they chose you?**

No, oh no.

When you turned up, did you not say, I know you don't ask, 'why' in the army but did you not have some idea what made you such a good RSM at that point?

Well I suppose, you see your postings within the infantry were controlled by the Director of Infantry in Canberra and

13:30 he and his sidekicks would select people for different positions wherever they happened to want them. Now just how they went about doing that is another story.

It's interesting because sometimes it seems there are arbitrary methods in the army and sometimes they're very specific. I guess it's a bit hard

14:00 **to tell?**

It is really, I mean people could get all sorts of jobs as punishment I suppose couldn't they. And if you struck the wrong note with a commander that could also influence what happened to you.

Did that ever happen to you?

No.

So your selection

14:30 **then into 1RAR did that strike you as arbitrary or specific?**

No it would've been a position that was vacant that fitted me for want of a better way of putting it and when I first went back to 1RAR the

15:00 training team thing sort of hadn't got itself going. I was with 1RAR as a company sergeant major for quite some time before the Vietnam thing got going.

Well you can see how that, well now talking to you, you can see how one started to lead to the next and so on you're obviously very good with the young chaps etc and I'm just wondering if that was the impetus for choosing

15:30 **you for what now is has been called 'the team'?**

No I don't think so, I suppose you know I hadn't blotted my copy book or anything like that and of course all infantry soldiers like to go to an infantry battalion and that's just the way it worked out and it worked out well for me.

Did you have to go through any special clearances to join the team?

16:00 Yes and no, yes and no.

Would you have to meet politicians and be briefed on like...?

No, no, no, we did have to do all sorts of things including taking a certain amount of Vietnamese language, short language courses and things of that nature.

16:30 Special courses at the Jungle Training Centre in Canungra in Queensland and that sort of thing. But we were sort of progressively - I was going to use the word indoctrinated I don't know if that's the right word - as we went along we were sort of our briefing got stronger and

17:00 stronger if you get what I mean.

When they sent the World War 11 chaps overseas, often they had just a little bit of Japanese awareness classes but hardly anything and I wondered whether they bothered to give you a break down of what Vietnam was and its history?

Well I suppose they did when it all boils down we were sort of given a fairly wide

17:30 coverage of Vietnam and Vietnamese people and what was going on and that sort of got heavier as you went along, yeah. I mean when I actually left to go to Vietnam I had a pretty good idea of what it was all about. I didn't know where I was going in Vietnam but that didn't matter, yeah.

18:00 **Was your understanding of Vietnamese communism different to Korean communism?**

Oh I don't know, never really looked at it from that point of view. Never really looked at it from that point of view.

Because there was all the business going on back here in Australia too?

Oh yeah, yeah, look once again the politics

18:30 of the whole thing was up to other people but it really didn't concern us.

I guess that's not your job is it?

Yeah, no it's the hierarchy that's their job to do all that sort of stuff. We were more intent on knowing what

19:00 we were in for and what we were going to do or what we were going to try and do. Yeah, that's, I think that was - but we did have a pretty good understanding of the whole thing. We didn't go in there not knowing anything and I suppose really had we wanted we could've delved into it ourselves a lot more but we went pretty well briefed as to

19:30 what was going to happen.

So you knew what climate to expect and I hope they told you how much rain there would be.

Yeah well that's something else, yeah.

What about the French who'd been in Vietnam all those years, did they send any advisers down from Indo French troops?

No, not that I'm aware of. There was all sorts of strange people about. Let's face it. There was all sorts of

20:00 people in Vietnam who you didn't really think would be there. And what they were doing there is another thing but if you let your imagination run away with you they were there to see what was happening.

I don't know actually I mean from my reading I just...

Well I was down in Ba Ria, which was down near Vung Tau where the soldiers were, long before they were ever down there and I in an American

20:30 compound having a couple of drinks and I suddenly found I was talking to a couple of Poms. I said to them, "What are you fellas doing here?" "Oh, just having a look around." Strange, isn't it?

Well who did you think they were?

Oh they were Poms they were on official business they were just having a look around to see what was going on around the country.

That's one of those army euphemisms though having a look around I mean were they military or...?

I don't know

21:00 and they weren't about to tell me anyway.

I suppose not. You must've run into that so much. I wonder what it's like constantly having to deal with classified information - you know not that you have to have classified information but being told constantly that you do not know further than this point, you do not ask any more than this?

Not a problem, it was not a problem, it was not a problem to me either. We were told what we need to know and what we had to know

21:30 and anything that wasn't our business we weren't told.

What about really basic things like what kind of creepy crawlers to expect over there?

Oh no in our briefings we were told all about the multitude of snakes and God knows what that's there,

which there's some nasty ones I can tell you.

And did any of the government, I don't even know what they were called then, but our version of I don't think AISCs (UNCLEAR) [?] was set up then and if it was

22:00 **I don't know what it was called, but did you have operatives like that come and talk to you before you went overseas?**

Not really, no. No we no doubt had the high-ranking military people come along and tell us this that and the other thing, you know, not that I'm aware of before we went to the training team before we went back the second

22:30 time we had people like the Prime Minister and everybody would turn up but with the training team no it was all done quietly.

Yeah, they must've gathered their intelligence from somewhere I suppose?

Oh yeah, yeah. The whole thing was it wasn't terribly, widely, known about the early days of the training team.

Well it was unique wasn't it, the team?

23:00 Mm?

The team that you were part of was totally unique...?

Oh yes, it was a first time too I think that a group of Australians had been sent to foreign country such as that to help advise and train another country's soldiers.

And if you'd stepped out into the civilian streets

23:30 **at that time and said to someone 'going to Vietnam'...?**

They probably wouldn't know what you're talking about. Later they did but in those early days they probably wouldn't have known, some would but they probably wouldn't have known what you were talking about much less known where Vietnam was.

What was if you can recall the music of the era? And I have an agenda for this which of course

24:00 **later on music became a big part of the whole Vietnam era?**

The music?

Well you said earlier that the Chinese had played Johnny Ray over the propaganda machines and I'm wondering certain music parallels parts of my life, you know I'll hear a song or remember where I was then?

No I can't think of one to be quite honest with you. I mean the only reason why I mentioned that Johnny Ray was because the way it was done.

24:30 **Well he was a much loved star. All right, can you talk to me about heading over to Vietnam again? Not again, sorry...**

For the training team. Well I flew up there I went via Perth so that I could have my 7 days rest and you know the pre-overseas leave. I

25:00 then flew on to Saigon - no I didn't, I went to Singapore where I had to spend an overnight stop and then fly on to Saigon.

Were you altogether?

I was on my own at that stage. I was travelling by myself.

Do you know why?

Oh the others had all gone in their own different directions and things but

25:30 I had to go that way because of my pre-embarkation leave in Perth. And I stayed overnight in Singapore and flew out to Saigon the next day. As a matter of fact I flew out of Saigon as my good wife was sailing into Singapore Harbour. But yeah she was going to England around the world and I was going to Saigon. And you know that's only a couple of hours flight or something from

26:00 Singapore to Saigon.

And did you wear your uniform?

No, yes, yes, did I, I can't remember? I don't think I did, I think we had to travel in civilian clothes. I fancy, no we were in uniform because I distinctly remember in those days if you were a warrant officer you had to travel 1st class and

- 26:30 distinctly remember getting on the Qantas flight before I'd sat down a big pot of beer was put in my hand and my coat taken and I said, 'God I'm getting looked after here,' and the guy said, 'Yeah but by the look of your tickets you'll be able to stand a little bit of looking after for awhile.' Yeah I must've been in uniform. Flew into Saigon and was picked up there and was taken into the headquarters of the AATTV and
- 27:00 briefed and all that sort of stuff and given a pistol which I couldn't hit that television set with and...
- Was that because the pistol was a problem?**
- Oh I was never any good with a pistol, however you had to have it.
- What kind was it?**
- It was a 45 American...
- Colt?**
- No, no it was a -
- 27:30 God I'll remember it in a minute.
- Smith and Wesson?**
- And then I was sent on an orientation trip right down into the [Mekong] Delta and Vung Tau and you know around those parts to have a look around and then I was sent up to the Ranger Training Centre which was at a place called Duc My
- 28:00 spelt Duc My.
- Duc My?**
- Spelt D.U.C.M.Y. and that was about halfway up the country west from Nha Trang at the bottom of the mountains, that's what that amounted to.
- I've got a few questions before we move on? When you got there different countries have different smells, did Vietnam have a specific kind of aroma?**
- Yeah, yeah, they all have, they all have,
- 28:30 I don't know how you'd describe it really. Malaya is different again but it has got its own, yeah. And Saigon is a big city, it was a big city, there's no risk about that but yes as far as smell yes they all got their own local smell.
- And when you say it was a big city**
- 29:00 **compared to today what would be like a tall building in Saigon when you got there?**
- Oh yes, probably not to the height of some of them here but there were a lot of multi-storey buildings and people everywhere like ants all around the place with cycloes and bikes and motorbikes and buses with people riding on the roof and all that sort of stuff. Typical Asian...
- Chickens...**
- Yeah, yeah very interesting
- 29:30 but like everything else when you go to a foreign country in Japan for instance, you wouldn't go into a Japanese house with your shoes on. So one thing we were did have drummed into our thick skulls if you're in Vietnam you must try and abide by their customs
- 30:00 because if you ignore their customs you might as well go home if you want to be an adviser. And they did have some funny ones.
- Such as?**
- Oh well, one I can think of you'd go to a Vietnamese house for dinner and the wife of the house doesn't sit down to dinner with you,
- 30:30 she stays in the kitchen. And at the end of dinner there's no such thing as having a glass of port or anything like that or a cup of coffee, you get up and go home straight away. And one thing that always horrifies my daughter if you have chicken soup or something, the eyes of the chicken are considered a delicacy.
- 31:00 And if you're a visitor you get them. As I found my daughter often says, "What did you do, Dad, throw up?" "No," I said, "No, I just poked them down my neck the same as everything else because you have to be careful otherwise they think you're rude," and rude people don't go down terribly well with the Asian people.
- I bet you got a lot of chicken eyes over the time?**

- Oh God, some of the things that we used to
- 31:30 have to eat there was out of this world. No wonder the tummy rumbles and carries on nowadays.
- The briefing, who met you in Vietnam to do the briefing?**
- Oh the commander, who was then Brigadier Serong, who is now just not long dead.
- He was reasonably highly decorated was he not?**
- Oh yes, the Yanks thought the world of him.
- 32:00 He'd been involved in Vietnam and American influences in Vietnam and advised the Americans a lot. They thought a lot of him. We had others there. There was lieutenant colonel, a captain administrative officer and a warrant officer administration too and they stayed in
- 32:30 Saigon and operated from there.
- And where was the barracks there or the HQ [Headquarters] or...?**
- We used to - you lived in hotels in Saigon. You either lived in American - in the American army a warrant officer is a commissioned officer the same so we used the officers facilities. up at the
- 33:00 Ranger Training Centre where I went to in the finish there was a compound where all the advisers lived and you know we had our own cooks, Vietnamese cooks, trained cooks, and your bars and all that sort of thing. You had a normal, like a motel room.
- 33:30 **Sure. And were the rest of the team there when you got there like did you join them?**
- Oh there was - see the team was scattered all over Vietnam they were right the way up north. They were in some terrible places as I said earlier my job was a pretty cushy one I suppose in comparison to some of the ones that they had. That was obvious with the number
- 34:00 of people on the training team who were killed.
- Okay well I wanted to know if you had a guide when you went on the Mekong Delta tour?**
- No I didn't actually. I just got on an aeroplane, military aeroplane of course, and went to wherever it was going, it was all pre-planned of course. No I didn't have a guide with me.
- 34:30 And you were briefed when you arrived at a certain place. You were briefed on what was going on there and then you'd get the next aeroplane and go some place else and get the same treatment.
- You had a little bit of Vietnamese by then were you able to use it when you got there?**
- Some of it I could but you know I was never very good at it but I could make myself understood.
- Can you remember any still for the camera?**
- 35:00 Mm?
- Can you still remember any to say now for the camera, like 'hello my name is'?**
- I can remember how to say I was an adviser at the Ranger Training Centre at Duc My.
- Take it away...**
- Now I'll tell you this again later, it was 'kovarn nook deloi trungtrom luck dom nong vietnam con twon' which means
- 35:30 'an Australian adviser at the Ranger Training Centre at Duc My'. 'An Australian in Vietnam' - 'zook zu loi'.
- Zook de loi...**
- And you learnt all these various sort of words and expressions, that one was particular that you did understand and you did learn to say that so that you could identify yourself
- 36:00 which came in very handy later. And you know, I always could remember a few words of French I suppose and they were very keen to learn English. I mean you could get little kids that high that would talk to you in clear English because in the early days French was the diplomatic language and then English became the diplomatic language. So they were taught English at school and you could have quite sensible
- 36:30 conversations with little kids but some of the older ones weren't but they were generally always keen to learn to speak English.
- What an interesting way to get know what was going on in a country from a little children's perspective.**

Oh yeah, yeah.

