Australians at War Film Archive

John Chamberlain - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:43 **Now yes so John if possible on this first tape if you could possibly take us back as far as your memory allows. Perhaps also a little bit about your family background, your parents, siblings and so on.**

Okay, right, well I was born on the 8th January 1945.

01:00 And that is a relevant date because my marble was called up for National Service for that date and in fact I was in the first cohort called up or National Service. So that's a relevant date. My early memories, I think like most kids I don't have a great memory until I started school I would say. I went to school in Koska Hall in South Road, Brighton. Started there in Grade 1

01:30 in 1950. I've got memories of that school of course. In Grade 2 one of my best friends told me that he remembers the day he started in Grade 1 in 1951 and I was a Grade 2 student and recalls me pushing my way to the front of the queue where we used to have school parade before

02:00 school started. Well I don't recall that, but that just shows that everyone has different memories of different things. So at Koska Hall I don't think, the only thing was, I lived in Moorabbin which was not far away from Koska Hall. Later on I was able to ride my bike to school. It was the fifties and it was quite a good time to be a school kid I would say. Quite a good time really.

02:30 I was one of six children, I was the eldest. My father is or was a GP [General Practitioner], a doctor in the area. His military background is – he was in the air force in the Second World War as a doctor so he was a flight lieutenant. He didn't leave Australia. He would've liked to have. He was slightly unusual in that he was of a group of doctors who was

03:00 taught to fly. So he would better understand the problems of pilots. So that's his military background. Further back fro the First World War my aunt on my mother's side has three brothers who all went to the First World War. We have a lot of their postcards sent back but they're not particularly illuminating because they never say exactly where they are or what they're doing. But they certainly had an involvement in the First World

03:30 War. My other background is on my wife's Christine's side, her uncle was killed in the Second World War he was a pilot. I – we believe it was a training accident off the coast of England and he is now buried in Bath cemetery and we've been lucky enough to see his grave. So that's the background.

04:00 My time at my first school, Koska Hall, from Grades 1 to 8, very, very happy days. Anything to do with military matters not really with just one – with just one or two exceptions. In the fifties certainly the opposing –

04:30 the forces most opposed to communism were in many ways – you know apart from the United States government and the Cold War, etc., etc., I think also the Catholic Church was very opposed to communism. And I do have a memory from Grade 4, which in 1953 where the priest decided that he wanted to illuminate us on the

05:00 Korean War. And the picture that he painted was in fact a fairly frightening one for a boy in Grade 3 who's aged about 8 and his statement was that in the Korean that it was very difficult to defeat the Chinese because they had so many soldiers and wave after

05:30 wave of troops would come until even though our forces may have superior fire power they would eventually run out of bullets. And I think this is not an uncommon thought from the fifties that people in Australia were definitely afraid of the Chinese. And of course, we're talking about the Chinese intervention on behalf of the North Koreans. And that is something that I haven't forgotten.

06:00 Towards the late fifties there was particularly in Boys' Own sort of magazines that used to emanate from England, there used to be a small amount of reference to the Malayan emergency. And in

particular, General Templar and one of his methods of dealing with the communist insurgency in Malaya was

06:30 a technique or idea of winning the hearts and minds of the people. And this has relevance to what I did later in Vietnam. And what they found in Malaya was that a lot of the villagers were very dissatisfied, a lot of them had certain – had communist sympathies and so what General Templar

07:00 did was he would first of all isolate the village, build a barrier around it and defend it, so that would keep the communist insurgents out and secondly he would do things for the villagers to improve their way of life. He might build a school for them. He might give them medicines. He might help them with agriculture. And this was winning the hearts and minds and this is

07:30 relevant to what happened later in Vietnam. So they're my only two memories from school. Otherwise we did what everyone else did in the fifties. There was no television so we had the quiet games and we had the violent games. The quiet games were monopoly, snakes and ladders, chess if you were smart enough, draughts if you were not, tiddly winks all the rest of them.

08:00 The long… forgotten the name of that one. We had to – they're all collapsed on a little coloured stick so you had to pick them up one by one. And then there were the violent games and in those days it was cowboys and Indians. So for Christmas or your birthday you'd have your Mum or Dad give you a cap gun, a six-shooter it'd be on the cowboy style and you'd buy your packets of caps for about

08:30 threepence in those days and have a great time shooting up all your friends and your brothers and running around corners. Everyone wanted to be the cowboys and not the Indians so often the Indians were imaginary and you were on the good side. Or you'd have cops and robbers. About 1956 Davy Crockett hit the movies so everyone bought their bush tail hats and their Davy Crockett outfits but certainly

09:00 kids aged from about 8 to 13 were a bit more military minded in those days. Now they're all banned all the guns I'm afraid, well not afraid maybe. And this was – certainly and the movies we used to see in those days were certainly cops – were the cowboys and Indians, they were very popular indeed. So that's about it. I that takes us up as far as primary

09:30 school.

So we're up to the mid fifties now?

We're up to the late fifties now.

What about obviously there was TV until…

1956 yeah.

Did you get TV in your household?

Yeah, we were lucky we got TV in the first month or so. In time to see the Olympic Games in late '56. Yeah we were lucky.

In terms of your neighbourhood was that like one of the few sets? Would people gather around that or…?

Yes we, we would've had one of the few sets

10:00 so I think the kids would come around and watch if they could. Otherwise they'd go to the television store and watch through the window as we remember from history. Yes.

What about you mentioned Davy Crockett, what about the films of the period. I mean how often would you go to the pictures? And also radio was that also important…?

Yeah sure, yes. Many kids went to the pictures every Saturday.

10:30 I can't remember now but I suspect we used to get there about once a month and we would watch – a typical show would be a cartoon, a newsreel, a short, interval, intermission and then the main movie which really in those days more often than not was a cowboys and Indians movie for kids. Or it was 'Ma and Pa Kettle." The 'Ma and Pa Kettle' series, "Francis

11:00 the Talking Mule' series. The serials, they often had a serial before intermission and the particularly popular series were 'Hopalong Cassidy' and the 'Lone Ranger' and you would hear 'Long Ranger' episode number 37 well of course you know each had to be self-contained and I think they were only about 10 or 15 minutes long. What else did we do? If you

11:30 could afford it you'd go up in the dress circle and that way you had a vantage point and if you wanted to bomb the people down below in the stalls you could. You could drop your lolly papers, your Minties and you would roll your Jaffas down the aisle. And you would make a hideous din, hideous, before the movie started and always the owner of the picture theatre would come and appeal for quiet and he'd say, "I won't start this movie till you all be quiet." And everyone would

12:00 of course shut up immediately then. It used to be about 9 pence for the front stalls, 2 and threepence for the dress circle. The lounge was probably 2 and 6 pence not worth it, not worth the extra amount of money.

Were you much into sports? You mentioned the Olympics?

Yes, yes at Koska we played cricket, football

12:30 they were the main sports we played. We went swimming of course, most people got their Herald Learn to Swim Certificate for swimming 25 yards it would've been. What other sport did we play? Cricket, football, oh athletics of course, so yeah I was interested in that no more than the average person. Cycling was popular.

13:00 They were the main sports we did in those days. Golf only later, I took that up about the age of 13 and haven't improved since. Skiing, no afraid not. No, not snow skiing was the preserve of relatively few people in those days. So that was – radio serials

13:30 we can talk about. They're the ones that people remember 'Dad and Dave', earlier on Enid Blyton's 'Faraway Tree." 'Biggles' was very popular, that's one with a slight military background and I think that was based on a World War 1 aviator. We bought 'Biggles' books. I think I was probably just a fraction young I think 'Biggles' was just a little bit earlier than my

14:00 time but we were still interested in it though, yeah.

You mentioned earlier that there was a teacher who was sort of indoctrinating you on the Yellow Peril I gather?

Yes, yes, yes.

From that period did you have much of a sense of Australia's recent past of its involvement in the wars, particularly World War 11 and Korea?

I think our

14:30 parents in many ways perhaps they didn't tell us a lot because if you think about it in the early fifties it had only been 5, 6, 7 years since the end of the Second World War. You would perhaps think they would talk more about it. I think we were aware of it. As children we didn't realise the war had been over such a short time. There certainly was in those days a lot of fear

15:00 of the Japanese amongst our parents' vintage and I think that might have transposed to the Chinese and then Asian people in general I would say. It wasn't all that obvious and Father Joseph Craig was the priest who told us about world affairs and we have to thank him for that and I think he was actually referring to the Battle of Kap'yong where the Australian 3rd

15:30 Battalion was outnumbered whatever it was, 10 to 1 or something. So I think he was referring to a particular Australian thing but also it was common knowledge that the Chinese had innumerable number of troops and perhaps would prevail as a result of that, yes.

So you've taken us up to about the age of 12 or 13?

Yeah, okay we're up to about 12 or 13 so off to secondary school

16:00 at Xavier in Kew so on the train, this is from Grade 9 onwards or sub intermediate on the train from Raven Station to Xavier. How did things change then? Well we were teenagers then. Sport – played a reasonable amount. I think we used to go to the movies less. Our interests changed, we weren't playing

16:30 cops and robbers so much then. We were watching television more. Again it was a good time at Xavier in those days. On the military side Xavier did have a cadet corps as did lots of schools in those days and certainly every public school had their cadet corps. And this I suppose was my first

17:00 exposure to conscription because in fact you were virtually conscripted to the cadet corps at Xavier. You had to be aged 14 and you had to be 4 foot 9 and above. That did disqualify one or two people, I presume they re-measured them later on and put them in when they finally reached the right height. Everyone went into the cadet corps unless you had a letter from your parents

17:30 stating that you were to be exempted. And I think about 1 in 3 boys would've gone into the cadet corps so I presume 2 in 3 parents objected to it. So I duly went into the cadet corps in intermediate so I had 3 years in the cadet corps. And this I believe was a very good

18:00 early experience of military matters and of the army, an extremely good experience of it. The cadet corps involved military type training. The cadet corps involved military type training. We wore World War 1 uniforms. We wore gaiters which we had to Blanko with khaki coloured paste. We had to polish our brass.

18:30 We had to clean our World War 1 Lee Enfield .303 rifle which mine was I think circa 1917. So somehow I guess the army had not a lot of equipment in those days so they gave us all World War 1 equipment. So we were a bit of a throwback and in many ways our training was World War 1. I was in the medical

platoon for a while so there was a lot of putting on shell dressings

19:00 and bandaging people. We all learnt to shoot a rifle. The .303 is a single shot rifle using your – with a bolt action. We also learnt the Bren gun and the Owen machine gun. We learnt particularly how to march and it was also harking

19:30 back to almost a 19th Century British type army where it didn't matter what you were like on the battlefield if you could march well you'd probably do all right. So the left rights had to be all exactly right. We had to know our left turns, our right turns our about turns our bear arms, slope arms, present arms. And this was all very useful when I finally joined the army. And I notice that the people

20:00 who hadn't done this before took a lot longer to pick up on these matters. So, the cadets again were something that you wouldn't – having been in it you were glad you'd done it but really you wouldn't want to be queuing up for because it involved doing lots of doing what you're told, being patient, doing what they tell you to do when they want you to do it and being there for the common good

20:30 really that was what you had to do. We went – we had an annual school camp which was compulsory and of course we went to Puckapunyal. Again, a connection with Second World War. We used to camp at various sites. Certainly the first time I went to Puckapunyal I thought this was a bit like France in the First World War. We were in tents and we were on a very rocky treeless

21:00 area with rocks everywhere. So these camps would last a week. We'd go off on bivouacs, we'd go to the firing range, we'd do lots of marching, lots of stand-to and all the rest of it. The odd element would always play up which would make life interesting and they'd be sent back home to their parents. We would march around

21:30 the campsite. And each year we'd go to Puckapunyal. So all in all that was quite a good introduction to the army. A lot of our instructors had some experience of the Second World War. Some had no experience whatsoever and therefore you wondered what we would learn from them. But

22:00 all in all we certainly learnt a little bit about military matters.