Did you learn any Vietnamese words that were say in the vernacular that were quite handy along the way?

I learnt how to say 'halt' and things like that, stop

37:00 yes I suppose there were quite a number of words that you did learn to use quite frequently. Yeah.

And when you got there from your point of view how well set up were the Australian military at the time?

37:30 Probably as well as could be expected under the circumstances. See in those days the American setup was called MAGV, Military Assistance Group Vietnam, and really they sort of controlled the whole Vietnam effort.

38:00 Our small group at that stage were pretty well under the circumstances. They were all right. Some of the boys were in very dicey places.

When you say that do you mean geographically or?

No, danger wise. Some of them were right up north and way out in the bush

38:30 where the wars were really going on.

Well from my limited knowledge of it all I understand for years prior to the Australians turning up there was all sorts of skirmishes going on between the French and the Vietnamese?

Oh yes.

So would they have been part of that...?

But that had been going on - see the French influence in Vietnam was still there. In buildings and a lot of the culture of the country the French influence is still there

39:00 but it started to disappear after the fall of Dien Bien Phu. The problem at that stage when our fellows first went there was starting to deteriorate. The whole effort in Vietnam the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong and all those people were getting

39:30 themselves really organised but no our small group were as well organised I suppose as you could get but you had to fit in with the American situation.

Sure.

Tape 6

00:47 **Duc My, is that how you say it?**

Duc My. Well you see in Vietnam the different areas their language is

01:00 different. You can get someone from North Vietnam wouldn't have the slightest idea what someone from South Vietnam was saying. Some people call it 'Zookme' and some people call it 'Yookme' and some people you know they've got different ways of...

I've got an idea what the Australians called it.

Yeah, one word can mean several things

01:30 it just depends what the tone that is used to tell you what they're on about. But 'Zookme' we used to always call it 'Zookme'.

Physically, geographically what was it like?

It was only a small village really. Almost at the foot of the mountains probably 10ks [kilometres] from the foot of the mountains.

02:00 The country around it was you know a lot of swamps, inlets and generally fairly flat from where we were to the coast at Nha Trang. There was some hills that when we drove through was always cock and handles down sort of thing and cause you get shot at

02:30 but it was about half way up.

You said earlier today that you all had a price on your heads?

As I understand it we all did, by name.

By name? How would they have your names?

God only knows, I don't know.

Which - as far as I understand the war in Vietnam was fought by a number of different organisations,

Yes it was.

03:00 **So who in North Vietnam?**

Well the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong.

It's interesting that they could have that sort of access to your names and whereabouts and so on?

I don't know probably the same way as the Chinese found out that 1st Battalion was in Korea?

Do you know how much money it meant?

No, no.

So how did you

03:30 **hear about this then?**

Mm?

How did you hear that there was a price on your heads?

It was generally known amongst the advisory team.

So one of those sort of guaranteed rumours?

Mm.

Did you find that out before you got to Duc My?

No.

When did you find out?

Oh I don't know it just came up. I don't think anybody took it very seriously. I certainly didn't.

But they were already taking pot shots at you?

Not necessarily at me but we had already had blokes killed.

04:00 See in Vietnam in those days, you couldn't relax your vigilance your back was a worry all the time. If you went into a restaurant you'd sit in the restaurant with a

04:30 45 pistol sitting there and you faced the door. You faced the door so that if a grenade came whistling through the door at least you knew what was going on and you daren't look at the kitchen at the back because you'd be likely to see your bit of poultry being chopped up on the floor sort of thing. But you were - in those days you were a target

05:00 now we trained Vietnamese rangers and we know that some of them that we trained were Viet Cong. So you know safety was always a bit of a problem.

Was it simply enough to have a white face?

No, they knew, they had the information that same as our people and they probably knew where each and every one of us were.

05:30 Without doubt, they knew.

Interestingly someone else we've spoken to said the opposite was also true that they knew where the VC [Viet Cong] were living but often couldn't do anything about it.

Do anything about it, yeah, yeah.

A very political war, yeah?

You know it was, it was the type of war that, it was in a new era of warfare.

06:00 Here we had the most sophisticated equipment and tanks and aircraft and God only know whatnot and they you never saw them unless you actually made contact with them and they basically didn't have anything like what we had on our side.

06:30 But they - they won. Because people you know you wouldn't trust even young children. We've had them where they could strip a grenade down and put it together while you were thinking about it and it was just one of those counter insurgency type things where you didn't know who was who.

07:00 In Korea we knew exactly who we were up against in Vietnam we didn't. Later when the North Vietnamese regular forces came into being and they started to come down the Ho Chi Minh Trail you did then find you were up against quite regular units of fighting units.

07:30 But if you were wandering around the place like we were out in the jungle or out in the paddy fields, someone digging the paddy fields over there would go down with these bloomin' thing with one hand and come up with the rifle with the other and you know it was just one of those situations. It was guerrilla warfare that we were not -

08:00 weren't really up with.

It must've been very confusing then in terms of the people that you were actually there with like the South Vietnamese?

It was, it was your back was you know - I was probably a little bit lucky in one way I had a Vietnamese driver used to drive my jeep - he couldn't drive for nuts really I used to drive it myself most the time and he

08:30 was a very loyal little guy and he never left my back when we were out in the bush he was always right behind me. Even if it was 2 o'clock in the morning he was there. You know probably I was fortunate along that line but it wasn't the safest place to be.

Yet another of those military understatements. No I just wondered

09:00 **you must've talked to some of the locals who were anti communists and wondering whether they gave you their views on what they thought about the communist and American intervention there?**

Well you know for what you could talk to them, what you could understand it was very hard to decide who was on whose side. It was very hard to decide.

09:30 **Well tell me then about setting up the - what you call it the centre of ops [operations] or the training school anyway?**

Well the training - the Ranger Training Centre was established when I got there of course.

What was it physically?

Well it was basically a group of buildings and sleeping quarters, if you could call them sleeping quarters that the rangers lived in

10:00 and they used to go out on their various courses whatever they happened to be. I was involved with 3 different courses the mountains and the jungle and the swamp camps and you'd go out and spend 3 or 4 days or a week out in each place and sleep in the

10:30 swamps with mosquitoes and, oh God, eat Vietnamese food and - but they were taught other things as well. They were good little soldiers but they'd get lost in a telephone box. I can remember a number of occasions being out wandering around the jungle with them on

11:00 a night compass march and I used get to the stage I used to say, "God, they don't know which direction they're going in," cause I mean we're pretty sensible people and trained and up with keeping direction at night and all that sort of thing. And I just used to head off back to the camp and the next thing they'd all be following. And if the one - they used to follow in single file and if the one directly behind you tripped over a stick everyone one from there back

11:30 would trip over that stick.

It's a bit Stooges [Three Stooges - silly] isn't it?

It was very frustrating because you'd teach them something today and tomorrow you wouldn't think you had done, you know.

Don't you think from what you said before, it sounds a bit conspiracy theory here but is it possible that they were having a lend of you?

No, no, no I don't think

12:00 so. I think that you'd find that anybody from the training team that you spoke to would tell you the same. You really sometimes wondered why you were doing it because they just seemed to forget what you've told them.

Where were they recruited from?

Oh all over, all over, all over.

And were they city kids or

12:30 **country kids?**

Oh no, no, no not necessarily I don't think. We had nothing to do with the recruiting of them but there are a lot of ethnic tribes in Vietnam from the Montagnards to the whole heap of them and I suppose they had their own way of rounding up the troops whether they went into the ranges or what they went into.

- 13:00 Some of their - some of things they used to do and the way the Vietnamese used to do it left a fair bit to understand. They did things in a funny way. They were nice people though.

Could you give me some examples of their peculiarities or their idiosyncrasies?

Oh well when we first went there I found that you went there to help them all right. That was your prime

- 13:30 target. Now it would take at least 3 months before they would accept your advice. At least 3 months depending on who you were dealing with.

What would they do in the 3 months prior to accepting your advice?

Just sort of keep - watch you, you know. Not pay much attention to you. I went once, we had a major, a Vietnamese major

- 14:00 running the part that I was - running the Vietnamese part of it the thing that I was with. I always remember that I went out and we were watching a demonstration of patrolling and we were standing up on the hill watching this thing and they were just down there and I was up here you see and this was terrible this demonstration it was awful

- 14:30 and I just shook me head you know and this major must've seen me shaking me head. He must've just spotted me at that time because all of a sudden he came up and asked me what was wrong, so I proceeded to tell him. He spoke good English incidentally - I proceeded to tell in no uncertain fashion what was wrong and from then on I was right. He obviously

- 15:00 accepted you see. But the young Vietnamese themselves I suppose they tried hard and that sort of thing but it was very frustrating trying to get them to do something and remember how to do things. They were - they had to have a lot of coloured smoke and all that sort...

What was your -

- 15:30 **what were your limits and boundaries in terms in what you could do to get them in shape?**

We had no way of disciplining them of course, they had their own way of disciplining the soldiers. They used to put them in a pit in the ground just big enough for one person to get in with a mesh lid on the top and leave them there. That was the cell.

- 16:00 We had no way but I didn't really come up against any anti-Australian - it was just that whatever you taught them didn't seem to sink in. They were always very keen to know about Australia and that sort of thing. I suppose that's why we've got so many here now.

- 16:30 But you used to think to yourself, "God, what have I been doing the last week? I've been out here trying to teach them to rappel down rocks or something and they still can't do it." You almost had to go back to stage one on everything you taught them every time.

The rock of Sysiphus?

And you know it was frustrating.

Did they strike you as wanting to be soldiers?

- 17:00 No, no, they didn't.

Is it possible they'd been press-ganged into this then?

Oh probably in the majority of cases, yes. I mean they were forced I suppose they had to be didn't they. In a lot of cases no they didn't have the professionalism or anything like that, that our soldiers have got or Western soldiers have got. I

- 17:30 don't think so at any rate.

And did many of them have any English?

Have?

English?

English?

Could they speak to you?

Oh bits, broken English. They were always keen to try and talk to you in English, always keen. I found that right through Vietnam wherever they were kids or adults or what have you. They were always keen

to talk to you in English, yeah.

And you mentioned that you found out later on that there were some VC among

18:00 **the...?**

Yeah.

At the time did you have any idea?

Oh no, no but we all knew that it was on the cards that we would be training some VC.

I'm a bit cynical, I'm wondering if any of the really good soldiers, would they question them?

You didn't know till after they finished their course and disappeared.

The local village near where you were based, they must've found these

18:30 **proceedings rather interrupting or unusual?**

No, no, they were pretty good down in the village it was only just across a bridge to the village. I mean you could go and walk down to the village and that sort of thing.

The VC had a lot of women fighting?

Oh yes, yes, they had women they had kids on their side.

Did the rangers?

Mm?

Were there any women in the rangers?

19:00 No, no, no. If there were I never saw any.

Who else was there from Australia apart from yourself?

We had a major, a captain and another warrant officer, I'm just trying to think who it was now,

19:30 in this particular group that we were with.

And would they be actively teaching the rangers too or was it left up to you?

They were supposed to be actively teaching the rangers.

So you were really in a really bad situation there?

But you know, let's face it, most of it was done by the warrant officers and...

Most of everything was done by the warrant officers?

20:00 Yeah, however, they were all there with that purpose in mind but in some cases there were officers in very dangerous positions up with the Montagnard tribesmen, and oh, blimey Charlie.