You said there were some young blokes who played up and were sent packing. What sort of mischief would the boys get up to?

Well probably the worst two things were to go missing because in the army you've always got to be accounted for and you've got to be there at the right time, that's pretty mild isn't really. The worst thing would be if they go off and shoot their firearm without being allowed. Cause that is

22:30 dangerous and that's all they did really. It really didn't amount to much. But, or else they'd keep their lights on too late at night or keep their – that sort of thing. The conditions were fairly primitive. We'd erect our own tent and we would be given our palliasses. Our hessian bag and we'd put the straw in it and that was our bed. The tent would have to be clean and tidy and all that sort of thing.

23:00 But it was certainly an interesting – it was interesting. And we would be shown training films again these'd be extremely old. And in general there certainly – I don't know how many there were but there were a lot of cadet units in Victoria and the idea I guess was to have at least some basic military training. I know now there's

23:30 virtually none left now. The served a purpose, at my school they eventually discontinued cadets probably about 10 years after I left school and the reason that they did that I understand that the good or the usefulness of the cadet corps was probably not sufficient to justify the resources and the time being spent on them. And also it might've been related to the 70s

24:00 as well. It was no longer considered of importance.

So what do you think you gained from those experiences?

What I gained was really a – you probably gained more than you realised because you had an understanding of the military and the army was about and to accept what they said and I would

24:30 say that would be the main thing that you would just a general background knowledge. And certainly when I finished in the cadet corps at the end of 1961 I had no – no idea that I was going to be involved in the army again. It was the furthest – furthest from my mind. And I always, not to put it too unkindly but I always thought that those of us

25:00 who'd been in the cadet corps maybe it had made us slightly anti-military. We saw the slight futility or the humour or the absurdity of lots of things that were military minded just as for example the Goons had a military background and I think they used to send up discipline. So

25:30 that could engender that response in a lot of people. And from my era at school over the several years maybe around my time I think two boys joined the army which was good but again perhaps there could've been more. Yeah.

So you would tune in the Goons would you?

26:00 **That was around that time wasn't it?**

It was around that time, I did a little bit but not as much as some. My memory is more hearing boys talking Goon talk. It wasn't so much my show, the humour was very wacky and there were certain boys at school who loved it and they would talk virtually gobbledygook.

Now you said you had no sort of

26:30 **military ambition at that time, what ambition if any did you have around that stage 13-14?**

I eventually became a doctor and I'm not quite sure when I decided that I wanted to be a doctor. Certainly in our family we've got six kids and four of the boys did medicine and my father was a doctor too. So, my aim was probably to be a doctor all along.

27:00 I didn't really give any other serious thought to anything else. So that was my aim rather than my burning ambition and so that is what I did.

Can I just ask, to help us get a picture of sort of the society of the times, late '50s I guess we're talking about, can you tell us about girls I mean when did they sort of make an impact on you and your

27:30 **friends. How it happened what was the – if there was a dating sort of regime or what was the courting like back in those days?**

Okay, at school it depended – it depended a fair bit on official – or in the late '50s it would depend on if you lived near – if one of your neighbours was a girl you found attractive. On the school basis it would depend on

28:00 interaction between the boys' and girls' schools. And that interaction would occur with concerts perhaps although I have to say that at my school both the female and all the – the male and all the female leads were played by boys so that sort of excluded girls from that. Now the girls' school supply the boys and the boys' school provides the boys. It's fairly straight forward now. Cadets a slight amount we used to have a

28:30 gymkhana every year and a lot of the girls would attend that. We would have the dancing lessons which would be either in year 11 or year 12 depending on your interest and that was every Friday night. That certainly unearthed some friendships. But certainly it was probably more towards university that you may have had more interaction

29:00 with girls. Remember I went to an all boys' school of course. And even at university in the medical school at that time there were only about 10% of the class were girls in fact. So I guess I went from an all boys' school to a medical school with 90% boys and then after a few years later to the army with about

29:30 99.5% boys, men, so yeah.

So is there anything else from the Xavier days that's worth mentioning do you think?

Yes we were certainly military minded in those days and I certainly remember Anzac Day, each Anzac Day we would have an Anzac Day march

30:00 so everyone would get their brass polished and we would parade on the main oval. About 250 in the cadet corps at the time. The parents were advised and a lot of the keener parents would turn up and I think the parents who had some connection in the past would certainly be there. We'd always invite a dignitary who would be a military man to attend and I noticed reading our old

30:30 school magazine that on one occasion Sir – General Sir Thomas Blamey was invited and they would always give a talk on military matters. I don't know that we took it all very seriously in fact but that was certainly a fixture on Anzac Day. And we wouldn't have had an Anzac Day celebration at school if it wasn't for the cadet corps. Again,

31:00 even Anzac Day gave some boys reason if they wanted to cause trouble or provide a revolt and so you could always have the feigned faint where if you were sick of proceedings you could just faint because it was quite common anyway. You could produce slightly absurd salutes if you wanted to. I can also recall

31:30 the annual gymkhana where we were in the medical platoon and our job, we were competing against other schools and there were four of us and we were the four stretcher bearers. And you'd have about six schools and you'd be told right there's a man injured 200 metres away, his injuries are this, that and the other. Your job is to go there, bandage him appropriately, pick him up on the stretcher with the four of you, rush to another point and do whatever.

32:00 So the group that I was in I think were also trying to make a slight protest. So not only did we bandage our man absurdly we dropped him out of the stretcher a couple of times on the run through. Needless to say the chap who was in my foreman stretcher bearer group was also the one that did the feigned faint once. That's probably about what we took home from the cadets. So

32:30 it was a certain amount of discipline but it certainly gave boys, and boys do need to revolt sometimes

and it gave them an opportunity to do that if they were so inclined.

Is it possible for you John to sort of give us a picture what Melbourne itself was like, I mean for the record I mean sort of a comparison between the Melbourne of the late '50s early '60s and today?

Okay, Melbourne in the late '50s. Okay, it was a duller place you'd have to

33:00 say. It was duller. You didn't have the restaurants, the outdoor restaurants. A lot of people didn't eat out in those days. Hotels were probably more important, I certainly remember the 6 o'clock swill. No matter where you lived if you were close to a hotel you would notice 5 o'clock to 6 o'clock all the workers would turn up the hotel would be so full that they would

33:30 stream out into the street. They'd all be drinking and suddenly about 6 o'clock they'd all disappear. So I do remember the 6 o'clock swill very well. Melbourne was more monochromatic in those days. The food was more Anglo-Saxon. About as an exotic a meal that we boys in the 50s could obtain would be spaghetti bolognaise and chicken chop suey so the main things

34:00 Chinese restaurants were doing but again we were not very adventurous with our choice of Chinese food. The movies were still popular. I think the beaches were more popular in those days. Kids definitely used to head down to the beach where we used to live with the surfboards. We used to go on trams and trains more often.

34:30 People would go into the city for their shopping. There was no Chadstone or Southland so a day out to the city would be a big day out and perhaps you would catch a one-hour news reel when you were sick of walking around the city. Your parents would take you to Myer or if you were a bit more up-market they might take you to Buckleys. Christmas was perhaps more important then. The Myer Christmas window was always a big

35:00 affair. It was certainly a simpler time. No computers, no- not much home entertainment perhaps. More monochromatic, TV was black and white I suppose you would say. That's my impression. I look back on photos of the time and I

35:30 can't get over how old fashioned people look but anyway at the time we thought we were up to date.

Were you much of a music fan because rock and roll of course was starting to happen?

No, I think a number of things hit me late in life and even the music side hit me late. I can certainly remember going on a school camp in 1956

36:00 or 57 I forget now and the bus erupting in '6 o'clock Rock' and repeating that song over and over again. But I didn't become interested in music till probably about when I was in Grade 10 or 11 in fact so I was a bit late. Then I used to listen to the top 40 on a Sunday. You'd buy your transistor radio which was a reasonably expensive purchase in those days.

36:30 10 pounds or more, I think I won my transistor radio in a raffle it was 46 pounds which was pretty valuable actually but I didn't play an instrument, no I didn't. There was an outlet actually in the cadet corps for people who were interested in music and certainly a lot of good musicians joined the cadet corps purely for that reason. And probably those same people played in the school band but I was

37:00 not musically inclined I'm afraid.

That's quite all right. Do you remember the sorts of stuff you would listen to in Grade 10 – 11 what were the sort of…?

Elvis Presley was the most popular singer about that time far and above – Elvis Presley I couldn't go much beyond him as a matter of fact and then there were a whole lot of

37:30 artists but he would've stood out at the time, definitely.

Were you learning to drive around this time?

Yeah, I got my driver's licence when it came due. I was about 18½ so I was about 6 months late and I was in 2nd year medicine and my father bought me a demonstrator model Mini. It was great, so it was a '63 Mini which was a great car.

38:00 Very tiny now when you get into it. 4 people in it you could hardly move it along. You could not get up Punt Road hill in top gear. It was very basic, it had no heating until they had heating installed later so you'd get in the car in your overcoat and your gloves in the morning. It used to also feel a lot colder in the 50s too. Trains weren't heated. I think we've had global

38:30 warming since then. So I had my Mini for about 6 years. It was a great car and in those days if you didn't have a Mini you'd have a Volkswagen and you'd count yourself very lucky indeed if you had one or other of those. No seatbelts but a great car for parking, get into a half spot, get to the football. I'd forgotten to mention football, yeah league football we used to be supporters of South Melbourne

39:00 so I used to often be able to get the parking spot right outside the ground. There'd be a little spot that

no one else would have. Actually back in 63 Minis they only came in 62, early 62, so there weren't that many around. A couple of my brothers had Volkswagens so they were probably a better car, they had heating so they were better.

39:30 **Can you tell us about maybe your last year at Xavier?**

My last year at Xavier, at Xavier we tended to do two years matriculation but my last year at Xavier my father said look let's put in for medical school in case you do well enough and luckily I did do well enough.

40:00 Strangely enough the subjects that I did well in were perhaps not related to medicine, one was general mathematics and the other was history but they were the ones that I got honours in and that got me into medicine and so we thought we'd better grab it while it presented itself. Although, I still hadn't made up my mine, I certainly went on a cadet course to be a sergeant in the summer following my finishing of school and of course I didn't

40:30 know at that time the exam results didn't come out till late January in those days or mid January so I spent a couple of weeks in the burning sun at Puckapunyal learning to be a sergeant and I think that was one of the, not even one of the small things that suggested to me look let's just move on and try medical school. And so I started in 1962. Younger than most, just turned 17. It was fairly young.

Right let's hold it there I think we're at the end of the tape.

Tape 2

00:34 **Okay John, we're back on and you were going to give us a couple of illustrations of life with the cadets and also the rivalry between Scotch and Xavier. It would be great to hear some of those tales?**

Yes, some things do – some incidents always do stick in your mind and certainly we used to be allowed when

01:00 we were in the cadet corps you were expected to take your rifle home because you had to clean your barrel with your piece of cloth and your rope and oil and clean it and your Jex or whatever you used to do. So we used to go home on the train and tram with our rifle but luckily they used to do two things, they would first of all take the bolt out so at least you had no chance of firing it, because it wasn't beyond possibility that the

01:30 boys could get hold of some bullets. They used to allow us to take our bayonets home but certainly when I was at Xavier that was forbidden. And I was told it was because on the Glenferrie Road tram one night the Xavier boys and the Scotch College boys who would've been on those trams, there would've been hundreds heading down Glenferrie Road came to a slight altercation using bayonets, so that was banned, banned for ever.

02:00 Banned for ever from then on. But other things that stand out in my time in the cadets was our final camp at Puckapunyal. We were exposed in our cadet camps at Puckapunyal to the glories of army cooking. We were exposed to them. Army cooks were usually contracted,

02:30 they were itinerant, I suspect alcoholics, they were not chefs. The food was atrocious. Anyway at this last camp that I attended the food was more than atrocious it must've been infected. We had about 250 boys on that camp and we, we and I came down with dysentery in the fullest sense of the word. The full on

03:00 dysentery, we won't describe it any further. It was so widespread that our CO [Commanding Officer] who had a love of the loudspeaker, he loved to hear himself on loudspeaker, so you'd have reveille and you'd have the loudspeaker going on in the morning saying you know, time for breakfast, time for breakfast. Anyway, the dysentery was rife that our CO over the loudspeaker that

03:30 morning felt obliged to say, all those boys with dysentery form up by platoons and companies on parade all those who don't have dysentery just go singly to the mess for breakfast. So I think about 95% of us went down with it. So we learnt that way that what stops the army is the medical

04:00 aspects not the actual fighting, it's the medical side. Any other memories of the military side…

You told us of the rivalry between Scotch and Xavier, the Glenferrie sort of sweep there. In your day how did that manifest itself, was it still pretty intense?

Rivalry between the schools was mainly on the sporting fields, football

04:30 and rowing. That was the main rivalry and I would say rivalry for the attention of the MLC [Methodist Ladies' College] girls on the tram that would be – they had an advantage over us because they were Protestants. There was also some religious rivalry in those days and that was intensified but then on the other hand we were also rivals with another Catholic school St. Kevin's College so sometimes you didn't

have to have religious

05:00 reasons. I think in the ’50s also certainly people I would say were more bigoted than they are now and society was more segregated. I think they’re my main memories of the times, yes.

In the previous tape you told us, I think it was the end of high school going into university you did the sergeant’s

05:30 **course?**

Yes I did the sergeant’s course and my main problem there was I did not shout loud enough for a sergeant. You had to absolutely shout. It was very hot in Puckapunyal that year, in the middle of summer in January. So hot we used to get up at 5 o’clock and start the training at 6 a.m. in the morning and at 1 o’clock you were ready to go back and drink about 20 glasses of water so I think we – it was hot. It was as hot as it gets.

06:00 And that was really my goodbye to the army and very happily so. I went off to medical school and spent 6 years in medical school not thinking about the military one little bit. Although, interestingly enough, I guess the first year I started in medical school was 1962 and interestingly enough it was January ’62 that

06:30 the Prime Minister, it would’ve been Mr Menzies, announced that 30 advisers were to be sent from the Australian Army Training Team, or so-called. They eventually were called the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam. So they were the first lot of 30 advisers to go off to Vietnam in 1962. Also in relation to Vietnam, and I guess my other memory and I do remember this from

07:00 1954 when the French were finally defeated in the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, I have a memory of that obviously as a 9 year old. I was certainly aware that the French had been defeated and I think that was a very big event in its time because it certainly meant that a European colonial, in inverted commas, power was defeated

07:30 in a country where they had colonial mastery. So I was aware of that and I was also aware of the Geneva Conference which partitioned North Vietnam into North and South Vietnam in 1954. But I must admit my geography must’ve been a bit hazy at that time because I sort of thought Geneva wasn’t quite in Switzerland but Geneva must’ve been on the side of Asia where Vietnam was and

08:00 but at least that did hit my consciousness at the time. And of course, in the early 60s we remember President Kennedy and I suppose as medical school went on I was aware of the situation in Vietnam but with only 30 then 100 Australian troops there wasn’t perhaps that much publicity. Although, the first combat death was late 64.

08:30 So…

You mentioned Dien Bien Phu and Kennedy, I mean on the bigger global scale do you remember things like the Cuban missile crisis?

Oh yeah, I certainly remember the Cuban missile crisis, yes indeed. That was in October 62. It was certainly big news and people took it very seriously at the time. I certainly did because I was –

09:00 it occurred in the 10 days or the two weeks when I’d finished lectures for the year and my exams had started – were to start. So it was the two-week study period. And I had done enough work that year but I hadn’t worked – studied the correct way. In fact what I’d done was to make perfect notes of all my subjects.

09:30 All my subjects which were chemistry, physics, biology but I hadn’t yet stuffed them into my brain. So, really for the exams I should’ve been allowed to bring my notes along but they were beautiful, they were there but they were not in my brain. So suddenly in that two-week period I was desperately trying to learn. And in fact I believe, you’ve got to learn something between 4 and 6 times to learn it. And I remember thinking, “Mmm this Cuban missile crisis, if the world ends I’m going to get out of those exams.” That’s going to be

10:00 the one good thing that’s going to come out of it. So perhaps I was a bit too worried about my exams I think. And certainly we were always aware of the Cold War during that time. It impacted subtly on your life. Subtly, the threat of communism that certainly impacted although, subtly. I was very glad,

10:30 I was interested about 5 or 6 years ago talking with my daughter who must’ve been aged about 17 then. She’d left school and I said something about communism and she said “Dad, what’s communism?” I said, “Uh oh, Anna, tut tut tut, Anna.” I thought why didn’t she know about it? She said this to me of course after the collapse of communism in Russia and I just consoled

11:00 myself with the fact that Anna had never done history at school. And so she’s perhaps better for not having known it.

So you said that you were aware of the Cold War. You said that it was a subtle sort of impact. Are you are able to explain how that impact was even if it was a subtle thing?

It was subtle but all pervading. It was in the newspapers the whole time. It

11:30 was on television the whole time. There was always the threat of nuclear – it was also a threat of nuclear war as well. There was perhaps – I also suspect that a lot of the revolt of the ’60s and the ’70s amongst the people and their – late teenagers, late teenage years and 20s was related to that

12:00 and that they just decided they wanted to forget about all those sorts of problems. I don’t think it’s any different to today where the threat of pollution, AIDS [Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome], racial engendered violence has probably replaced it. But certainly, and it always came up at election time. In the ’50s the Liberals won every single election on their defence policy on their promises to the Australian

12:30 people that they would better defend Australia. The elections were never fought on the domestic and economic matters that they are now and I think Prime Minster Menzies in those days understood and the only person who has understood defence as well as he has, since then, is John Howard. He understands defence still seems to ring accord with the electorate. And yet you’d have to say in the 50s despite the Liberal

13:00 Party’s rhetoric, in fact they let the military and the army run down significantly throughout the 50s and so that at the start of the 60s when perhaps our Vietnam commitment was about to occur, the Australian Army was in as run down a state as could possibly be. Although, I do believe even though the military was small they did not have a lot of great

13:30 equipment, what people they did have were certainly very well trained and quite a few of the officers and NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] in the Australian Army had at least been to Malaya. They’d been involved in the Malayan emergency in the late ’50s early ’60s and there was a core of experience and I think that’s what stood the Australian Army in very, very good stead in

14:00 the Vietnam War. A lot of the equipment ended up being provided by the Americans but the training and the experience of jungle warfare in Asia was at least party understood and it has to be said that the Americans did not have a clue, not a clue. Because they had not fought in a jungle warfare,

14:30 counter-insurgency warfare or counter-revolutionary warfare situation. Their only experience of that was the Korean War and that was not a counter-insurgency warfare type.

Do you recall when National Service was reintroduced?

Yeah, so in 1964 Prime Minister Menzies announced that

15:00 the government was going to reintroduce conscription. There had been National Service from about 1950 to 1960. So they had a National Service for 10 years but that was a different one in that you were called up at the age of 18 virtually, virtually when you had finished school and you spent 2 months in an army training camp. For us it was Puckapunyal,

15:30 not me personally and remember I was – I missed out on that. I would’ve been 18 in 1963 so this finished in 1960 so I just missed out on that. That was virtually universal conscription, you did 2 months training and then you did several weekends a year or perhaps a weekend every six weeks and then your second year you’d do another 6 weeks and then that was it. You were not allowed, you weren’t permitted to leave Australia for,

16:00 you never joined the regular army, you were unable to fight in a war. But that was, that sort of National Service in many ways was a bit like our cadets for the younger boys aged 14 to 17. And that had finished by then. The army was certainly low in numbers, I think they probably had about 23,000 in the army and Prime Minster Menzies announced in about October ’64 if I recall that they would reintroduce conscription. Now

16:30 everyone believes that was for Vietnam but that was not. My reading since, but probably not my understanding at the time, cause I wouldn’t have got into it that carefully was that conscription was reintroduced because of instability in South East Asia and particularly Indonesia. Because remember at that time Indonesia had President Sukarno he was not exactly communist but he was not –

17:00 there was a very large communist element in Indonesia and in October ’65 there was the PKI [Communist Party of Indonesia] Revolution where the communists tried to take over. So I think that was Prime Minster Menzies’ idea and I – it’s really only later that all National Service was really more associated with Vietnam from then on. So I would’ve registered in late ’64.

17:30 I registered at the Fitzroy Post Office in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, I recall that. And then we waited for the marbles to come out. I don’t recall how many marbles out of 365 birthdays came out but your birthday came out and mine came out. And I suspect it probably came out it was announced about late 64 early 65. Remember I was in the very first ballot. So

18:00 National Service was for those born from January 1945 onwards. So January the 1st and I always like to say that I’m born on January 8th. I should’ve been born 8 days earlier. So that was the very first ballot and I was – my marble did come out and this would’ve been early ’65. And the rules were established then that if you were in a course, a university or tertiary course and you

18:30 did not leave the course or you did not fail it and you were kept at university that you would be deferred. I think the first National Service intake was probably July ’65. Now I was in, so in early ’65 my marble’s come out, I… don’t necessarily think I’m going to be in the army because there were still a few other hurdles. First of all, I knew that it was the start of 65 I would have

19:00 another 3 years medical school and almost certainly one year residency so it was 4 years away. I thought there was a possibility things might change and it certainly didn’t particularly concern me I have to say. And I didn’t probably pay all that much attention. Four years is a long time when you’re young. And I wasn’t overly, I didn’t think much about it. I sort of got on with my university

19:30 course. I had no contact with the military during that time and I finally, I would’ve – I finished my university course or medical school course at the end of 1967. I then became a first year resident at St. Vincent’s Hospital for the whole of 1968. I’m just remembering now, I think each year we had to notify, must’ve had to notify the Department of – the Department

20:00 it wasn’t the army you notified you notified the Department of Labour and National service. And the minister at the time was Mr Bury, B.U.R.Y. So that’s interesting that they combined National Service with labour. Each year you had to notify them you were going back to university. I knew there were other ways of getting out of National Service but once your marble came up they were gone. You could volunteer

20:30 to join the army or the air force or you could join the CMF [Citizens’ Military Force]. But the CMF I think was a 6 year commitment. My memory is that you had to do that before. So most people were just say I’ll take my chances and see if my marble came out and I haven’t got a clue how many marbles came out. I’m not even sure myself now.