So what did you make of all of this after a couple of - oh I assume you were there for months?

Not much at all

20:30 except that I was always - I could never see us winning.

At that stage, what did you think you were ultimately there to do?

Well we were there to try and help the Vietnamese the South Vietnamese Forces you know and once again the politics of it all

21:00 was up to the powers that be. But it didn't stop you being able to say to yourself this is not going right.

Did you write that anywhere or send letters to anyone about it?

No, no, no.

And was there a part of you that wanted to get out of it?

I could've got out of it six months after I'd

21:30 it was just so frustrating.

Why didn't you then?

Because I was there for 12 months. See I was sent there to do a job and that was what I had to do. In fact I was there 13 months and I was glad to get out of it because it was trying on your system,

22:00 your health every way you could think of.

We use the word trauma a bit too much these days but traumatic by the sounds of it?

Well yeah they talk about trauma and all that sort but it was hard.

In and around the villages or the cities in that time was there any obvious VC propaganda going on that you could...?

Yes, oh yes you could see it. Yes it was there.

22:30 I mean we wouldn't be able to tell because we couldn't read it or anything like that but it was there. And they were there, they were everywhere, everywhere.

Did they make themselves known to you?

Oh no, no, no, and you weren't in a position to say well that fellows a VC or he's not because you didn't know. That was the whole thing with the whole place you didn't know who was who.

23:00 You could be talking to someone, you wouldn't know whether they were on your side or their side and some could be on both sides if it suited them.

Yes I was thinking that, it wasn't a black and white situation - dear oh dear. And I would imagine given the divisions between the people of Vietnam that you must've seen a fair bit of strange rivalry or

23:30 **going back years tribal ancestry and so on in play?**

No I don't think so. I don't think I saw much of that, no. I've no doubt it was there but I didn't see much of it.

So, in and among your training were you given any time to do or see anything else?

We had an R and R period the same as we did when we were in

24:00 Korea. And I went to Hong Kong actually. But quite often you know we'd about once a month get into our vehicles and drive down to the coast to the Nha Trang Village and I used to go down and go to this

24:30 hotel called 'Hotel Frigate' where I used to go and have a big crayfish fresh out of the South China with chips and French bread which we weren't suppose to eat because it gave you all these things that things give you nowadays but it was beautiful bread.

You know what they say, carbs [carbohydrates] are the enemy...

Yeah. And a big bottle of beer La Rue and

25:00 you get in the vehicle and drive back again and start all over.

Well I believe the Vietnamese beaches are very beautiful?

Yeah, the one at Nha Trang was, it was a very nice beach. It was a nice little town. A big American air base there.

What about the religious in Vietnam, any idea what sort of stance they were taking at the time? This was quite early days?

25:30 On a religious...

Oh the Buddhists there and so on?

Oh they had all their temples and all that sort of stuff. Yeah there was - I never really concerned myself with it but they are fairly strong in their religious beliefs I think. And I think most of them were Buddhists. I watched one burn himself

26:00 one day. They probably, probably not to the extent that we've got in the world situation at the moment with the Buddhists and the this and that and the other thing but I think they were fairly religious people, yeah.

Yes, no, I guess I'm not entirely sure where they stood in terms of the advance of the Communists?

No I don't know either.

You said you saw one burn himself?

Yeah I did,

26:30 half way between where we were and Duc My and the town of Nha Trang there was another village called Ninh Hoa and I was there one day or going through or something and there was a crowd in the centre of the square sort of thing you know. I stopped to have a look, to see what it was all about and

there was a Buddhist

27:00 monk sat down in the middle of the square, tipped petrol all over himself. And it had to be Esso petrol, Esso was the big thing over there, and he set all right to himself and I watched this, I'll never forget it. I was speechless, you couldn't do anything of course.

27:30 It was just something I had never seen - seen before and I hope I never see it again. He didn't cry out he just tipped the petrol over himself and set alight to himself and I'll remember that as long as I live.

How long does it take for a person to die in that circumstance?

Not very long. I was just so

28:00 amazed. I was speechless. You could only sort of think, my God what's next.

Is there an impulse...

I suppose, they're protesting about something. It's done in protest about something or another and later on went on to be quite a common thing all around the place even here

28:30 in Australia. But that was the first time I'd seen it and I was horrified. I was just numb struck.

Was there an impulse in you to want and go and put the fire out?

No, you wouldn't have dared. It wouldn't have been worth our life to do it because he was doing it in protest and the people around him were on his side sort of thing. See life doesn't mean anything much to Asian people or people in the Middle

29:00 East, or that. It doesn't have the same meaning as it does to us and that was his way of protesting equally as much as it is with these guys that bomb themselves and kill themselves with car bombs and things.

You said earlier before that you learnt some language and it -

29:30 **some of it was like very, very helpful from time to time including saying that you were with the rangers?**

Yeah well, one word that I learnt was 'dim lai' which means 'stop'. One night I was out at the mountain camp and we used to spend some nights out there and I didn't have my interpreter with me

30:00 and I didn't have my driver with me and they were giving me the horrors. So I thought I've had enough of this for the night I'm going back into the compound which was a very foolish thing to do because it was night-time. Now the Duc My Village, there was a - at both main entrances to it, there was a big

30:30 check points. So anyway I got in my jeep never gave it a thought, charged off down the road towards the village and suddenly I come to check point and I got the word from there 'dim Lai', 'stop', and I thought, "I am in trouble here." You could hear the cocking handles of the

31:00 Thompson submachine guns going back and I remember even saying to myself, "Mother, one false move here and I'm dead," and I reckon I could look down the barrels of those things and see that brass thing and I thought, "What the hell am I going to do? Do the wrong thing and I'm gone," cause they're very trigger-happy people, the Vietnamese. And they gradually called me forward, like that,

31:30 that's what they do and I go forward a bit and I'm watching these guys with the blasted Thompson submachine gun, oh gee, and it's an experience I never ever want to live through again and eventually I got to the stage where I could talk to them and I told them, "Ko vi nuk di lai," you know, and they called me forward and then they suddenly realised that I had a slash hat on, a big hat they used to call it and that was all right,

32:00 I was okay then. For a little while I thought I'm in trouble cause I'd left my driver behind and didn't have an interpreter or anything.

A few questions there.

I don't know whether you've ever looked down both barrels of a Thompson submachine gun that's cocked and ready to shoot but I thought I was in bother but it worked out all right.

When you are actually in a real situation like that and it's possible that you could die, it's entirely possible, what happens to you physically?

32:30 Well you know my - I realised that, that I'd done something stupid.

But do you get the sweats or do you...

Yeah, feel the hair on the back of your head stand up on end and you think oh lord.

Is there a bit of an evacuation of the urinary tract situation?

No, no. no, but you

33:00 know you're in bother. And I could literally feel the hair stand up on the back of my neck and...

With a part in mouth?

Mm nice - I'm sure I said, "Mum, I'm gone here if I make one false move."

Why didn't you take your interpreter or driver?

Oh I don't know, the interpreters were hopeless because as I said earlier you would tell them something that you wanted them to translate to these guys. They would translate what you said into French and

33:30 then into Vietnamese and by the time it had got to those it had lost its meaning altogether.

Chinese whispers.

It was hopeless. So I never used to bother with them. I used to, with a bit of scratching in the sand and a bit of Vietnamese and a bit of their wanting to learn English you could communicate with them as long as you didn't want to do it in a hurry.

And I need you to explain to me the business of the check points and also the compound?

Well the

34:00 check points were there, for that exact reason to check everybody coming into the village from that direction and that direction - mind you, you could come in any other way you wanted to and they were highly armed. In the compound where we used to live it was all

34:30 it was right on a river and it was fortified, armaments and guns - in fact I was the resistance security officer. Fortunately the Viet Cong never had a go at that particular compound. They had attacked a lot of them where Australians were

35:00 but you know the check point was there purely to check everyone that come into the village. I don't suppose there was a great deal of point in it really because you could come into from any other direction you liked.

Who manned them?

Vietnamese.

South Vietnamese?

Mm, the rangers.

Rangers, fellows you'd trained yourself. Anyone you'd trained yourself?

No, but they were sort of

35:30 permanent people at the Ranger Training Centre.

Gotcha, and the compound?

Vietnamese as well.

Okay. Oh, I also wanted to know you said they had Tommy machine guns?

Mm.

I'm curious to know where they got their weaponry and ordinance from, the Vietnamese?

I think most of it come from the Yanks, I think.

Okay.

Because they, you know, they used to have these big Garand rifles

36:00 that the Yanks used to have and they were too big for the Vietnamese. They damn used to stand almost as high as some of them and if they fired one it used to knock them over. But they also had a variety of other the M16 carbines and Thompson submachine guns and things like that but I think most of it came from the Yanks.

Did you feel

36:30 **adequately equipped to do what you were doing both physical...?**

Oh yeah, I had this 45 pistol.

You said that wasn't much good.

It was a hopeless thing. No it wasn't the pistol that was hopeless it was me as the user. I never could shoot straight with them but I also carried when I was out in the jungle a carbine, an M16 carbine, and if I was out at night I also took a pump-action shotgun

37:00 cause they're very handy at night if you get caught in an ambush.

They would be a little bit incendiary too wouldn't they?

No, no, but they worked well. But you had to carry this confounded pistol because you had to carry the thing. And I would never have liked to say I only hit something once with it.

37:30 We were down in the swam camps walking around the water up to here in the swamps and had to put the thing around your neck so it wouldn't get wet and the Vietnamese'd follow me and if I fell in a hole they'd all fall in it too. And the only time I hit anything with a pistol and all of a sudden a snake was coming through the water towards us and it had a head on it like a diamond

38:00 the Vietnamese backed off because they knew what sort of snake it was, I didn't so I jacked around the chamber of this blasted pistol and went bang and hit him first time but I'd miss that television I was hopeless with it. Never hit anything.

What about the officers of the South Vietnamese, did you find you had better rapport with them?

Oh yes I got on quite well

38:30 with the ones that I dealt with any rate. Yes and you know I can remember us have a couple of big dinners with all the highfalutin chiefs would - army people would come and sit down, yeah we got on pretty well with them.

I don't know if you can answer this, but I'm wondering if they wanted you there to save there country or...

Or what...

Or what?

39:00 Yeah, yeah well that's a good question.

Is it a long answer?

It's a question I wouldn't like to try and answer.

Well on that note then we'd better swap tapes.

Tape 7

00:33 **I heard you mention earlier the Kennedy assassination?**

Yes, the Americans are a funny lot, don't get me wrong when I say that, but they, regardless of their political

01:00 side, the President is the President and anything that happens to the President is a disaster and in, when I was in Vietnam one of the occasions when I was back in the compound I was listening to the radio in the morning and I heard that President Kennedy had been assassinated. So I went up for

01:30 breakfast and I sat down at a table and I always used to try and sit down with the Negro boys.

Why was that?

Because I always had the idea that the Americans were very - what's the word, again - any rate, I sat down and I happened to say to these couple of guys that were there, "Gee that's sad

02:00 about President Kennedy." And they said to me, "What about him?" and I said, "Well, he's been assassinated," and they said, "Oh hell, Mr Dalton, we don't joke about things like that." And I said, "I'm not joking." Anyway the American commander came in and then made the announcement that it had happened. There was an absolute stunned silence

02:30 throughout the place, they were in a state of shock. They really were but that's the way they are and it happens with every President regardless to who he is, nothing can happen to the President.

He was a particular President though for the Americans as history's indicated.

Mm, they were, they were absolutely shocked.

Were there any tears?

03:00 Probably, I didn't see any but probably there were. Black or white they were all the same absolutely stunned.

Later on, many years later some historians and film makers suggested that Kennedy was very against the police action in Vietnam?

Could've been.

Any thoughts on that

03:30 **regarding the men that you knew?**

No, no, no.

Again, sorry for my naivete but the US compound, that was separate to where you were working in the South?

Well yes it was separate to the 3 different bush camps that they used to go to work to yeah. It was a sort of centre piece of the advisory group.

Can you describe for me first what it looked like and what were there?