Did you have many friends for whom the marble dropped?

No, no virtually none

21:00 because I was so young for my year and it turned out that there was only one other doctor in my medical course who was called up that year – who was called up, so and we were the only two who were called up. There was at least one other he failed the medical. So as I was young, it was more the younger people the years

21:30 below me. One year below me maybe even two years. And I didn’t talk about it particularly much because it was very nebulous it wasn’t a fact. There were lots of us being deferred. Everyone who went to university was deferred. I think if you joined the priesthood you got deferred too for every – mm forever. Although perhaps they should call up – the army needed padres perhaps they should’ve called them up.

22:00 So, yeah really we fast forward to I guess 1968 when the Vietnam War’s well and truly going. And I think that’s the first year I started to take a bit of an interest in it. And I know I certainly bought quite a few books on the civil aid aspect. Because between 1965 and 1968 a lot of hospitals sent surgical teams to Vietnam totally

22:30 unrelated to the military effort. They had no connection with the army at all. And they sent surgical teams to some of the major provincial hospitals from Melbourne. They went to Bien Hoa Hospital, Li Loi Hospital and Long Xuyen Hospital, all in the south of Vietnam. And they provided a surgeon and anaesthetist, they provided sisters and it’s only in recent

23:00 times that those people who went have been given some recognition. And it was only about the last year or two that they’ve actually been given a medal for it. They went for about 3 months. Even people as well known as Weary Dunlop went to Vietnam. People have probably forgotten that by now but he went to Vietnam for 3 months which is a lot, many years after his Second World War effort. Then during 1968 when I was

23:30 doing my first year residency, I had the opportunity to revisit the army. The army had by then was very short of doctors by 1968 because remember no National Service doctors had yet joined. They – the army had tried to encourage doctors to join but the only way that they could do it was on the undergraduate scheme and this involved you joining the army

24:00 in some ways for the last three years of your course you were paid a reasonable amount of money, let’s say it was about half pay probably. Your commitment was basically a Citizens’ Military Force commitment where you did perhaps one weekend a month and with a three week camp every year for three years and in return they would pay your course for you which was a great help for many people. They would pay you a salary which would be as I say about half the

24:30 normal salary. In return you would have to give them 2 to 3 of your own time once you graduated working for the army but even this was not working so they were very short of doctors. So St. Vincent’s Hospital whose medical superintendent at the time was Doctor Keen and like many he had been in the Second World War and was naturally sympathetic and I would have to say also that a lot of the older doctors at the Melbourne university medical

25:00 school and even at St. Vincent’s Hospital had been in the Second World War and certainly we had

lecturers at university. One whose name unfortunately I've forgotten but he was a paediatrician he had been in the Second World War. Never mentioned it actually so – and he'd been at Changi too but never ever mentioned it. It was only later I found out. So to cut a long story short, St. Vincent's Hospital agreed to

25:30 provide a doctor to Puckapunyal and we'd go up for a month so I volunteered for that. It only needed 12 doctors for the year but I volunteered because I thought I might just have a sneak look at this army and just see what's in store for me. So I went up in June and I was posted in June 68 and I was posted to the 1st armoured regiment which is the tank, which was the only tank regiment in Australia at that time. They're now

26:00 situated in Darwin where they might be of use but in those days they were in Puckapunyal and on exercises they would churn up all the ground around Puckapunyal. So that was good to see how just for one month working in the regimental aid post there living in the officers' mess. Just having a bit of a sneak look at the army. I heard some stories of Vietnam then because the tanks – the tank regiment has about 4 sections and

26:30 one of the sections at any one time went to Vietnam and the tanks had only just arrived in Vietnam that year. And about the time I was there a few battles where the tanks actually had some casualties and so there was a lot of intense talk at that time. I certainly recall my first day at the regimental aid post where I learnt about medical sergeants.

27:00 My very first patient was paraded in front of me, my medical sergeant was an old man in his late '40s and he paraded a similarly old sergeant from the tank battalion in his late 40s and he said to me, "Doc he's got flat feet he needs to be given no marching, no hard work for the next 6 months." I knew this was a ruse so I examined his feet very, very carefully and I finally came to the conclusion

27:30 and I said, "Look I can't do that I'm afraid I'll have to decline that." So the medical sergeant knew he was foiled and he saluted me very smartly and thought, "Damn it I thought I'd – I thought I could trick this young whipper-snapper doctor who doesn't know a thing about the army." So anyway we were doing our first-year residency, 3 months medicine,

28:00 3 months surgery, 3 months anaesthetics and 3 months casualty just the average thing a first-year resident does. And we came to the end of that year and the army informed me that yes now is the time to join us. So I thought well that's reasonable but I did apply for a deferment on the grounds that I – it would be useful to complete more medical training but they said no, no

28:30 now is the time. You're allowed one year residency and then we need you. That was really their decision they could've allowed you to complete for example specialist training and for example the American National Service system often allowed that but the American National Service system required people like neurosurgeons and thoracic surgeons

29:00 to go to Vietnam too. So they allowed many to do their specialist training. The Australian Army's need for doctors was really for just general practice doctors, regimental battalion doctors and that's why I believe and they needed them there and then so there was no question that even though I wrote to Mr Bury he politely declined my request and at that stage you had your medical. So,

29:30 again there were three – there were stages. You had – your marble – you had to register first, your marble had to be called out and then finally with about 3 months to go you had your medical. I had no grounds for medical exemption and so that was it. So I finished my first-year residency. Had about – I was due for 5 weeks holiday which you get but as we finished on January the 10th and the call up was the

30:00 29th January 1969, I had a short holiday in Surfers Paradise and that – did a locum a medical – a locum work for my father for about a week, earned some money and on the 29th of January I turned up to the Southern Command Personnel Depot, Swan Street, Richmond opposite on the other side

30:30 of – opposite to where the tennis centre is – it's now gone – with all the other hopefuls and the buses awaited to take us to Puckapunyal. It was a hot day, a gentleman, a reporter from The Age was there to interview people. I'm not quite sure why that was important because intakes occurred every

31:00 3 months if I remember rightly. Every 3 months they occurred. And we were the 19th intake or whatever we were and of course they occurred in different States. For Victoria, I think we took everyone from Victoria and Tasmania and Puckapunyal was the recruit training camp. New South Wales went to Kapooka near Wagga Wagga or Singleton. South Australians, can't remember now.

31:30 where they went. So I was interviewed by the reporter and whatever I said he decided to put that on a column, a small little column on page 2 of The Age, he was a commentator and he just said he interviewed me and I was fairly quiet and subdued and he said what would I rather do and I said well look my idea really in medical career was to become a specialist and

32:00 work in Collins Street. I was a bit of a hackneyed thing that I think that. And he said I was a thoughtful young man. And he interviewed me, I just had my pre – another medical to make sure you hadn't developed anything since the original medical but so I'd just come out from my medical and he said he was a quiet, thoughtful young man wearing PMUs [?] with ship's wheels embroidered on his PMUs –

very personal.

32:30 **Do you think that was a fair summary of who you were?**

Yes, yes, I wasn't going to make any great statement. I wasn't prepared to make any world shattering statement. I was – I knew there weren't going to be many doctors. I knew there had not been many doctors to join the army at that stage and it turned out that only two in Australia and we were the very first, very first, the two first National Service doctors.

33:00 Now why, there was a bit of a fuss on that, there was a fuss. You wonder why, we are no different to anyone else. Because the army needed doctors and yet the army could not afford to signify to the general public that we were going to get special

33:30 treatment. If you are a lawyer or a qualified engineer or if you are a lawyer let's say you weren't going to do law in the army. There were only two professions where you were absolutely – if you were the holder – there were only two professions who were – ended up being guaranteed to work in their own field in the army, one was a doctor and the other was a dentist. Every other profession, if you were engineer

34:00 you had a chance to be in an engineering company but often as a private. If you were a psychologist you had a very tiny chance of joining the psychology unit but not much because there were very few people in a psychology unit. The army doesn't need many lawyers at all and if you were a lawyer you had a minute chance.

When had you become

34:30 **(UNCLEAR) of that – when you found out your number had been called up…**

Oh no I'd worked that out myself that – by the same token the army cannot cope with minorities. It never knows what to do with them. So there were two of us doctors and what the army had decided and I didn't know it at the time but they were going to have a special course for doctors and dentists. And

35:00 that course was going to start in about 3 weeks time. And there are about 25 of us on that course and why is that so, that is because there is only two of us National Service doctors but there'd be about 10 National Service dentists. The dentistry course is about a year shorter that's why they were there with us and the other half would be doctors and dentists on the undergraduate scheme. So even though they had been on the

35:30 undergraduate scheme the army still felt the need for them to have some training. And the sort of training that they envisaged for us was general military and officer training. To learn how to be an officer and soldier because we can't just be doctors and dentists but that wasn't perfectly explained to me so day one I went on the bus up to Puckapunyal to the recruit training battalion. How many of us were there? I think there were 200

36:00 per company so there'd be about 800. And I was Recruit Chamberlain, J.N. Chamberlain. My number was 37851787 or something even and that – every number that is 379 means you're National Service, as a National Service number if you're from, my memory is, if you're from New South Wales you're 279, if you're from Queensland you're 179, it's a bit like our phone numbers. Even that caused

36:30 quite a lot of a problem for the army because when they gave me this National Service number they then realised that I had been in the army for one month at Puckapunyal as an acting officer and was given an official army number. A CMF one and it doesn't sound a big deal now but they had great problems resolving that and in the end they had to rescind my National Service number and give me back my old CMF number which

37:00 350610 and every time you were – you filled in forms and put that in they would say but you're not meant to be in National Service, how come, well what's going on? So off to Puckapunyal where I was a recruit for 2 weeks, treated exactly the same as anyone else, exactly. My friend who was in medical school with me, the only other National Service doctor in Australia, he'd been given an exemption by the army.

37:30 For some reason he was in Western Australia and he couldn't get back in time. So he got back about a week later and I found out that they didn't know what to do with him, they knew what to do with me they just put me in the recruits but with him he arrived in Puckapunyal a week late and they said look you've missed the start of all this show, there's your little building just hang around till you leave us. So he did nothing. Anyway, I felt it was probably quite good.

38:00 In retrospect I'd spent 6 years becoming a doctor and another year training and they had deconstructed me or whatever the word is and I'd gone back to being a recruit. Now perhaps that's fairly humbling in some ways but perhaps it doesn't do you any harm and I spent 3 weeks there. Again it's February, again it's the heat. The heat of Puckapunyal and it all felt like the cadets again. Left turn right

38:30 turn about turn but I knew which was good. Present arms, shoulder arms – the rifle had changed by now by the way. The .303 1917 Lee Enfield rifle had gone and we had the SLR and so that was an entirely different rifle to learn. It is a different rifle because it's not a single shot rifle it is a, I'm trying

to think now, you press the trigger…

39:00 uh huh yes, yes each time you press the trigger a bullet comes out. You don't have to put the bolt in, you've got about 30 bullets in your magazine. It's not a fully automatic rifle. A fully automatic rifle you press the trigger once and the bullets keep coming out while the trigger's pressed, handy to know all these things. And so – so there we were Puckapunyal.