Well it was an old French homestead

04:00 actually, an old French homestead right on the river and additional buildings had been built as sleeping quarters and things like that. It had a tennis court, used to play tennis at night. I never used to feel very comfortable doing that because the other side of the river was black, dark and I used to think to myself

04:30 there we are under floodlights playing tennis. I often used to think to myself this is not very good for the tennis, I was never any good at tennis anyway but that didn't improve things but we got through it all and it never happened.

What would you wear playing tennis?

Tennis gear.

Whites?

Yeah.

So you were able to bring all that sort of stuff with you?

Yeah, yeah, I mean we had our mess kits our whites and all

05:00 sometimes we had to go to Saigon for different highfalutin functions and we'd all get into aeroplanes and fly down to Saigon and in fact that was the first time the commander of the United States forces at that time was General Timmies, and I actually had a fly in one of his aeroplanes. In his personal aeroplane

05:30 having a few glasses of his wine and smoking a few of his cigarettes while I was - mind you he didn't know about it he wasn't in it but it was going from Nha Trang to Saigon and I had a ride on his aeroplane all by myself, yeah.

Was that all above board?

Yeah, oh yeah, yeah the pilot stopped - actually I couldn't get on the other plane there wasn't enough seats which please me greatly because

06:00 the thing used to fly around in a lot up there were what they called a C1-23 which was a small Hercules with only two engines. It was a dreadful thing I was terrified flying in them. And on this particular occasion I couldn't get on it so the tower called us that that plane was just about to take off and...

Did the North Vietnamese have ground to air missiles?

No, no I don't think so. They had their own

06:30 little air force thing but I don't think they had any ground to air missiles.

No I had heard they were brilliant at improvising weapons out of anything?

Oh don't let's make any mistake about that yes they were. They were very good at a lot of things like sneaking in and turning the claymore mines around so that they were facing you instead of facing out that way. They were very good at a lot of things, they were no slouches don't worry about

07:00 that and of course they were dedicated. Absolutely dedicated.

And they were on their home turf which I'm sure made a big difference?

Well you know, they could live on a little bag of rice for days, we couldn't.

Sorry to jump around, back to the compound about how many men could it house

07:30 **for example. I'm just trying to get an idea of the size of what a US compound?**

The compound, I suppose it would've been all told 30.

Okay, so it was quite small?

But I mean other than us there were the Americans and their administrative staff and odd sods if you could put it that way.

Did they have a PB [?]?

Yes, yes

08:00 sort of.

It's pretty small, I mean you must've all kind of got to know each other pretty well?

Oh yes we did, we knew everybody. Oh yes.

It doesn't sound like the Americans had started sending over too many troops at that stage?

No, but that was when they were starting to come in. About 64 they were starting to really take over the whole thing.

I believe Johnson

08:30 **really turned up the heat there?**

Once Johnson sort of took over.

Oh about uniforms, you said that you had quite a bit of stuff with you, when you came over were you told what you could bring or did you improvise?

No, we sort of knew what we had to have our greens and our jungle stuff. You didn't need any cold weather

09:00 stuff. I mean our working clobber for want of a better word was the normal greens that we used to wear in those days and the GP [General Purpose] boots and the hat and all that sort of stuff and we took whatever it was of that - a steel trunk, I had a steel trunk which I've still got which my son's probably got

09:30 you know you had all your stuff in there and we also had civilian clothes and...

And were you allowed any personal effects?

Oh yeah you could take up whatever you wanted but there wasn't much point in having a lot of it.

Now in the US compound you said there were all sorts of folks and odd sods, what do you mean by odd sods?

Oh well there was quartermaster people and you know that sort of thing

10:00 and administrative staff. The cooking was done by Vietnamese and security was done by Vietnamese and me. You know they all had various jobs they weren't all field people.

From a bit of reading, but and I admit this

10:30 **largely from film my understanding that at night Vietnam prior to the influx of American and Australian troops was a very different place to Vietnam during the day?**

Yes, well at night-time I think it was basically the Viet Cong's time and that kept on for quite a while too. You know there was villages down in the

11:00 area of Ba Ria and Vung Tau where the Australian Task Force was that used to happen, it was ours during the day and theirs during the night.

So how would that work for example, what would they do?

Well they used to come into the villages and night and threaten people and indoctrinate them all that sort of stuff.

Did you see evidence of that?

No not personally but it used to happen.

11:30 **And what about gunfire at night with the patrols and so on with Viet Cong?**

Yeah well, the - as we found out when I went back the second time it was quite frequent, our boys were quite often clashing with them at night-time, yeah.

Also you said earlier that you discovered that your father had passed on while you were here training?

Yeah well when I - I knew earlier that he hadn't been too well

- 12:00 and I was actually on my way home, I was in Saigon on the way home and low and behold the commander came out and told me that my father had died at about the exact time he was being buried in Perth. That's how long it took them and it was
- 12:30 you know naturally as you'd expect I was a bit shocked even though I'd sort of known he was sick. They then made every effort to get me on a plane that day out of Saigon, Qantas took a passenger off in Singapore for me but you know it was just too late.
- 13:00 **So how does the military break that sort of news to you?**
- Oh he just came and told me.
- Was he compassionate?**
- Oh yes and of course he realised that probably getting the information to me was somewhat slower than it should've been that's why he made every effort to get me home as quickly as he could. And he couldn't have done it any quicker anyway cause you know you've got to fit in with aeroplanes haven't you.
- 13:30 So yeah it was pretty sad but it was a pretty sour ending to a pretty traumatic 12 months or 13 months.
- At that stage, are you starting to feel a bit disenfranchised with your army career at all?**
- No, oh no, I'm a big boy, I've been
- 14:00 around. But you know my Dad - see before I went up on the training team I was on my pre-embarkation leave in Perth, when they came out to the airport to see me off I always remember my Dad saying, "Now you look after yourself because I've got a feeling I'll never see you again," and he didn't. And I don't know whether he meant the possibility
- 14:30 of me getting knocked off but he was right he didn't. It just sort of put a nasty taste to the end of the whole thing.
- Had you lost anyone else while you were in Vietnam either back home or in the country itself?**
- No, I've lost a few since but not while we were up there.
- You mentioned some of the team were killed at this...**
- Oh yes, there was -
- 15:00 and as strange as it may seem I used to have a lot of these young guys in the battalion. The first bloke that was killed up there was a bloke named Hacking, Bill Hacking, and then there was blokes like Keith Payne he wasn't killed but one of EC [Engineering Company], Dasher Wheatley, Grumpy Conway, they were all young sergeants in the battalion
- 15:30 and went from 1 Battalion up there. There was a number of them killed up there, one way or another but of course the training team went on and on and on. It's just life I suppose I was just lucky I didn't finish up in one of the places that they were.
- You did get to come back for awhile though?**
- What from...
- You said you were in Saigon on your way home, and you got some leave after that didn't you?**
- 16:00 Oh yes I spent some time in Perth with my Mum and family and then I went back to 1 Battalion. Where I promptly fell in a heap.
- Right, was it being back home that started undoing you, do you think?**
- No I don't think so, I think I was grossly underweight and the
- 16:30 tour of Vietnam had a fairly serious effect on my nervous system because that's what had happened they thought I'd had a heart attack but I hadn't my nervous system had collapsed and that was that. Then of course, I still wear the problem today.
- Look I totally appreciate why it ran you ragged, were you ever shot at, or mortared or fired on**
- 17:00 **or...?**
- No not really, no, but the danger was always there as I said it was your back you worried about most of the time.
- Well take me through a little bit about that nervous collapse, they thought you had a heart attack. You probably looked grey or white or you...**
- Well I collapsed on the floor at the battalion

- 17:30 and they rushed me over to the military hospital at Ingleburn and we had a doctor there called Doctor Matusak, God knows why I remember that, anyway I was tucked away in a little or big ward and the only other person who was in the ward was right down the other end and it was a young bloke who had German measles or something. And they come out with all their cardiograph
- 18:00 gadgets and the doctor said to me, "I think your ticker's sick," and he said to the matron get an ambulance. And I thought, "Oh God," you know. And they took me to the repatriation hospital at Concord treated me like a piece of cracked crystal and I was there for days and days
- 18:30 and testing me for - you know going through all that stuff and eventually they took me to a specialist there at the hospital in a wheelchair and I said, 'I can walk' and they said, "We will be the best judge of that." And I said, "Okay," and that's what had happened he told me that my whole system had just collapsed.

What was your response to hearing that news?

Oh you know I wasn't laughing, by that time I was

- 19:00 feeling okay. I suppose I was a bit surprised. I was pleased I hadn't had a heart attack and there it was. It had happened and it lives with me today. I know today when my system is getting tired, I know.

19:30 **And what happens?**

I can just feel it, I can't get involved with anything where there's any stress. If we're going away interstate, flying or something Helen has to go and do all the bookings and stuff like that because I just get to the stage where I can't cope with it. That's the way it is.

Does any part of this interview start to create any of those symptoms?

Oh

- 20:00 I take a tablet here every night that's supposed to settle me down but a couple of stabbies does it equally as well I think.

And what did you imagine your future was at that point?

Well I couldn't see that you know that it was going to affect me in anyway I mean I was up and about and

- 20:30 going again and it didn't seem to bother me. I just went about my business. The boys at the camp had been practising their slow marching and everything for nothing and they had been.

So it was serious enough for people to think you had bought the farm [were going to die]?

Yeah, yeah, I suppose it was fairly serious when you come to think of it. Probably laugh about it now

- 21:00 but I wasn't then.

Well you're laughing about it?

Eh?

No, I mean you're kind of laughing about it now in that great Australian tradition of you know laughing at death and so on but it sounds you were kaput for a bit?

Yeah I don't know, I got through it.

And how did you get through it?

Because I wanted to I suppose more than anything else, yeah. And you know once I knew I hadn't had

- 21:30 a heart attack I suppose it became somewhat easy to - okay so the nervous system fell apart so it goes back together again probably not completely and enough to go on and I just went about my work as I normally would.

Were you in what these days people would say you know 'denial' of your symptoms? Were you

- 22:00 **facing up to what happened to you or were you just trying to put it behind you and get on with it?**

Oh I don't know, once it had happened it had happened life's got to go on you've got to get on with things. And even the specialist agreed with me. He said, "What do you think you should do?" And I said, "Well I think the sooner I can get back to work the better," and he said, "I agree, we'll go today and we'll get you out of here today." I said, "No you won't, because it's Sunday." He said, "You watch me," and he

- 22:30 picked up the phone and I was out of there in no short order and back to work.

How long had you spent time in there?

I was there for about 10 days or something but things have got to go on and I don't suppose – how old would I've been then? In my 30s wouldn't I, 34 I would've been – it didn't cause me any ongoing heartbreak

23:00 at that time. I was more anxious to get on with what I was about because at that stage I hadn't quite achieved my aim.

What habits did you come back with from Vietnam in that first tour?

None that I didn't go away with I don't think. No none that I didn't go away with.

And sleeping? Had that been affected?

No, I sleep on an end of a rusty nail. Sleeping up there

23:30 when I was out in the bush wasn't all that great and down in the swamps and there where the mosquitoes'd almost pick you up and fly you away, but sleeping has never been a great problem for me.

And what about any other problems that Vietnam might've given you any sort of physical complaints or skin disorders or?

No I gathered –

24:00 some of them I've got I probably gathered up over quite awhile but I think mainly my physical problems arose after the second tour.

Okay, I'm just going to have check my dates, you'll have to tell me you're not married yet.

No.

You've met Helen and when you're back in Australia and from Concord to Holsworthy are you able to catch up with her?

Oh yeah we used to

24:30 communicate even when she was in England. But I, we didn't get married until I came back to the 1st Battalion as the regimental sergeant major, then we did down here at St. Peter's Church.

Okay, well let's talk about becoming the CSM and being part

25:00 **of forming 5RAR?**

Well at that time I was CSM of a company in the 1st Battalion. They were warned for service in Vietnam, I had not been home the prescribed 12 months that you had to be so I couldn't go with them otherwise I probably would've done. So they were establishing 5RAR and I was sent

25:30 across to – as a company sergeant major in 5RAR to help establish the battalion which we did. And in fact I was to be the first RSM of 5RAR but they found some Warrant Officer Class 1 in England or something that was surplus to establishment or whatever and brought him home so then the CO that was to start

26:00 5RAR was also given the job of establishing the 3rd Training Battalion at Singleton and so I was involved in that I got my promotion to WO1 then and at one stage I was, I was a CSM of a company and 5RAR and RSM of the 3rd Training Battalion at the same time. We established the battalion at Singleton

26:30 and the National Service boys started coming in there. And of course this was when all the...