What would it have been like you know it was a bus from Swan Street to

39:30 **Puckapunyal was it?**

Pretty quiet.

What was the general mood?

Pretty quiet. No one knew each other. Everyone was a bit, we weren't saying much. And we weren't saying much particularly because the army knows that it has to establish mastery over you from the first, not just the first day the first hour. So the sergeant, it's usually a sergeant and said, "Gee you're a lot of stragglers, we're going to have to really work

40:00 hard on you. Now come on line up, line up," and they were very tough on us right from the start. We learnt the pecking order very quickly in those first few weeks. Each section of 10 men had a lance corporal in charge of them. They shouted a lot and were quite, were very tough. And a lot of recruits got into – and then above them was the one sergeant for the platoon of about

40:30 30 and then each platoon had a second lieutenant who could be a National Serviceman. Each company had a captain or major and then finally the lieutenant colonel in charge. But the lance corporals were the ones mainly who had the day to day contact with you, did the training and I know recruits got into big trouble when they used to mix up and they used to call someone sergeant when it was lance corporal. Or if they called them

41:00 lance corporal they were meant to say corporal because you mustn't say lance corporal so and a lot of confused people, very confused at the time. There was some who didn't know how to march and they didn't know that you put your left hand and your left – they mismatched their left – their hands and their feet when marching. Now you look a bit like Charlie Chaplin when you do that.

41:30 And a lot of people were from the country, although interestingly enough our intake had the most number of qualified people because of course the people that went in the very first intake in 65 they either had stopped their course or were not doing a course that was considered enough to defer but the army had caught up with us all by the time in '69. So there were certainly engineers and lawyers and people like

42:00 that. And I think everyone just…

Tape 3

00:33 **So training – Puckapunyal?**

Right, so we've reached the first day or two at Puckapunyal as a recruit and of course by this stage Christine, my current wife and I had become engaged about 3 months earlier in October '68. So Christine bade

01:00 fond farewell to me in January 29th 1969 as I joined the army, and I must admit that time we hadn't actually set a date for our wedding cause you can't decide what you want to do when you're with the army but more of that later. We were able to send letters from Puckapunyal but we were not allowed any leave until about the first two weeks. They had to have two weeks to fully induct us into the army way of thinking where we would

01:30 march and do our training, do our drill. And this recruit course is meant to take ten weeks. And after 10 weeks a recruit becomes a private. Under the army system you then spent another 3 months after you had finished your 10 weeks of recruit training you would be assigned to a corps. You might go to armoured corps if you wanted to be in tanks. Infantry corps if you wanted to be an infantry soldier

02:00 or you were sent there anyway. Artillery, if you were lucky you may have gone to one of the tiny corps like dental corps, intelligence corps, signals corps if you liked fiddling with radios and things. So then you spent another three months of training to be a qualified signaller, artilleryman etc., so it was about 6 months of training altogether. That's for the private. For

02:30 those who wanted to be an officer, about 3 weeks into the recruit training course they provided a competition. Those who wanted to be officers would apply and they would have a very comprehensive test. They would test you on intelligence, no doubt, they don't want dumb officers, they would test you on your physical ability. You had to

03:00 climb up those – that netting and those ladders quicker than anyone else. But probably they would actually test you more on leadership than anything else because you have to lead people. And so after about 3 weeks those that had applied and then were selected and I suspect not that many were selected, you don't need that many officers in the army. They then went off to train and a place called Skyville outside Sydney. And a lot of famous, a lot of people who managed

03:30 to join that, who reached officer training school at Skyville have done very well. Tim Fisher's one who was a National Service officer. Now, I was a bit different being a doctor I was not going to go to officer training school. So what they had was an officer training school for doctors and dentists. And that was, at that stage for the whole of Australia was situated in the sleepy village, town of

04:00 Healesville. The army had bought an old guest house there and had added tents and extra areas for training and that's where our medical training was. So after 2 weeks at Puckapunyal where I was doing everything that all the recruits were doing. Absolutely everything, I was treated no differently to anyone else the army plucked me out and said right now the time's come to go to Healesville to do officer, medical and dental officer

04:30 training.

Can I ask you a question, which is just simply did you have the expectation and the intention that you would be a doctor?

Yes I had the expectation and intention because I knew the army were very, very short of doctors. They were critically short. They had been asking doctors just to serve for 3 months in Vietnam. They'd been using local

05:00 GPs around Australia. They were critically short, perhaps I didn't realise that as much as they knew it at the time. And there were about 30 of us on that course, now there's only 2 National Service doctors, there's about 10 National Service dentists and they were short of those too. And the other half of the course were provided, as I said, by doctors and dentists on the undergraduate scheme whereby the army had been paying for their

05:30 course and paying them a small salary whilst they were training to be doctors and dentists and in return you would have to give back 2 or 3 years to the army. Now we all arrived at the end of February at Healesville. By that stage we had been promoted which was great. They promoted us to officer cadet. The same would apply for the officers who were selected for Skyville they became officer cadets. The National Servicemen were officer

06:00 cadets but the undergraduate doctors they were captains already. Not very good, they were captains. Paid as captains, we were paid as officer cadets which was about one quarter. So there was a little bit, I suppose you could say that's not fair in some ways but that's the way it is, they had volunteered to join the army earlier. So there we were at Healesville. The training there was a

06:30 compressed officer training. It was actually only 6 months – it was only 6 weeks instead of the 3 months but the army is always governed by rules so it was only 6 weeks and in it we learnt a very quick course on how to be an officer, how to shoot rifles, how to march. The first day they got us running, so we got into our little white shorts and top and running shoes. Our Dunlop OC volleys

07:00 and we started running down the roads around Healesville quite close to the Healesville Sanctuary, so a very attractive area. And after about 300 metres we were all conking out. Ohh… one of the blokes had an asthma attack we were not that fit I'm afraid. The person in charge of the course was a doctor, and we had the fortune or misfortune whichever way you like to put in that he

07:30 was a doctor that had worked with SAS [Special Air service]. The famous SAS the Black Hawk Helicopters and all that business so he was very keen on us becoming good military men and being fit and he made sure. By the end of our 6-week course we were able to run 9 miles carrying a rifle and wearing boots. So it was the fittest I've ever been and unfortunately it's been downhill ever since… unfortunately. It was a good course, as I said

08:00 we learnt military things. We learnt, some of the things we learnt weren't helpful. We had to learn about, a lot of outmoded things because the army puts things on paper and sometimes it's 20 years out of date so we learnt the set-up of military installations in the Second World War or even the First World War where you have a regimental aid post at the back of the battle. You have a casualty clearing station 10 miles behind the front line.

08:30 You have a general hospital 50 miles or 100 miles behind the front line. A lot of this was very old fashioned stuff. We learnt how many artillery pieces there are in an artillery regiment but we also did have some lectures on tropical diseases that we might expect in South East Asia. We had some lectures on dehydration. So they tried to teach us a little bit about military medicine.

09:00 In so far, and they had guest lecturers, perhaps there wasn't enough experience in the army of tropical medicine but whatever experience they had they tried to share with us. So we learnt about things that you get in the tropics like cholera, dysentery all that sort of thing. We learnt about heat rashes for example. We didn't do anything on NBC warfare, which is nuclear biological and chemical warfare. That wasn't part of it.

09:30 Because it was still of some importance in those days but they knew they were training us for either work in Australia, where we just work with soldiers or work in Vietnam in the tropics. So our course was 6 weeks. At the end of that we sat an exam to make sure we assimilated the medical and military knowledge and at the same time they assessed us to see if we were officer material.

10:00 They emphasised throughout the course, that if you do not pass this officer course and know how to be an army officer, you will not become an officer. If you don't become an officer you won't be a doctor. Luckily, everyone passed.

Can I just ask you a few questions about the training itself? Who was actually delivering these lectures? Who was training you? And what was their experience?

John Taskey was the doctor in charge and his experience was, he'd been in Vietnam

10:30 and he was currently, at that stage, the doctor for the SAS regiment in Perth. We had other guest lecturers who were doctors in the army who had – most of them had not had experience in Vietnam, no. A lot of them hadn't. We had lectures from people on general military matters. We had a couple of people who were as old as second – I think our warrant officer class 1 or our

11:00 regimental sergeant major was an ex-World War 2 person. The course was mainly to, I think to give us military knowledge but it did deal with the medical side a little bit.

Did it surprise you at all that their knowledge, their information wasn't as detailed or as thorough as you might've expected? Given that you know there had been jungle warfare in the Pacific and there had been Korea and…?

11:30 No it didn't surprise me. It didn't surprise me. Remember that a lot of the doctors who had experience in the army at that stage were really needed somewhere else and didn't have time to come to our course. It was only meant to be an introductory course. We were qualified doctors and I think we were meant to learn on the job. And we were also going to go to very disparate places. Some of us would end up in 100 bed

12:00 hospital in Sydney or Brisbane and they were the biggest hospitals the army had. Some of us would end up like I did as a doctor for a recruit training battalion where you were really just a GP. Some of us would end up in Vietnam, some of us would've gone to Singapore. We'd all be doing very different things so it would be hard to train you completely. And remember we were only first year out and so wherever we were going to go we were going to have doctors who were

12:30 more senior to us or specialists in their field, so it was more a general training. We learnt how to be officers. We had a – we learnt how to be officers and part of being an officer is having someone bring you a cup of tea in the morning before you get up. So that was very nice, they would bring you this strong cup of tea in bed but then within five minutes you had to be up and at it and running around and etc..

13:00 They – we had a mess, an officers' mess nights where you again acted like officers and toast the Queen. So it was a little bit of this and a little bit of that and it was… and in the hills of Healesville it was nice, it was good. We went out on a 5 day camp, that wasn't so flash because I forgot to bring my raincoat which is – I've forgotten what they call that in the army, your poncho, your waterproof poncho and it rained for 5 days and 5

13:30 nights. And ever since rain has never worried me, I don't care about it. We camped in the hills around Healesville, it was March but it was absolutely freezing at night. We did a little bit of adventure training. For example on one of the nights on that camp what they did was they got us up at midnight and they blindfold us and they got everyone to hold on to the person in front of them, so you had a snakelike

14:00 party of 30 people each holding on to the one in front of him led by a person who is not blindfolded and we walked through the bush. I think that's called getting confidence in your fellow person and developing teamwork. But we all passed at the end of the course and we were invited to put down our postings in the order in which we wanted to go.

14:30 I always wanted to be a hospital doctor so I put down the hospital in Sydney and the hospital in Brisbane. Remember they were only small 100 bed hospitals as my preferred option. There were no postings to Vietnam at that time. Except, except for one and halfway through our course they said that there's suddenly become a vacancy in Vietnam and they invited – they asked the two National Service doctors, I'm

15:00 not sure why the didn't ask the undergraduate doctors maybe their postings were already settled but they asked the two National Service doctors were they interested in going and my friend Hugh Robertson said, "I'll go because I'm not married. John's going to get married." So he'd volunteered and by May he was in Vietnam with the 5th Battalion. So I put my preferred list but in

15:30 the army there's a saying that whatever you put first you'd never get and what you put last is what you get. So the job I got was going back to Puckapunyal. I'd been there in the cadets, I'd been there as a recruit, in the recruit training battalion and I was going back to Puckapunyal as the doctor in charge of the recruit training battalion. I don't know what they thought of it. 3 months I go from recruit to doctor

so and

16:00 captain. So I think they survived.