...hoo-ha at started, yeah?

Yeah.

Well I've got a few questions here, one is - I'm not trying to be a psychologist here but I'm looking at the fact that your dad's no longer alive, your mum's never been very keen on your army career anyway, your girlfriends a long way away and you've just had a nervous breakdown and I'm just wondering, you strike me as being in a fairly isolated position

27:00 **at that point?**

Oh I suppose but in an infantry battalion you've got all your mates around you all right, you don't get much of a chance to feel isolated. And you know, I used to ring my mother regularly every few days, that sort of thing and then she'd go crook at me

27:30 for not writing letters because she reckoned she got more information out of the letters than she did over the phone. Helen and I used to talk to one another. I used to come down here, get in the car and drive down. No, I never felt isolated, no.

The hoo-ha...

With the National Service men, yeah well that was something else.

28:00 We know how it all started, we know who started it but it, it got to – in fact if I could just go back to Saigon for a minute, I can remember being upstairs in the American BHQ [Battalion Headquarters]

28:30 watching down below where the riots and things that used to occur, thankfully I was two storeys up and I often used to think, “This’ll happen at home. It’s got to come. We can’t escape all these things.” And then watching these people was very disappointing

29:00 because of the effect it had on the boys themselves. You know most of them were quite happy to go, they were damn good soldiers. You would never know the difference between – in fact when we went back to Vietnam with the battalion half was National Servicemen and half were regulars and you would not have known the difference unless you went and looked at their regimental numbers because the National Service boys had a longer number. They were fine they were good boys,

29:30 you got the odd rebellious one, not a lot. I used to tell them they had less chance of getting a bullet where their shirt meets their trousers in Vietnam as they have of getting knocked over in the road.

Was that true?

Well it’s not far out the way they kill themselves is it? But they were good boys and all this nonsense that was going on and of

30:00 course you know people were getting themselves into quite a frenzy over the whole thing.

Did you ever witness any of the marches or the protests?

No, no, no, I didn’t, when I came home I did. It was pretty sad, pretty sad and unfortunately

30:30 it all was twisted everything around that it was the soldiers’ fault and it wasn’t it was a governmental decision that we go and so go we did. But they turned the Australian people against the soldiers.

Did you ever listen to any of the talkback that must’ve been happening

31:00 **at the time?**

Oh yes I suppose I have done I’ve put up with some of their demonstrations and I watch a women in Sydney on the television once not our CO one of the others this woman run out and chucked a bottle of blood over him and as they were marching through Sydney and all this. It was crazy, it was crazy and the result was that the effect on the younger soldiers, the National Serviceman

31:30 was almost as bad as going there in the first place. And it took the government 20 years to recognise the fact that the served in Vietnam – 20 years.

Did the regular army not have enough men to send without conscription?

Oh no, they wouldn’t have enough see, they wouldn’t have had enough. We had 9 battalions,

32:00 not all serving at the one time you know plus all the armour and the gunners and all these other people. It’s a lot of people I think it’s some 55,000 people involved in it.

And from your perspective what did you think about taking in your first lot of National Service boys?

Taking them there?

No, taking them in for training?

It didn’t bother me I’d done it

32:30 before. These were a trifle older and doing their training for a different reason but it didn’t bother me. They were just young soldiers.

I need to clear up too, when their number was called, the ballot was called, was it a guarantee that they’d be going to Vietnam or was it just a guarantee that they had to do their National Service?

I would say

33:00 it would’ve been a guarantee that they had to do the National Service because there were people in the National Service who did not go to Vietnam. In fact I think Jeff Kennett was one of them. But probably not through their own fault, they probably would like to have gone because everybody else went but for some reason or other.

Earlier when you trained in the National Service or whatever it was called then the CM...

33:30 In the west?

In the west they did a 98 days, how many did they do now?

They did a basic training period of about 6 weeks I think it was. And then they went to their battalion or their, wherever.

So given, I'm being hypothetical here, given that some of the boys that were conscripted didn't want to be conscripted what was your methodology in training these kids?

34:00 What was my what?

Methodology? What did you bring to the job to turn them into good soldiers?

I suppose nothing really that I hadn't done with any other soldiers. They were there – they were training for war and it was all guided in that direction by everybody that was involved.

34:30 We did exercises in Shoalwater Bay in Queensland that sometimes I think were a lot harder than what we did in Vietnam.

In what way?

In the – they were really hard exercises physically and every other thing in

35:00 Queensland. And that was what it was all about you trained them for war the same as you would a regular soldier.

Could you tell the difference in training?

It was different to the training that we had when we went to Korea because it was a different type of war. There was no difference between the National Serviceman

35:30 in the training and a regular soldier they were all the same.

But when you had new intake could you pick the difference between a conscript and ...?

Well yes you could for a little bit because they didn't know as much as some that had been there for 3 months or whatever it was. Well that would only be natural.

I know that you spent your evenings in an entirely different environment and so on but I imagine if you're a good trainer or teacher you'd keep an eye on

36:00 **things outside of the actual classes and instruction so do you know how the two managed to get along then?**

Good. Yeah, they – they were put in together, they were being put together the same as any other infantry soldier and they just mixed in together. They used to call the regular soldiers 'you bloody Regs' [Regular Army] and our blokes to call the 'Nashos' [National Service Soldiers] you know

36:30 but it was all in good fun. You know they all got on.

So if you had a game of sport would they divide up like that?

No, not necessarily, no.

And the other thing is history shows that a lot of fellows who just didn't want to be part of the National Service could get out of it. They got out of it in all sorts of ways. Some just didn't sign up you know did all sorts of things but others were caught and turned in. So if a fellow ended up in National Service

37:00 **and under your command for training and he just wasn't going to tow the line, what would you do?**

Give him to someone who could, thank you. We had all sorts of sportsmen, Doug Walters for instance, the cricketer was one which was a bit of pain because the media followed you everywhere you went, geez. What you really had to try and avoid

37:30 was having one who was an absolute stirrer amongst the rest of them. You really didn't want that situation. But it seldom occurred. They were good, they were good I had to admire them.

It was totally random wasn't it, the conscription method?

Oh I don't know, they used to pick it out of...

38:00 **Yeah, no what I mean it didn't have anything to do with what school you went to for example?**

Oh no, no, no, I don't either, regardless of what people say if your number came up it didn't matter if you were a Scots College boy or from a Mornington High School sort of thing.

Mm, so Dougie Walters [Australian cricketer] had press following him around did he?

Yeah we had him, but he didn't go away with us. Why didn't he? Normie Rowe [pop singer] was another

one.

38:30 There were quite a number of those sort of people.

Did you train Normie Rowe?

But Normie Rowe was in armoured but he was there.

Would the fellows that you were training go into something specific or were you training them for broad...

No, we were training them to be infantry soldiers.

And if you weren't much of a shot with a pistol were you better with a rifle?

39:00 Oh yes, yes somewhat better.

Tape 8

00:33 **Okay, I just want to get an idea how long you would have your recruits before turning them back out again?**

In the Training battalion?

Mm hm.

Only a period of about 6 weeks and then they would go on to the infantry whatever battalion they were going to go to or whatever batch of gunners and they would go on with their normal. The 3rd Training

01:00 Battalion was purely for basic training. All their specialised training in infantry work or whatever was done with the units, various battalions and things like that.

So you were very much their first port of call?

Yes, basically that's what it was all about.

And RSMs have a reputation of putting the wind up soldiers?

Yes, we have been accused of that

01:30 and no doubt the accusation is probably pretty right because the RMS since the year dot has always been a dreadful bugger according to soldiers. It's always been, it's only a thing really but ever since I can remember

02:00 anything to do with army the RSMs were always a dreadful damn person.

Did you have the voice that they needed?

Yes I did, I had a very high pitched voice and as I said when I was on Rottneest Island they could hear me down in the village 3 miles away.

And how did you keep up the front of it?

Well you know

02:30 you had to be spit and polish all the time and you had to be careful you didn't let your guard at any time. And you just did, you had to otherwise the image is gone.

So you couldn't appear soft at any stage?

Well you weren't supposed to.

What about with the Little Horse, that would've kind of taken the frighteners out of you?

03:00 No, at Little Horse of course was something else, I suppose there were the odd occasions when you'd get a bit soft on things particularly as you get older but I don't think that in all the time I've been involved with training soldiers I've ever done anything to them that I regret.

Some of them would've needed to coin a phrase 'shoulder to cry on from time to time'?

Oh yes,

03:30 yeah, yeah, yeah, and really had to be there to do that. Probably not so much as the RSM because they sort of give you a wide berth but in the company stages, you know the company sergeant majors, platoon sergeants and things like that yeah you had to be very careful of young soldiers, yeah.

So as an RSM would there not be an opportunity for you to sort of...?

Oh sometimes

04:00 I suppose you would but generally the young soldiers treated you like the plague sort of thing. I don't know.

It must be a bit weird for example if you're in full mode and someone turns up from your past who knows you as that gad about boy, etc.?

It happens.

What do you do in those circumstances, it'd be almost embarrassing?

Oh no, no

04:30 because anybody from the past probably did exactly the same as I did. I've had people who knew me – well as a matter of fact I had him as my platoon sergeant in Korea and I saw him again years later at a reunion in Sydney

05:00 and he said you must be proud of yourself starting off in the battalion as a private soldier and then you come back as a regimental sergeant major and he was you know he's dead now poor fellow. No, anybody that was in the army about the same time and joined the army and sort of went through it about the same things – did all the same things as I did. Cause I never used to get into any trouble.

05:30 **Oh no, I'm sure you didn't.**

No.

And by not getting into trouble how would you describe that?

As I said the crime was not doing the crime it was getting caught that's the crime.

What didn't you get caught for?

I didn't get caught for much at all really. I was generally pretty well behaved.

What could you have been caught for?

Oh God a million things, a million things.

Mm, good at evading my questions.

A million things but nothing that I'd be ashamed of.

06:00 **No, I'm not suggesting you would be but it's kind of fun to...**

But young soldiers get up to all sorts of things don't they mainly concerned with probably a bit of grog and stuff you know.

Well there's a bit of cow tipping bit of you know high jinx but it would be good to get some more fun specific detail?

Oh of course it all depends how much time you've got. I didn't get up to you know anything...

What could you do in 45 minutes then?

06:30 Oh probably I don't know it all depends what you wanted to do. Have two or three stubbies, I just didn't used to get mixed up with a lot of nonsense it just wasn't my cup of tea.

When you had a passing out parade

07:00 **for some of the lads you trained, would they do something of the equivalent of say break up day at school and pull a stunt or something?**

Oh some of them used to. I never used to encourage it.

I'm sure you didn't but I'm wondering if you ever came out and...

Cause people, two apprentices were killed in one of those sort of damn fool things. Not while I was there after me.

What happened?

Oh they used to have these

07:30 crab nights or something they called it and they got a flagpole and they were running around with it and of course touched the electric wires. I never had any bother along that line.

Given the training that you're doing though, it sort of sets the possibility for accidents and I'm wondering if you witnessed many of those?

Oh yeah, well it does and you know

08:00 I suppose there were quite a lot of them one way and another. You know some of the training that we used to do provided an opportunity for a lot of accidents of different sorts.

Could you give me a specific example of an accident that occurred?

No I really can't that I can think of. I'd have to do a lot of thinking, I've got to cast the old mind back a long way and I just can't think of it.

08:30 Probably tomorrow I'll think of a half a dozen of them.

Well unfortunately we won't be here so if you do think of them interrupt me. Okay well let's push on then it was quite a long time before they sent you back. You said early when you came back you needed to be back at least 12 months but looking at the dates it was a good 3 years before they sent you back over there.

It was 1968 I went back.

So all of those three years were they served...

It wasn't 10 years it was...

No 3 I said,

09:00 **in all those 3 years I'm just clarifying was that spent as RSM for 1RAR?**

Basically, basically but not all of it. I would've, I spent one complete period of training for one group of National Servicemen that was a 6 week period it took us probably

09:30 that long to establish the battalion headquarters and you know by the time all that sort of administrative work was done all but about 3 months I suppose. I went to 1RAR, back to 1RAR as the RSM when they came home from Vietnam the first time.

10:00 **What's it like to realise your lifelong ambition?**

I was pretty happy about it, pretty happy about it. Particularly, I did it fairly quickly because that's what I wanted to do.

Does it make you come up with another ambition?

Oh well probably at the moment

10:30 see a few more birthdays is about the only ambition really that I've got now I mean at my age what would I want to do.

Did it make you think you could retire?

No, no, that decision came much later.

Okay. Did you have any experiences training boys sending them off knowing that they'd gone off to Vietnam did you have that experience of

11:00 **reading their death notices in the paper for example?**

Well I had more than that, I suppose in my time particularly after we came back from Vietnam I hesitate to think how many military funerals I've conducted for young soldiers that were killed in Vietnam. I wouldn't like to count them all.

11:30 I really wouldn't and that was a pretty hard business. I can vividly remember having to physically take hold of one mother and pull her off her son's coffin as it was going through the

12:00 you know the - and it's pretty hard, pretty hard. And I have conducted the military funeral of a lot of young soldiers and you've got your firing parties and all that sort of stuff. I've done some big military funerals too I might add.

12:30 But it was hard young soldiers yeah a lot of them.

Do they have any kind of a rating?

Yes, yes they do. It depends on your rank as to what you get. And I just can't remember all the little bits and pieces. I've done a lot of private soldier funerals, I've done them for generals

13:00 where I've had a 1,000 troops on parade.

Is that something specific to a RSM's job then?

Well people often ask you what is a RSM's job and my answer to it is everything but basically his job is ceremonial, administration and discipline, military

- 13:30 law and administration and anything else that comes up. My CO at the 3rd Training Battalion when we established it said his RSM could do anything. It's very hard to define. You find yourself doing all sorts of things but basically his job is military law, and administration, ceremonial
- 14:00 and stuff like that. You answer directly to the commander
- This is a bit of an arbitrary question but is the funeral of a private and conscript any different to the funeral of a ...?**
- No - both get the same. The regular soldier you were going to say?
- No I was actually going to of career and say lieutenant and I mean in terms of a...**
- Oh well yeah it
- 14:30 did depend on rank as to what you got and it's no good asking me what each one got.
- No, I'm actually being a bit more abstract here I'm saying in terms of grief and emotion in regards to the family did they alter?**
- Well I would - it was very hard - it was hard on you because first
- 15:00 off he was a young soldier and in a lot of cases probably came from somewhere that you had trained him somewhere along the line. No, it was very emotional, particularly when you get instances as I said of having to drag a mother off her son's casket.
- Did the families ever take issue with you?**
- No, no
- 15:30 they always seemed very appreciative of what was done. It always seemed that way.
- Did they always manage to be private or were they ever interrupted by anti-Vietnam sentiment?**
- No I never had one, never had one interrupted no. I've had the odd difficulty I had to bury one young chap and by the time we went to let the casket down
- 16:00 into the hole it was full of water. Those sort of things we couldn't get one out of a church door. Those sort of things come up but you get around them. That's where you learn to make snap decisions as to what you're going to do next.
- It's almost comical isn't it, getting a coffin out a church door? Oh dear, and the other question, I don't mean to be morbid but after awhile if you've trained all these young soldiers are you able to tell who's going to survive and who's not?**
- No.
- 16:30 **It's just luck is it?**
- No, no you can't tell. It's the luck of the game.
- Did any of them touch you more than others personally, like if you heard that they died did it affect you more than any other?**
- Not really they were all young soldiers and they all mean the same. Some of them you know better than others. See in
- 17:00 the battalion for instance people often used to say to me, can't you remember me and you can't remember them all and I used to make it my business I could always remember the stars and the 'mon stars' the ones in the middle were just there and sometimes you'd get one who's an outstanding young soldier and have him get killed is just -
- 17:30 it does tend to stir you a little bit more.
- Did they ever let on what they called you in terms of nicknames and so on?**
- No, but I don't think you'd have to have a very vivid imagination sometimes.
- We?**
- I wouldn't like to, no.
- I can't rhyme anything with...**
- No, no, look, it's
- 18:00 probably - they had a lot of names let's leave it at that.
- Well I don't think...**

I don't think any of them were all that bad, I mean I had the CO of the battalion come with me one day and said, 'I don't like these boys calling me the old man,' but it was a term of endearment. All commanding officers are called 'the old man'.

What terms of endearment did they have for you?

I don't know that they had any. No I couldn't

18:30 no I no you know...

What are you worried about by telling me?

No, nothing really, but I'm sure there were a lot of fairly colourful ones. You're not going to get any more out of me.

No I realise I'm going through them in my own head and they're making me laugh. All right,

19:00 **let's talk about your second tour then, how did you receive the news that you were off again?**

Sort of quite easily because it was about rotation time for the battalions but the CO of the battalion at that time was Colonel Bennett. He came to the battalion and I was at that point

19:30 being considered for the job at the, as RSM of the Officer Cadet School, Portsea. The CO, Colonel Bennett asked me if I'd stay on and go back with the battalion and I said, 'Yes,' but I told him about Portsea he said, 'I'll fix that in a flash,' which he did with a phone.

20:00 And that was that. And then of course the problem was go home and tell Helen. She accepted it because probably you know she accepted it well because she knew she'd married a soldier but when our departure date was the 1st of April, the night of our first wedding anniversary that made it a bit harder

20:30 but that's the way it was and Helen stuck by it and other than that it didn't present me with a problem. I didn't particularly want to go back again but some people had been back 3 times mind you. I didn't particularly want to go back, the battalion was going and I was the RSM of the battalion so I had to go.

If you'd pushed it could you have got that position at Portsea?

21:00 I don't know, but the Director of Infantry then who was Colonel David Thompson who led our company up that Hill 227 in Korea told me, he said, "Now if you go back to Korea with the battalion I will look after you when you come home." "Oh yeah, yes."

21:30 I had to apply a certain amount of pressure when I came home to remind him of that fact. I was RSM of the battalion and I had to go that was that.

How does the army treat its RSMs?

How does it treat them?

Yeah.

Pretty well, pretty well.

It is a fairly serious position to attain?

Yes it is. Yeah it is.

22:00 **And I mean you're in that awkward spot as well where most the people you deal with are your subordinates but you've attained a rank that a lot of your senior ranking officers wouldn't have attained if they'd gone through the way you've gone through if you get my drift. It was sort of a weird position to be in I imagine?**

No, no, no, I - you had to be at least a major to even attract my interest

22:30 the RSM wields a pretty big around the place and he answers to the commanding officer. Generally the RSM of a battalion is considered a very important person.

23:00 And a lot of cases of what happens in the battalion has a tendency to centre around what he does. I've found that most RSMs are pretty well respected but they all go about things in their own way though.

Okay, so you're off overseas

23:30 **again, on a 50/50 scale - I mean is there a part of you quite wants to go back, give it another shot?**

No, I wouldn't have liked to gone back again. When we come home and went to Malaya we were there what 6 - 9 months and I had just had enough of Asia. I couldn't careless if I never went to Asia ever again.

24:00 **This time, they send you to Nui Dat which was a big base?**

Yes, that was the Task, the 1st Australian Task Force was based at Nui Dat and it comprised of the 3 infantry battalions with all their supporting arms. Airfield everything. 99% of it was under

24:30 canvas. Mess halls and that were under hard, you know built places and in fact I had a nice little cement building as my office come sleeping quarters.

I also understand that Nui Dat was entirely secure though, that it was subject to attack?

I would not have liked to have seen Nui Dat attacked. I think

25:00 the results may have been disastrous. As I understand it though, that's where the North Vietnamese people were going that clashed with 8RAR, was it 6RAR Long Tan that's where they were going, Nui Dat - as I understand it.

Oh okay,

25:30 **and the Battle of Long Tan stopped them from a fairly major insurrection then?**

I wouldn't have liked to have seen Nui Dat attacked myself by any force of any consequence.

Why?

Because the area was - it would've been all right if all the battalions had been back in there but when they're out on operations it could've been a different story.

Again I...

Lack of numbers, lack of numbers. I mean the

26:00 battalion areas for instance were secured basically by the odd sods that were left behind, the cooks and all that sort of stuff but could shoot and all of that but not enough of them I don't reckon. That always bothered me a little.

Why would they do that when it's such an important area that needs protection obviously?

Oh I suppose their intelligence

26:30 had a lot to do with it. I doubt that the task force commander who was an ex CO of 1 Battalion actually would move the task force out of the area and leave the main base fresh out of somebody to defend it. It covered a

27:00 pretty big area.

By the time they sent you back it would've - Australian government would have peaked the numbers they were sending over there. In fact not long after that Nixon would've...

Pretty well, pretty well, when we were there, there was 3 battalions, gunners, engineers, choppers, light aircraft, yeah they were probably at about its peak

27:30 of numbers.

Can you sort of compare the differences between your first tour and your second for me?

I wasn't on the first tour.

I'm sorry the time you were over with the team?

Oh much more comfortable because you're with your own people. Got your own people around you and that has - to have your own people around you feels good.

28:00 **What about the differences in what you saw in terms of the landscape, geography, climate, environment?**

Oh I suppose it was all basically the same. Wherever you went it was lousy with things that are prickly - bamboo. Oh pretty the same. We probably saw more on the second tour

28:30 of the country because we - you know the battalion would go - I mean to see a battalion, a whole battalion lift off the ground at the airstrip in helicopters like a flock of birds, it was just something else to see. Dozens and dozens of them just lift off like - and we would certainly travel a lot further than

29:00 ever I did when I was with the training team. You know we used to travel quite some distance, sometimes you wouldn't go far.

The country itself had been under a lot of firing attack in those intervening years, could you see any of that?

Oh yes, you know, places were wrecked and there were forests burnt and what was the

29:30 other thing they used to use, this Agent Orange [defoliant] or whatever it was for defoliating the jungles and villages wrecked and burnt and you know a lot are.

Could you detect much difference in the people themselves?

No, no, same, as I say they were quite nice people Vietnamese, yeah.

30:00 Any that I came in contact with in the first tour I found quite nice people. Probably in the second tour we didn't come into the same - it wasn't the same closeness as there was in the first tour.

Where there any members of the original team that you could catch up with or

30:30 **am I way out here?**

What since I've been home?

Yes were there fellows that you knew from your first time there that...

Yeah you see some of them around, yeah you see some of them around but Australia's a big place but you do see some of them around, yeah, oh yes. We had Keith Payne for instance down here not so long back. Yeah you see quite a lot of them.

31:00 **From your notes earlier I think that you mentioned that most of the role you took on there was the defence of the HQ, is that right?**

Well, I was a member of battalion headquarters, being RSM, and I was responsible for the defence of battalion headquarters when out on operations. Yeah that was always pretty thin on the ground too sometimes and quite often we'd be at a

31:30 little base all by ourselves. Sometimes a little concerning because there's not a lot of people in battalion headquarters.

What does HQ hold, what's in it?

Well it starts off and you have your commanding officer. Your 2ICs [Second in Command] are always back in base and your various signals officers, mortar command all those people make up the intelligence officers and

32:00 their sidekicks and stuff like that, drivers and regimental police and...

And what is your actual role in this circumstance then, I know you've just told me what it was...?

I had to lay out the defence at battalion headquarters and keep them all on the job.

Is he the boss?

Pretty well, I don't get involved or I didn't get involved in the actual

32:30 control of the command post there's enough officers there to do that.

You don't do strategy?

No.

You run the machine...?

The defensive outside, yeah.

Do you ever have to go on patrol then?

I never did, never had to, no. It didn't fall within in my job.

You've done this in a round about way but I'm wonder if you got for the purpose of the interview

33:00 **situate yourself in that say Nui Dat or a similar HQ in the area and run me through what a day would involve for you?**

Within the - within Nui Dat oh - there was still a lot of administrative type of work to be done. I mean people were always finishing up on charges for

33:30 one damn thing or another and that was always my lot. We spent a lot of time going around and visiting the companies and that sort of things.