So what you became a captain?

Once the course had finished after 6 weeks the undergraduate doctors went to their postings immediately but there was a rule in National Service that said you had to have 3 months training. Therefore, myself and Hugh Robertson had to have another 6 weeks where we really just were given a very loose itinerary

16:30 and for a lot of that time I lived at home which was good. I was able to go home and we would visit various medical establishments around Victoria. We would spend a day at the medical and dental stores place. We would spend a week at Puckapunyal learning about various medical things. We went down to Point Cooke to learn about the air force point of view and we had dinner with all the pilots in the air force mess which was great. We just had to

17:00 fill in time. Rules – rules were rules. And then finally after 3 months and by now we're in the start of May you get promoted to captain and then I went off to Puckapunyal in May. It must've been about March or April I said to the army look I'm engaged to be married when can I have some leave. And they said well

17:30 okay that's fine, you've done well in your course. What say we give you a week off between when you finish your training and when you start at Puckapunyal? So that was it, I married Christine in the start of May, went off to our honeymoon in Adelaide, driving the yellow Volkswagen that my brother had. My Mini wasn't considered good enough for the honeymoon, I don't know why – Volkswagen's better than a Mini. And that made a big difference because that meant

18:00 when I came back from the honeymoon I started at Puckapunyal that we needed a married quarter. So rather than living in the officers' mess, so they duly found, quick smart, a house in Puckapunyal and off we went to Puckapunyal for the next… for the rest of that year, for 6 months. The houses were 50s style. The heating was not brilliant in those days.

18:30 We had one of those briquette-fired, briquette heaters and that's all you had. I can remember running from room to room because it only warmed one room and it was freezing in Puckapunyal in the winter. We used to always say in Puckapunyal it was 10 degrees Fahrenheit cooler in winter and 10 degrees hotter in summer. And I think Puckapunyal is Aboriginal, I think, for valley of the big winds. So that was the place.

19:00 Being a doctor for recruit training battalion, I guess I had been a recruit myself. They were pretty tough on the recruits in many ways. Sick parade was at 7 a.m. So you had to, you were probably up at 6 o'clock, sick parade at 7 a.m. I just dealt with the diseases and illnesses that recruits had and look there were coughs and colds and injuries and that

19:30 sort of thing.

So how did sick parade take place?

Sick parade, they'd all parade in your big medical building. There'd be about 30 or 40 for the morning. And you'd do that for a couple of hours and then you'd spend the rest of the time just on emergencies or on training of your staff, on that sort of thing. On inspecting the quarters to make sure they're all using their – make sure they're not getting tinea. Giving

20:00 lectures. The first lecture, the first talk I ever gave to a large gathering which was about 300 people, unaccustomed as I was to public speaking had to be the medical officer's VD [Venereal Disease] talk which you would do per company. So each night, I'd come up there on the stage and be saluted by the sergeant and I would give my talk on the dangers of

20:30 VD. Cause that's – you have to make sure soldiers don't get that. That's always one of the problems in war. And you'd always judge the effect of your talk by how many worried soldiers would come up to you privately afterwards and say can you get it from toilet seats all this sort of thing. And we would give other talks to the soldiers on you know staying fit and on avoiding illnesses in the army.

21:00 We had some problem with National Service recruits wanting to get out of National Service. Some of them feigned illnesses, so we would have to pick that. There were a small number who would do anything to get out. I remember one chap particularly, he was obviously intelligent, he was a qualified engineer.

21:30 And he had figured in his own mind that bed-wetting would get him out of the army and indeed it does, because the quartermaster general can't keep providing new beds. So he kept coming to the RAP, the regimental aid post complaining of bed-wetting. Somehow I suspected this chap, I suspected him. So I thought, "Right, I'll get his

22:00 platoon officer, his platoon officer, to do the sniff test," and his bed failed the sniff test. The bloke had just been pouring water on his sheets. So that was it, he was in. There were also, we mustn't make fun of it, there were some psychological problems amongst recruits particularly if they were from the

country and remote areas. They were being hammered on all sides by army discipline

22:30 so there were some breakdowns. Whether these were psychiatric or psychological is I'm uncertain. In fact most of them were dealt with by sending to the army psychologist. And the army psychologist, in other words they weren't overt psychiatric problems. The army psychologist would do tests on them and often would find that they were unsuitable for army service due to their… personality probably.

23:00 And there may also have to be an element of their intelligence to be in the army. So that was – look it was interesting enough but it wasn't what I wanted to do for the next 2 years and I thought look I was in the cadets in Puckapunyal I'm going to be in this place for my whole 2 years and someone will say what did you do in the army and I'm going to say I was at Puckapunyal and they'd say oh really. So it

23:30 occurred to me I thought I'd better do something worthwhile. So about September I volunteered to go to Vietnam. And remember that I was always keen to work in a hospital. I was always keen in the army to get true medical experience. I was always interested in the medical side not the military side. So naturally you get the best medical experience in a hospital where you may have specialists above you. So I volunteered for, I often say at the ir conditioned hospital in

24:00 Vietnam at Vung Tau was the safe place, totally safe. And about a month later they said yes a vacancy will be coming up early January. I said fine, that's good, great, that's for me, so that was all done. I finished at Puckapunyal at the end of – in December and Christine and I went off for a holiday in Sydney from which

24:30 I was not going to return because we embarked from Sydney in those days.

Okay that's a fairly made decision, isn't it?

It was made in conjunction with Christine who was accepting. I don't know – I don't think she was probably happy but she was accepting because it was going to be a whole year. So that was very good of her to do that. Where is she listening? But I think she also realised

25:00 and the result and then her choice then was would she live at Puckapunyal in an army environment or would she go back and live with her parents. And she chose rightly to live in Puckapunyal where there was a supportive army environment rather than it would be a retrograde step to go back and live with your parents. And also people were – and also in general people were not overly supportive of soldiers or people who were in Vietnam at that time. They were not anti despite what you read – have read since,

25:30 they were disinterested it didn't involve them particularly. And she taught – to fill in her time she got a job at the local army kindergarten so she filled in her time.

The other part of that decision though is to do with your, you know, what situation you're putting yourself into and the potential danger of it, did that concern you?

No I didn't consider that because remember I'd volunteered for the base hospital, reasonably

26:00 safe actually, so that didn't concern me, no. And they assured me yes that's the job, the vacancy is there. So this was the hospital at Vung Tau which by that stage had about 90 beds and Australian specialists, you know anaesthetists, surgeons, physicians that sort of thing.

Can I just take you back a little way, which is back to your role as doctor at Puckapunyal with the recruits. I'm just trying to get a picture for what it

26:30 **must've been like for those young guys who were…, you know it was sort of different for you as a doctor going in and being (UNCLEAR) for guys that were going to be going into the infantry and they were going to be in the front line…**

Yes I think it was very difficult for them. No well it was difficult – what was most difficult for them was the rules and the discipline. A lot of them were 20 and 20 year olds don't take all that kindly to rules and discipline now even then they didn't. And the

27:00 continual orders and the continual having to be up at a certain time, you've got to polish everything, you've got to march perfectly. They were not concerned – I would say that their concern at that time was a day to day concern. You know they were allowed to watch movies occasionally and maybe once a week they were allowed to have a few drinks. That was their main concern, they were not concerned

27:30 about being sent off to war. I think they were concerned about I'm going to be spending 2 years like this. It was – it was not their concern that they were going off to war. And remember that not every National Serviceman did. Only about, I think it's about 1 in 4 National Servicemen went to Vietnam.

What about for yourself during your training and the discipline and the drills and the route marches and how did you handle all of that?

I usually fall in in those situations and just do it,

28:00 so it wasn't a problem, no it wasn't a problem. And remember I guess our instructors as they were called were slightly aware of the fact that even though we've got to be officers we were also doctors.

And look we, the doctors and dentists, we realised that we were just so lucky that we were going to be doing something in the army that was our profession and would at least some worthwhile experience. So I feel sorry for the people who were qualified in engineering and law

28:30 and all sorts of things like that or qualified as anything that didn't get to do what they wanted – didn't get to do something that was related to their profession. Then again, there might be people like electricians maybe they had something in the army. Maybe they were in, or plumbers they may be in the RAEME which is the Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical engineers. And the army always made the 3 months of the recruit training the worst. That's where they really had to get you into the way of the army. When you did corps

29:00 training the training was more focused on a trade or occupation. And it was short-lived, you know it wasn't that long. The other thing we did at Puckapunyal of course, I was the doctor for the recruit training battalion, we had about 3 or 4 doctors at Puckapunyal including a 30 bed hospital so I was on call in conjunction with

29:30 the other doctors at the local little army hospital. And we would have patients there that might have pneumonia, bronchitis, we would have patients who maybe would have torn cartilage. They would go off to a larger hospital and come back for rehabilitation. There were relatively minor conditions in the hospital but there was one thing that was the hardest in that small hospital which was called 3 Camp Hospital and it was of World War

30:00 2 vintage, so it was a vintage structure. The hardest thing was the car accidents and we found that the soldiers had a nasty habit of at the end of the week, if they were given a weekend leave, now remember this is not the recruits, we're here in Puckapunyal for all the soldiers. We've got the tank regiment there, we have an engineering company there and I think we had about 3–4,000

30:30 soldiers in Puckapunyal. It was quite – one of the bigger camps in Australia. We had to look after all those we found that sometimes when they were given weekend leave, which recruits weren't, that they would have a whole lot of drinks in the mess and then head out in the car to go home and that's what caused the trouble. There were lots of car accidents they wouldn't get very far and we often used to say even afterwards that it was more dangerous being in the army

31:00 in Australia and doing that sort of thing than being overseas in Vietnam. We used to say that. So there were, I can remember one patient being brought in, I'm pretty sure he was a paraplegic for a spinal injury but it was very hard to tell because he was also paralytic drunk it was very hard to ask someone to move their limbs when they're so drunk they can't. The doctor that I worked with at that time was Neville O'Connor, he was the doctor in charge of the Puckapunyal area and

31:30 in charge of the hospital. He'd been to Vietnam 2 years earlier. So it was, it was a reasonable thing but I don't – I would not have been happy doing work in Puckapunyal for a whole 2 years.

So where was the hospital located in relation to the base? Was it within the base?

Right inside the base, purely for military people. Yeah right inside the base 400 metres from the recruit training battalion.

So did you run a kind of clinic

32:00 **for recruits plus work at the hospital?**

The clinic was done on the grounds of the recruit training battalion. The hospital looked after, when they had to go into hospital. And the hospital looked after those units who didn't have their own doctor. There was a doctor for the recruit training battalion. There was one for the armoured regiment but they were the biggest two units and then the hospital looked after on an outpatients basis for all the other soldiers. Interestingly enough,

32:30 the area that we were housed in at the recruit training battalion at Puckapunyal, it also being an area that I had gone to as a cadet, a bit of déja vu, although other cadet camps we used to have in tents but this one was wooden buildings. I'd been there before as a cadet, and I could even recall seeing the graffiti left behind by the National Servicemen of the earlier era, the 1950 to 1960 National Service era.

33:00 Those gentlemen are now 65 to 75 they used to leave slightly anti-army slogans on the walls of their huts. So it was interesting, you know, you had different eras going through these huts. And those huts were also used a couple of years ago for the Kosovo refugees, that's where they were housed. Those that are left, many have been demolished.

So the soldiers who were also there,

33:30 **were they sort of preparing for their tour in Vietnam or had they returned?**

No, no, no, the other soldiers that were there, some of them were yes, some of them were. The tank regiment had about 4 – I've forgotten the word for it – 4 troops I think and there would be one in Vietnam at any one time. The engineers were 21 and 17 Engineer Construction Company perhaps about

34:00 one quarter of those would be in Vietnam. The other units no, no.

So were you treating any returned soldiers?

No. No virtually not. Well there were some people in Puckapunyal, yes had been in Vietnam but that had no relevance. They were no different to any of us. They were no different. Some of the non commissioned officers, corporals and sergeants and

34:30 officers in the recruit training battalion had been to Vietnam but not many, not many at all. There was not a great emphasis on it. Not everyone in the army went to Vietnam. I mean at any one time there were about – at the height of the Vietnam War Australia had about six and a half thousand army personnel in Vietnam. And the size of the army I think was about 60,000, about 1 in 10.

35:00 The other statistic that is interesting, and of the 55,000 Australians that went to Vietnam, about a quarter were in National Service, quarter. And the other interesting statistic is that every male over the age of 20 who registered for National Service, registered, remember their marble may not have come out, they may have failed the medical. They may have joined the army as a National Serviceman

35:30 but not gone to Vietnam, but of the males that registered for National Service only 2% ended up in Vietnam. I don't know the figure for how many National Servicemen what percentage, if you're in the army what percentage, maybe about a quarter went to Vietnam, those National Serviceman who were in the army. I once knew that figure but it was still not that common. Certain

36:00 units are over represented. For example if you joined the 2nd Battalion, infantry battalion and it was well known they were going to Vietnam in six months time, you knew you were going and a lot of people have asked me did I volunteer and I said yes I volunteered because remember I'm on my own, I'm just a doctor. A lot of people, who put in for an infantry battalion, or something like that, I'm never sure if they volunteered or not. The unit was sent to Vietnam

36:30 and if they didn't want to be in that unit they could take measures to ask for a transfer. Whether they did or not I have no idea. Whether they were afraid to, I've no idea, don't know but I volunteered and I've got a feeling most people did volunteer in inverted commas, at least. But remember volunteering and being ordered in the army it's a bit confusing. It's a bit blurred line I think.

It's a blurry line is it?

I think so yeah.

37:00 But I volunteered as just a – an isolated person. One of the strengths of the Australian Army in Vietnam was the fact that whole units were sent. They trained together for 3 months and then they were sent. So they were already a cohesive unit. The American way was just to post people individually and that didn't work nearly, nearly as well. Before you went to Vietnam you had to go through quite a lot of things. You had to have all

37:30 your injections, inoculations, smallpox, cholera, plague. You had to do military weapons training which they abbreviated for me. In general you had to go to the jungle training camp at Canungra just in south east Queensland just in from Surfers Paradise where you did jungle training for 3 months – 3 weeks. I didn't have to do that because it was too urgent for me to get there. Perhaps I would've liked to have done that jungle training camp

38:00 but I missed out on it. There were also many courses in the army that you could do and some soldiers did. There was a parachutist course where you learned to parachute. I didn't do that. I wish I had've. And one of the most interesting courses was called the intelligence and prisoners of war course and that was held at – in Adelaide at –

38:30 at an army barracks there where for one week they pretended as if you were a prisoner of war. And so you were treated like that, you were fed badly, you had a light on all night, you were told right you can have something – go to the shower now and you'd go to the shower and the water'd go cold. You were verbally harassed and the people who did that were Australian Army people. I wish I had've done that course.

Did they teach you how to escape?

Don't know.

39:00 Don't know about that one they didn't tell me but I wish I had done that course. And finally, at the very end and I think you know I gather you were allowed to at any time pull the plug and just say right that's it, I'm out which you have to allow people to do. But the climax of the course was you were all then led – at the very end of it you were led blindfold into a darkened room and they said that

39:30 you – the people on the course expected something terrible to happen and suddenly they turned the lights on and there was a great meal for you. Beer everything you can eat, everything you can drink and all your captains were congratulating – congratulating you. But no Australian was taken prisoner of war but that would've been a very good course to have done I think, you know. Adventure

40:00 training. But otherwise I had a very shortened preparation.

Tape 4

00:40 **So just on that subject of STDs [Sexually Transmitted Disease] and what do you mean you had people coming to you all the time, what they had contracted the disease? Or they were unsure of they wanted to know more?**

No, as a result of the VD lecture you really did measure

01:00 your impact as to those who would come up and ask questions. I don't believe – very few were contracted because quite frankly they never got leave. I think from memory you were only allowed 3 days leave during your 3 months recruit training. I didn't really assume the rule of a counsellor. The counselling was done really on a platoon level. The platoon commander who's a second lieutenant is in

01:30 charge of 30 men and he's the one who deals with their emotion problems and their family problems. We were not – doctors were not meant to do that as much. There was also some problem with continuity, remember as a doctor to the recruit training battalion you've got them for 3 months so every 3 months there's a new lot that come. So you don't have them for very long. The people who came to

02:00 me were mainly the coughs and colds and injuries by and large. Psychiatric problems, I can't remember treating anyone with you know say tranquillisers, sedatives or anti-depressants. If a person needed any of those you have to question whether he stays in the army and he would be sent to the psychology unit and would

02:30 be assessed and quite a few, I don't know the figures, but I'd imagine out of 800 men in a recruit training battalion maybe 20 would be sent just sent – put out of the army. There was a word for it, it was something discharge. It wasn't a dishonourable discharge, it was just a discharge said this man is not fit for the army and partly would be related to personality and sometime and also to intelligence too.

03:00 On the other hand, if a soldier or recruit tried to beat the army, disobey orders and that sort of thing, the army would take it as a challenge and they would not give in very often on that. And I remember one recruit, I always call this 'up the pole on the Sabbath' incident that on the Sunday when the families were allowed to visit he climbed up a pole

03:30 and refused to come down. I think he actually got discharged in the end. He just was not a suitable person. But, we also were not there to give counselling. I can recall, we're jumping ahead now, I can recall even in Vietnam a solider coming in with what we would call battle

04:00 fatigue or battle neurosis and the army wasn't keen on that. But remember the morale of the Australian Army was very good, very good indeed. And so that battle neurosis, battle fatigue was not recognised. It must've occurred but I think it was dealt with on a unit level or with the person's commanding officer or he just went out and had a lot to drink and half forgot about it.

04:30 Perhaps this is why, perhaps this is why they say a lot of Vietnam veterans have neurosis now, I think that must be the theory. I've not taken a particular interest in this field but I suspect that the post traumatic stress disorder must be at least partly related to the stresses of the time being dealt with appropriately. And I don't believe you can blame the army for that because I don't think – there were stresses, there are stresses that

05:00 are not military related, I don't think they were dealt with very well either by society. Now you have a team of counsellors as soon as an incident happens you know. So I feel it was done as well as it could be handled really. The medical services in the army, my memory is at the height of the army when I was in there probably had about 60 to a

05:30 100 doctors from memory but they were really spread around a lot. There might be 20 in Vietnam, that sort of thing. Be about 20 there and the rest maybe 60 or 50 it's hard to remember now, would be spread around the rest of the army in Australia. And they all did different things, a lot of doctors had a large component of administrative work. For example the doctor in charge of the 30 bed

06:00 camp hospital he's not going to be just a doctor. He's in charge of 6 or 8 nurses and probably in charge of about another 25 soldiers who are going to be wardsmen they're going to be people who keep the hospital going. He's going to have from electrician, plumber from other corps to keep it going. He's going to have drivers, he's going to have ambulance drivers and he has to administer them. In other words the doctor is not just the doctor he's the commanding officer of that

06:30 hospital. And my aim in the army I have to say, I always thought that what I wanted to do was to get away from the administration, the military administration and get on to the real medicine. That was always my aim.

So how challenging was it for you working in the hospital? I mean given that you just had – all your experience had been as a resident doctor for a year, that's right,…

No,…

07:00 **… before you went in to the army?**

… that was fairly reasonable. Remember this 30 bed hospital was really probably like a small, a very small country hospital of the same size. But you're not going to have any child you know midwifery cases or children and remember you've got fit young soldiers so we did deal with more minor conditions. If they were seriously ill, or in a car accident, they would be sent in the ambulance straight down to the repatriation hospital in Heidelberg. So in

07:30 that way it was not satisfying in that you only dealt with young fit soldiers and if there was anything serious they were off to the main hospital or they were out of the army. If you had conditions like peptic ulcer, diabetes, that was a medical discharge from the army. You didn't see enough of real medicine.

So how many were on staff there at the hospital?

There were about 2 doctors and there'd be about 8 nurses and about 30 other ranks altogether, yeah,

08:00 about that.

So and who were you accountable to?

I was accountable, the doctor in charge of the hospital was also in charge of the entire medical establishment for Puckapunyal area so even though I was well recruit battalion, but the recruit training battalion was in charge of me but also the doctor was in charge. A bit of each. There was a bit of pull sometimes as to who would be in charge

08:30 because the regimental medical officer or the medical officer to a body of men be it 1,000 or what he is responsible to the commanding officer, that's the chain of command, okay. And he's responsible to the commanding officer for the provision of health to the troops and maintaining them in physical fitness and avoiding disease. That, that at a unit level that's your responsibility. And the army place some emphasis on prevention. I guess fitness

09:00 regimes, army food no we can't say that, no the army cooks weren't much chop so we didn't feed them anything, a lot of fried food. I can remember great big pans of greasy bacon and eggs. Indeed.

So how would your accountability have to be you know sort of played out? Like did you write reports, were you

09:30 **briefed, were you questioned?**

Yeah, I'm beginning to forget about all those but you would have to – but the army's full of reports so every month I'm certain we did have to write a report on how many patients were sick and how many evacuated and what were the major illnesses. We… it was our job to make sure they were fit for duty though.

10:00 We also, the medical section at the recruit training battalion were also given the job of prevention of sexual diseases and so we were in charge of giving the condoms out before they went on leave and there were two schools of thought for that, one was to line them all up and hand them two condoms, forcibly. And my

10:30 thought was a different one, rightly or wrongly I said no, a lot of them are going to go home to their mothers and say what was this, what was all this about and other's said to me is this to keep my rifle you know clean. So what I said was, in my case I said look I think they should come to the medical centre and ask like a chemist and they'll be given, no questions asked. And I can't tell you what percentage came but not that many.

11:00 **Did you have to advise them on how to use them?**

No, no, cause they were allowed some leave, not much leave during their recruit time.

So you think that method worked in as much as they were fine about fronting up and actually asking for them?

Well they should, back in civilian life they'd have to do the same and go to a chemist shop, wouldn't they. I think the army was also

11:30 thinking of public relations too, in some ways. That you know if you can give these condoms forcibly the army is saying that they accept it or promote it. It hasn't changed today has it really?

No, but that's what they were doing in the Second World War.

What were they doing?

They were giving as part of the kit they were giving soldiers condoms.

Okay, that's interesting. I can only say what we did in my recruit training battalion.

12:00 When we were in Vietnam I can't remember, I don't know. I don't know at all.

Okay, so why don't we go to Vietnam now.