Out in the field?

At times, if they were out and we were in and the CO was going out I'd go to see. And your days sometimes could be a bit

34:00 boring and sometimes there wasn't enough time in the day. You took it as it come, you had to. And we used to count the 'wakies' to coming home.

Count the?

'Wakies' wake ups - got 165 wake ups before we come home.

Sleeps.

We came home, we had

34:30 recreation leave, 5 days recreation leave, I came home to Australia for that because I wanted to see my son who they finally told me had been born.

So Helen was pregnant before you left for Vietnam?

Yes.

Did you know that?

Yes.

Okay. That's another thing on your mind as you're over there as well?

Yes. I was lucky, we had a gynaecologist in Liverpool

35:00 Doctor Hislop was his name and his attitude was, "You go off and fight your war, you've done your bit. You go off and fight your war and your wife and I'll do the rest." That was his attitude, but he was very good. I even after my son was born I

35:30 even wrote him a letter to thank him for looking after Helen cause it is a worry. And when I came home for R&R I was asleep on the couch one day and he came round. And he said, "Of all the soldiers' wives that I've looked after, you are the first silly bugger that ever wrote and thanked me," and he said, "I had to come around and see what sort of a bloke you were."

36:00 He was great.

The charges that you had to deal with, with the young fellas, what sort of problems would crop up?

Oh, drinking too much, one bloke shot himself in the foot. You know all that sort of stuff, nothing terribly serious.

Why doesn't someone teach soldiers who want to get out to do it in a fashion that doesn't give them away cause that's got to be the oldest trick in the book, doesn't it?

36:30 Yeah well we knew most of them, we know most of the tricks because we've been there. But there wasn't a lot of that sort of stuff goes on but we did have one bloke that shot himself in the foot and that put him out of action and you know you got the odds blokes that had too much grog and misbehaved themselves that sort of thing.

Is it a

37:00 **Court martial offence to shoot yourself?**

Oh it becomes very complicated I tell you.

So on a compassionate level, what do you do in terms of disciplining or charging these young fellas who have turned up in a scary place like Vietnam with too much grog around and probably a bit too much weed?

Put them on the grog and - put them on the dry and hit their pocket. Hit the pocket.

Did you have a rating system for how much you would deduct per offence.

No the - whoever is

37:30 hearing the defence, the thing, either the company commander he's got to set a level he can go to and then your battalion commander has somewhat more and from thereon it goes court martial type thing.

Alcohol and drugs are one of the things that define Vietnam and Australia's involvement in it than say any of the other wars were fought...

We did not have a drug problem.

38:00 If there was, it wasn't evident. There probably was cases where the odd soldier drank too much but there was no evidence that I'm aware of, and I knew most things that were going on around the place - of drugs. I'm not saying it didn't happen later because it probably did and it is now.

Well it certainly seemed

38:30 **to have infiltrated the American ranks?**

Oh, yes, yeah, yes, because when I come home on R&R, I flew in an aircraft with a whole batch of Americans, we stopped at Darwin and everything from cigarettes was taken off us. The whole lot, you weren't allowed to bring any at all.

39:00 We arrived at Mascot, and the customs people were waiting and I think there were 3 or 4 Australians on the thing and the customs people called the 3 or 4 of us first and kept the Americans till last cause that's what they were looking for, drugs. But I - we had no evidence of drug use in the battalion that I'm aware of. There were many things that went on

39:30 that I didn't know. There was probably a lot of things that I wasn't supposed to know about but no, no jokes.

Did you have an official line to take if you did catch anyone with contraband substances?

Oh well, that sort of thing the customs people would...

So nowhere in the army regs was a line that said, 'Catch anyone stoned, they're

40:00 **out'?**

Oh with drugs?

Yeah.

Oh at that time, I don't think there was any official line but that's what would've happened but now of course they'd be counselled or something.

Tape 9

00:33 **Just to go back to your first trip over with the team it was a secret embarkation but you got embarkation leave, how did you explain that to your family?**

A secret - ask the question again.

Sure, it wasn't public knowledge that you were going over to Vietnam was it? In your first tour?

Oh my family knew.

You could tell your family?

Oh they knew where I was going, yes, yes, yes.

01:00 As I said because my Dad was at the airport and he said you know look after yourself because I've got a feeling I won't see you again and he didn't. Oh yeah, they knew where I was going.

I'm just trying to gauge the level of secrecy then, where they committed to not tell anyone?

No, no, I don't think that it - the authorities were trying to keep secret the fact that

01:30 there was advisors in Vietnam, no I don't think they were trying to do that just some of the capers that we got up to in preparation.

Okay I think I must've misunderstood the climate. Now the interestingly named mountain and jungle and swamp camps, you mentioned the swamps what would you do in the mountains?

Oh well you know there was

02:00 in the mountain camp they had rifle ranges and rappelling down rocks and, you know, climbing up and down cliffs which didn't grab me much that sort of thing. In the jungle camp they sort of concentrated on actual jungle warfare and down in the swamps camp they concentrated on the swamp aspect of the whole thing and it was all

02:30 done in the swamps. Dreadful places to wander around. In fact we got caught in a fish net one night. They had these big fish nets that they - you may have seen them on television - they lay these big nets out and they mechanically pull this thing up and we were cruising around one of the swamps this night in a little rubber dinghy

03:00 thing and the next minute we're up in the air because we got caught in one of these - yeah. But they concentrate on the swamp aspect of it because there's a fair amount of swamp territory in South Vietnam and that's the way it was - in some cases I suppose you know one could interact with the other sort of thing. That's the way they wanted it set up and that's the way they did it.

With swamp warfare

- 03:30 **and you talking about just getting around or actually staging attacks and things in the swamps?**
- No more getting around than anything else. I mean in those mangrove swamps and - oh you can't move, really I wonder why we were there but there is a lot of swamp territory in Vietnam, South Vietnam any rate so I suppose it had to be included
- 04:00 in the training program All we seemed to do was move around in the swamps and get horribly wet and horribly dirty and lousy with leeches and mosquitoes.
- I mean it was the South Vietnamese - it was there country, did you feel like you were telling them how to suck eggs sometimes?**
- No, because all we were teaching them
- 04:30 was how to - the military aspect of protecting their country. We weren't trying to tell them how to run it. I'm not suggesting some of the 'up tops' probably were telling them how to run it but that wasn't what we were about, no. We were there to teach the military aspect as far as protecting their country not how to run that country.
- And in dealing with those types of terrain, you don't have to be**
- 05:00 **specific but had that training you had back in Australia, had that been sufficient for you to then train other men in swamp and jungle?**
- I think so yeah, yeah. I mean I'd been at it for a while. Yes I think so. I mean by that time I had a fair bit of experience in training and all that sort of stuff. I think most of us were pretty well into it.
- And enough experience**
- 05:30 **with things like swamps and jungle conditions?**
- Yeah, you go up to Queensland, a bit of it up there too. I remember one young fellow jumping out of a helicopter up there once and he was that small he disappeared into the swamp and all you could see was his head sticking out and his radio aerial. No we've all - we've done it here too.
- And what were you training in terms of tactics that were different specifically geared to fighting the North Vietnamese?**
- Oh mainly
- 06:00 patrolling and ambushes and counter ambush drills and shooting cause they couldn't shoot for nuts. And that sort of thing which probably our own people training in the same way ambush, counter ambush, patrolling, casevac [Casualty Evacuation] all that stuff.
- 06:30 They all had to be trained.
- And how about dealing with - well I mean the North Vietnamese are famous for tunnels and booby traps and guerrilla - how would you train against those?**
- Well the people that would do most of that would be the engineer type people and see North Vietnamese were very good at
- 07:00 tunnelling under the ground had complete hospitals had complete everything under the ground. A bit out of my line that sort of stuff. Not something I was practised in so I wouldn't attempt to teach it. Otherwise you're talking about something you don't know anything about do you but the other stuff the infantry military stuff yes I know what I'm on about.
- Now during that year**
- 07:30 **where in Vietnam was it safe for you to be?**
- Safe? You mean safe, safe, probably nowhere.
- There's degrees but...**
- Probably nowhere at that time. You know we'd go down to Nha Trang and sit on the beach for a bit but it was still there. There really wasn't any safe places other than within your own compound
- 08:00 or whatever it was and even then one of the Australian hotels where they - where the Australian were they put a bomb underneath it and dropped a complete floor. There really wasn't anywhere safe.
- How would you try to relax when you were relatively safe?**
- Well as I said I used to go down once a month to Hotel Frigart and have a day down there eating
- 08:30 crayfish and drinking beer and eating French bread that I wasn't supposed to and just completely relax.

Completely relax?

Oh yes, pretty well, yeah and go back. I mean, when you start talking about safety, in any war situation I suppose

09:00 you can't say that you're safe safe. When you're out - when you were in the compound up at Duc My, yeah we were reasonably safe as long as they didn't decide to launch an attack on that particular company which they didn't do fortunately but in a lot of place where the boys were they did. But the situation was always there

09:30 we were always liable to get a bullet in your back or something like that. And you couldn't - if you went for a haircut one would sit in the barber's chair while the other one stood at the door because there was nothing - quite common to have a grenade thrown into a café and you

10:00 might be in there sort of thing. And no doubt the advisors and the Americans of course, were prime targets for you know any VC that could infiltrate into your setup or if they sort of caught you out and about on your own sort of thing.

Did

10:30 **you see any of that VC activity?**

Not during the first tour, no, saw plenty in the second one but not during the first tour. But of course the possibility was always there. You can't say oh I'm right here 'She'll be right' because she's not right.

11:00 But as I said the job I had probably in the training team was far more cushy than some of them.

Well I mean it's enough to know that there's a constant possibility of danger?

Yeah, there is. It's a bit different to going to work here. You can do that with relative safety but I think things are changing even that way now but yeah there's a constant thought in your mind

11:30 that you could get into trouble.

You mentioned the various weapons you would keep nearby one of which was a shotgun that you take out at night. Did you ever have reason to shoot that off?

Well the pistol was no damn good to me and the pump action shotgun if you're caught in an ambush is a pretty handy thing. Scanners that are around.

12:00 **Did that happen?**

No, no but I wasn't prepared to have it happen and get caught with a damn useless pistol. No it didn't happen but precaution was always there, always took the precaution. Because if you start to - in anything like if you start to get slack and forget what is

12:30 going on it could be fatal so you've got to keep on your guard all the time. I mean even in a compound your weapons are right beside you so that at a drop of a hat you've got them. You can't afford to get slack and adopt the 'she'll be right' attitude because it doesn't always work that way.

13:00 Probably I was fortunate but it did I never got into any serious trouble but it was always there.

Now you mentioned that it wasn't entirely secret the fact that Australians were in Vietnam but still those Poms you met didn't give anything away?

No.

Were you able to talk much about what you were doing there to the Americans?

No, no, I could've done it was just that

13:30 they were there and I was sort of surprised to see two damn Poms standing in a Yankee compound.

Did they want to know what you were doing there?

No. They would've known full well what I was doing but they weren't about to tell me what they were doing. And when I said to them what are you guys doing here they said just looking around, okay I've got enough brains to know enough about the system to know that

14:00 they were just looking around and they were probably British Intelligence people for all I know, I don't know.

Did the Americans know full well what you were doing?

Oh yeah, oh yeah, yeah, yeah, I mean they started it that's why we were there. Oh yes there was no great secret about us being there. No great secret.

14:30 Sometimes things didn't get reported in Australia quite as truthfully as they could've been.

What sort of examples are there where the reportage was one thing and the reality was another?

They didn't get their stories right. You know - my mother used to send me up paper clippings from the paper the West Australian and the

15:00 reports of action that went on up there were nothing like what did happen.

Were they more spectacular or less spectacular or?

Not good for the people at home to be getting the stuff all bloodied up just for the sake of selling a paper.

15:30 I often think the media could be far more truthful than they really are.

So in that case the stories would actually be more spectacular in the paper than in reality?

Well they weren't right. I mean there's two sides to a story, now if they're going to report on a story of an action that's taking place they want to do it correctly. Don't boost it up and make it look 10 times worse than it was.

16:00 But that's the way it goes, they do that, they're still doing it.

Such a contrast of the Second World War because the media was always making us look better?

Yeah well in the Second World War and in the First World War I mean we reckon we did things hard but when I look back at some of the things you see on France in the First World War and Gallipoli and those places we live a life of luxury

16:30 I suppose because we had more stuff more everything. They did it hard in those days and the boys during the Second World War did it hard too. You had to admire them. They had their jobs to do and the blokes that are in the Solomons at the moment have got theirs to do and they're probably doing it in the true tradition that's needed.

17:00 **In either of your trips to Vietnam what did you see of media presence over there?**

Not a lot, not a lot, it was mainly done by the public relations people. They did come of course but they didn't bother us much. You know I can't remember any specific occasion

17:30 when we had media people out with us. No doubt they were there though at various times but I just can't remember an incident when they were so I wouldn't like to comment on that.

Did you see any photographers or cameramen or anything like that?

Oh there was war correspondents and things around, yeah, yeah. But they never got in the way.

What was the official line with dealing

18:00 **with them?**

I suppose, I don't know what the official line was but I suppose be as co-operative as you possibly can and hope that they don't get in the damn road. That last thing you want getting in the road is photographers when trouble starts. Yeah they would've been there, there's no question of that. But I just can't recall

18:30 a time when they were there and they were obviously there and they had to be because a lot of photographs came back so somebody had to take them but a lot of Public Relations guys.

Okay and on both tours again how much would you have to do with what's called 'winning hearts and minds' the sort of?

Not much to do with that.

Did you see any evidence of that?

There was a lot of

19:00 work done in later years as I understand it and there's still a lot goes on in Vietnam of trying to win back the confidence of the people and that sort of thing. There's probably still a lot of - in fact there is still that sort of thing going on, there's groups of people over there building schools and God only knows what not

19:30 but there was always what did they call them, the Civil Affairs Group that were what's the word, trying to help the local Vietnamese people and probably try to convince them what good fellows we were and all that sort of stuff. They had a Civil Affairs Group

20:00 up there. In the particular case of ourselves, we didn't get terribly involved with it because you had too many other things to do.

What did you think of the Civil Affairs mob?

Don't know, didn't have much to do with them. I don't know I can't say.

They didn't have a reputation among the troops or officers?

No not that I can think of. I didn't have much to do with them.

20:30 **And on your second tour generally what do you think your men's opinion of the Vietnamese was?**

They were held fairly highly, in fairly highly regard as being skilled opponents and they were. Let's face it

21:00 and apparently as a result of people going back to Vietnam who've spoken to ex-Vietnam commanders and what have you the Australians were held in very high regard by them. They liked to treat the Australian forces with caution.

21:30 And of course there were a number of - a lot of Vietnamese people here in Australia now as we all know but a lot of them that are ex-Vietnamese forces people. I know a friend of mine in Canberra who has been to Saigon officially and has spoken with ex-commanders that commanded the regiment that we were basically

22:00 concerned with, yeah.

Would you like to have been able to talk to those men?

Yeah I suppose if the opportunity arose but I wouldn't go back to Vietnam to do it. I don't care if I never go to Vietnam ever again. But it just so happened that he was in Hanoi in fact and was introduced to one of these people who commanded this

22:30 lot that were constantly against us and yeah and apparently they held the Australian forces in fairly high regard keep out their way.

You must take a fair bit of pride from that?

Oh yeah, yeah. You see look the Australian soldiers are spoken very highly of around the world particularly from the Americans.

23:00 Because of the way they do things and the attitude I suppose you know. You will very seldom hear anybody from any country running the Australian soldiers down.

What defines the Australian soldiers?

Pretty well any of them regardless of what

23:30 particular thing they do, but they're all spoken very highly of from engineers to pilots to little infantry soldiers, they're marvellous - chopper pilots. You know in Vietnam you'd have to really see a helicopter pilot who were

24:00 flying Code Name Dust Off which was casevac choppers and I haven't been with them but I always knew exactly what was going on when their contacts and those helicopter pilots would fly in to pick blokes up and there would be bullets whistling all over the place, you know it's all still going on but they chug in - there was a navy bloke that we had, I can't remember his name

24:30 but we called him Sinbad the Sailor because he had a beard and he'd fly that chopper anywhere regardless of what was going on if it meant being able to get a couple of soldiers out. You see the helicopter made the infantryman's life somewhat easier in as much that he could be transported from point A to point B without having to walk all that distance and he got a bullet

25:00 where his shirt meets his trousers he could be on the operating table in a half an hour. It made a lot of difference to infantry soldiers.

It also meant you could go somewhere pretty hairy pretty quickly though?

Yeah, yeah.

So it worked both ways I think.

Yeah, yeah they're marvellous. People always say I want a ride in a helicopter. I always reckon a 2nd class ride is better than a 1st class walk any day. But they were marvellous

25:30 for infantrymen plus being marvellous for a lot of other things. Fresh supplies could be flown out to soldiers on the front line, ammunitions supplies you didn't have to carry the damn lot sort of thing you know, guns and - you'd see them flying along with the artillery pieces slung underneath them. They were just marvellous.

26:00 It changed the whole face of warfare.

You mentioned as you went in as a training capacity you didn't think we could win?

Yeah.

How did you feel the second time you went in?

Pretty well the same. They were getting the better of us. Not in our particular area but we weren't winning I mean we knew that.

Well

26:30 **How does that affect your leadership of men?**

It didn't affect it at all. You went on as normal you still - everybody still got on with the job. We never had a chance of winning I don't think. We didn't.

Did your men share that sentiment?

I don't know probably they did. They're not stupid they could see what was happening. And the net was quietly closing in

27:00 which it did do. I don't know whether they could see it or but I reckon they could. Because you know we were fighting in their country it would be different if it was in our own - here but in the country they've got the greater percentage

27:30 of public on their side plus the fact that they resupply - you know they didn't have much must've come down on somebody's back down the Ho Chi Minh Trail but they had a lot of people doing it and no we weren't destined to win that.

Well if you go into a fighting situation and your objective isn't to win what do you make your objectives then?

If you were...?

Well if you're not expecting to win

28:00 **the larger war what do you reconcile yourself with? What are your objectives?**

I suppose in all fairness we did everything, everything that we were involved with we went with the intention that we were going to win. I mean it's like playing a game of football, it's no good playing a game of football if you say, 'Well I don't know why we're going to do this because we know we're going to bloody lose in the first place'. Everything that was done

28:30 was done with the intention of winning and any actions that our boys were involved with we didn't lose but the overall concept of it the whole Vietnam War was doomed to failure, I think. But we never lost anything. Come close a couple of time but

29:00 no you've got to do it with the intention of winning.

I think you briefly mentioned in the first tape that Fire Support Base Coral the 25 day? Could you give us a sense of the stages of that what was happening?

Well it was the most prolonged action of any in the Vietnam War.

29:30 And we were put into place and it's no good of me trying to explain to you exactly where it was and we were obviously in the way of a Vietnamese regiment, North Vietnamese regiment that was going to Saigon and we were in their road and they didn't like it obviously. And they attacked the battalion, most of the rifle companies

30:00 were out around the place. They overran the mortar platoon to the extent where the mortar platoon commander called for 'fleshet rounds' I don't know whether you know what a fleshet round is but when it goes off it fires little metal spike type things

30:30 with some fairly sad results and he declared them off his mortar line he had to call us in to be fired onto his own mortar line they overran some of the guns, they had guns and mortars turned around. We were in real trouble, big trouble. Air support

31:00 and artillery support and God knows what not was called in. At one stage the commanding officer had given the - all the various air power that turned up - you know just - there's plenty of targets pick whichever one you want and the amount of aircraft

31:30 from choppers to fighter bombers floating around in the air at one time the control people at Sydney Airport would be horrified and you know to see people in choppers with a choppers actually hovering and the gunners taking them off - you don't like hovering with a chopper because you form a bit of a

32:00 target and what was the other we used to call, 'Spooky' was it, which was an old DC3 that used to come along and it had all the gun pointing downwards and in one burst it'd clear a piece of ground the size of

a football field and all of these aircraft and everything going on at the one time was amazing.

Any napalm?

Not on no,

32:30 not on our immediate front but they fighter bombers were coming in with their rockets and very close. This went on – the rifle companies all came back in of course – this went on for quite a long time. There was a lot of patrolling and clashes, there was a lot of casualties on both

33:00 sides. More on their side than ours but more than enough for us. And it went on for 25 days and night-time nearly all night all you could hear was ‘boom boom boom boom’ and it just kept going. I just forget how many we lost there but too many.

What sort of setup did you have there from where you were standing the HQ?

We only just had ordinary trenches and things you know.

And when you say they

33:30 **overran I always got the sense they came in, in little hit and run sort of missions, did they actually come in a front?**

No, they actually come in quite a large group, a large group to start off with but they kept at us for a long time. I think it went on for 23 or 25 days or something like that.

What was the turning point?

Mm?

What was the turning point of that then? How did you come out of it?

They went some place else. I mean we weren’t going to move. We took over from the Americans

34:00 who had apparently told our Intelligence Officer, ‘You guys are not going to like this place’. And I must confess I flew in on the ‘recce [reconnaissance] group’ to start off with and I didn’t like it either. It just didn’t feel right. That’s the way it was. But our boys did a magnificent job, the supporting arms did a magnificent job they all did. I mean Fire Long Tan

34:30 was savage but shorter. They changed, they made Vietnam Remembrance Day the day of Battle of Long Tan well they would’ve been better to have made it the day the last soldier was pulled out of Vietnam.

Do you know that date?

No not off hand.

Your return to Australia

35:00 **how would you describe population at large attitude towards Vietnam at that stage?**

Frowsy, frowsy, you know even the RSLs [Returned and Services League] wouldn’t accept the blokes for a long time. People lined the streets when you marched through Sydney abusing the life out of you

35:30 calling you murderers oh look it was beyond belief. To the young National Servicemen it was devastating. It didn’t do the regular soldiers much good either. But the regular soldier was more – probably a bit more

36:00 hardened to it if you’d like to put it that way particularly if you’ve been a soldier for some time but to the young soldiers to the young National Service soldiers in the main it was devastating and it did as much damage as the actual war in Vietnam did to them. Some of them will never get over it.

What problems do they have now do you think is related to that reception?

36:30 Well I think mainly it’s all other than people who are wounded and you know it’s mainly a mental attitude to what happened both up there

37:00 and when they came home. I mean they call it post traumatic stress something or other, God strike me, everybody seems to be able to get that now. I think it was more a mental problem where it just drove some of them crazy and they took to the bush. They seemed

37:30 to think that they were being shunned by everybody and when the RSLs don’t want to talk to you it’s a bit sad now of course, most of the RSLs are run by Vietnam Veterans aren’t they.

What did you think of the government’s attitude to Vietnam on your return?

Well when we came home the Labor government pulled the soldiers

38:00 out of Vietnam and it took 20 years for the government, never mind about which one it was, to recognise the fact that they’d had soldiers in Vietnam. 20 years. That’s pretty sad. And then when they

did have that big effort in Sydney everybody wanted to get in on the bandwagon then all the politicians and stuff.

38:30 I didn't go to that because it had too much of a political smell about it. But 20 years is a long time to recognise their service and fortunately nowadays they seem to be going the opposite way and they're probably going a bit overboard with the whole thing. Some of the blokes that they are on about have only been away a couple of

39:00 months. Never mind not their fault, one could only hope that there is never a repeat of the after Vietnam schmozzle.

Was there a lot of anger among the men?

Yes there was, yeah. There has been so many broken homes and suicides and

39:30 it's not funny, a lot of the. But things are changing now and I think everybody's sort of settled down a little bit but it took a hell of a long time. But it was a small group of people including one politician who started it all. And he, that one politician, at one stage was

40:00 the Minister for Defence.

Do you have any regrets about going to Vietnam?

No, because that was my job. It was an experience and as I am at this particular point, you know, I don't want to do it again. But if I was back to being 30 or 32 or something it would probably be a different story, yeah. But now, as I am now, no, I wouldn't last 5 minutes anyway. My health wouldn't stand it.