All right, so…

I'm curious about you reaching that point where you thought, "Okay, this is really not challenging enough"?

No, I thought I wasn't getting enough out of it medically and that's exactly the reason I volunteered but I also volunteered for the hospital. During this time, incidentally, so

12:30 I've almost done a year of National Service now and what was my relationship to the army and the medical corps. It was a symbiotic one. I knew that I was first and I decided that if I'm going to have, get something good out of this I should do the right thing and that would be worthwhile for me. So, I had met the colonel in charge of the medical corps in Victoria and I found him very good to work with and I'd met the

13:00 major general in charge of the medical corps for Australia. Obviously they'd taken an interest and I trusted them. They were both very good people. And about May I agreed to give a talk in Melbourne, the army was – the medical corps was concerned that with the 50 or 100 doctors that were to come into the army over the next few years

13:30 that were currently medical students that they had the wrong idea. So they asked me would I give a talk to them. And so they advertised it and I think about 50 medical students or first year doctors turned up to a function put on by the medical corps and I gave them a talk on what it's like to be in the army. Now I didn't paint a glowing picture, but I also didn't – I painted a true picture. I said it's not as bad as you think.

14:00 You have medical – full medical responsibility. It is almost certain that you will become a doctor, you know they were worried that they wouldn't become. I said look you've just got to pass the course, do the right thing, you will become a doctor. I emphasised that they were lucky that they were going to be doing something that they were trained for, not everyone was. I think the army were quite pleased with that. I didn't – I told the truth but they were grateful and

14:30 it's strange a lot of people over the years have come up to me and said ohh… I went to that talk you gave, I went to that, yeah, I went to that. That was the only talk I ever gave to other possible because there was a lot of angst. There was a bit of angst amongst doctors and there were even accusations that the ballot was rigged so that they could get more doctors in. That the ballot, the marbles were rigged now I don't think that's possible

15:00 I don't think that's possible but a lot of the doctors thought that and I think even the Australian Medical Association may have made that a suggestion because they did have a desperate need. So here we are, I've… for embarkation to Vietnam you leave from the ECPD and in the army you have all sorts of acronyms like that and that's the Eastern Command Personnel Depot beautifully situated just behind

15:30 that fish restaurant at Watsons Bay, 'Doyles'. That's where you – it's a personnel depot where you have to attend and that's where you leave for Vietnam. And I think it was the 5th of January 1970. Remember man had already walked on the moon. I was in – I was at Puckapunyal that day, yeah. So I arrived at Watsons Bay and there were about 150 people.

16:00 And a plane flight, a Boeing 707 flight. Some large units went on HMAS Jeparit, a ship, and particularly if they were taking large vehicles and they had what, 2 weeks on ship but a lot of us just went on the 708 Charter. For years the army chartered Qantas flights. It was a 707, in those days it would go Melbourne, Darwin.

16:30 I got out at Darwin at 2 a.m. in the morning, very hot in January. Next stop Singapore, next stop Vietnam. The army was never silly, they worked out alcohol and women don't mix so on their planes all male stewards but as much alcohol that you wanted to drink. It's very interesting that the Americans had a different approach. Female stewardesses on their planes but no alcohol at all. So we

17:00 all congregated at Watsons Bay, there was no one that I knew that was going on that plane. There was no one going on that exact plane because these flights used to go every week. I think once a week they went. Because if you think about it there's about 7,000 troops in Vietnam divide that by 50 that's a 140 per week anyway. And I was taken by the warrant officer who gave us our pre-embarkation

17:30 talk. Cause his first sentence was, "Gentlemen I warn you for war," which is a nice dramatic way of putting it. And he explained to us that there was no turning back now. We had volunteered if we sort of wavered a bit at the last minute and decided to get out of it, it was too late. It was a court martial from then on. So that was it.

Were you travelling with other medical corps people?

18:00 No just general army troops, yeah. Yeah there was no one that I knew on the plane. There may have been a couple of medical corps people but they weren't doctors so I didn't know them. They may have been from other parts of Australia. There probably were a couple cause remember in the medical corps the army in Vietnam had about a dozen nurses. Had about a dozen females nurses but the rest of the medical corps were all chaps and you know

18:30 they weren't really very qualified of course. They were qualified to first aid standard. They may have been qualified some of them up to nursing aid standard. There were occasional ones like a radiographer who would end up doing radiography but in general they were more standard first aid people. We

stopped in Singapore and I had a look at Singapore at about 6 a.m. in the morning and thought this is a very nice place. We came in over the East

19:00 Coast Road and I looked down on all the beautiful tree lined streets and I just put it to the back of my mind, mm nice place Singapore. At Singapore on the plane we had to change out – we were in our army clothes of course for the plane flight but we had to change, take our khaki shirt off, this has been mentioned many times by people, and we put on a white shirt because for some reason Singapore did not want to be seen as being a stopping point for people going off to the Vietnam War. So hence

19:30 the white shirt charade. About two hours in Singapore for breakfast, and then off to Vietnam, then. We arrived at Ton San Nhut airport which is the busy – which was the busy airport in Saigon, extremely hot. Planes everywhere, hundreds and hundreds of planes you could see parked there. The usual army fashion from Saigon Ton San Nhut airport we had to

20:00 then catch an aeroplane to our province which was Phuoc Tuy which was about 70 miles south.

Can I just stop you there, sorry, I just want to get your impressions of arriving in Vietnam. Yeah hundreds of planes on the tarmac what sort of planes were these?

All types of planes, jet fighters, transport planes, even little DC3s which were there but mainly just military planes, helicopters cause at that time it was the busiest airport in the world.

20:30 Fearfully hot, I can't say it was the same as in the movie platoon where the solider arrives at Ton San Nhut airport and sees the body bags going out, I did not see that. But what did happen to us is we were there, due to army inefficiency for 6 hours sitting on the tarmac. We had arrived at Ton San Nhut airport.

Who was it staffed by?

Ton San Nhut airport is

21:00 mainly staffed by Americans and there are Vietnamese. It's a civilian airport but it's a war so there's mainly military people there. Fierce, incredibly hot, no air-conditioned terminal. So I can recall sitting on those Chep type pallets in the sun for 6 hours unfortunately because our plane was delayed.

21:30 We were given something to eat. The doctor in charge of the medical corps in Vietnam rang me to say unfortunately he couldn't take me around Saigon and show me. In the 6 hours we had spare he was committed to something else which was a bit of a pity. I would've liked to have had a quick look around it so I was just confined to the airport like everyone else really. And, but he did have time to tell me sorry there's been a slight change in

22:00 plans you're not going to the hospital now, you're going to the civil affairs unit which I don't think I had heard of at that – I hadn't heard of that exact unit at that stage. So I said right, fine, interesting.

So you didn't know where you were being posted until you arrived?

No. no. But that happens in the army. I didn't complain. I considered it a better job than perhaps becoming a regimental medical officer

22:30 because again it suited my theory of I'll be doing real medicine and not so much medical administration. But I would've preferred to go to the hospital.

Did you know what the civil affairs unit did at that point at Saigon airport when he told you?

Yes he explained that I would be going around the villages giving aid to the villages, medical aid to the villages, and that really encompassed it and he said there'll be others – people doing other things and I said fine,

23:00 fine, we'll just take that. Then they bundled us into our air transport to Nui Dat and that was a Hercules aircraft. Not too much seating and to get 100 troops into a Hercules what you do is you have them in about 10 rows sitting on the floor and they have a rope going cross ways so each hand hold on to a rope. I hoped they closed the back entrance cargo. I can remember

23:30 for a while seeing it open I'm sure they – I'm sure they did close. So a fairly uncomfortable plane the Hercules you have to have air protection and all sorts of things. And that was it I was on my way to Nui Dat. Now the civil affairs unit was situated in Nui Dat where the task force and most of the troops were. Vung Tau was the base camp with about 1,000 – 1,200 soldiers. Nui Dat had about 4 ½

24:00 thousand soldiers. That was where the infantry battalion, the artillery and the tanks were. We were there because Nui Dat is right in the very middle of Phuoc Tuy province and we'd been – and the Australian Army had one province to look after. So civil affairs unit was rightly situated inside that army camp. So we could get to all the villages as quickly as we could. Phuoc Tuy province, I know more about it now than I knew

24:30 when I arrived. It's one of 44 provinces in Vietnam and one of the good things about the Australian Army involvement in Vietnam is that we were mainly located in one province the whole time. So we got

to know the people and the people got to know us. It's a province that we – I don't think the Australian Army realised at the time, but it's a province that had a long history of conflict and there was a long history

25:00 of the precursors to the Viet Cong who were the Viet Minh providing resistance to the French. The Australian Army, I doubt whether we knew it. Because in general I think the Australian Army wanted to be assigned a province that was relatively safe and where we would not be confronted with North Vietnamese regular army troops with tanks and things and that never happened in our province. The Australian Army when they first arrived in Vietnam were assigned to an American

25:30 brigade in the province next door Bien Hoa,[?] but they found it most unsatisfactory because the Australian Army commanders wanted to have control over their own troops and the Australian Army have a different approach to war to the Americans, very, very different. The aim of the Australian Army first of all is to not get their troops killed and the 2nd theory of the Australian Army is not to make full frontal attacks or anything like that if you see a larger force than yourself

26:00 you withdraw. And you patrol in the jungle, you send out a man ahead of time or you send out a scout. You do everything very, very carefully. You try and make yourself invisible in the bush. The American Army has not had any – had not had any training in jungle warfare and they weren't good at that and they still aren't. They're really good in places like the Gulf War and Iraq where it's pure fire power technology but

26:30 in Vietnam it was still the individual soldier that counted. The Americans thought that they could bomb their way out of it and they couldn't. The dropped more bombs on South Vietnam or North Vietnam than for the whole of the Second World War and still couldn't win it so that's the difference. The civil affairs unit, onto something happier now, we were a unit that was responsible to the Australian Army Headquarters in Saigon in actual fact.

27:00 We were situated in Nui Dat, Nui Dat was big it was, it might've been 3 miles by 2 miles. It was a very big base. We were situated on the site of an old rubber tree – rubber plantation. It was early autumn when I got there so the trees had leaves on them but the leaves were beginning to fall. And we were situated amongst the rows of rubber trees, that gave us a bit of shade. Our accommodation, remember that

27:30 the Australian task force had been at Nui Dat for 2 years by then yeah 2 years 3 years so we had four-man tents. Although for officers you'd have a one-man tent. So it was a sizeable tent. The tent was sandbagged to about 3 feet high. The tent had a panic trench at the back of it where you could hop into if anything ever happened although nothing did. The tent had an electric light which was great. I

28:00 think I had a small fan, I'm not quite sure if it was my own or army issue and you needed a fan cause it was hot. The tent had floorboards. It even had a Brownbuilt type metal trunk. So in general, our accommodation was actually as people said was better than you would expect. At least there was a static camp and we were in a static situation. The civil affairs unit had about

28:30 55 people. It was only in operation for 4 years. It was started in 1967 and it – from about April it was started. April 67 and it was disbanded in April 71. The army thought of it as part of the winning the hearts and minds component to the Vietnam War. The army had some experience of civil affairs units in New Guinea towards the end of the Second World War. And this was where they

29:00 had reclaimed territory from the Japanese and they felt that they had to have people to help the local New Guinea natives with economic matters, with housing that sort of thing. They had to have liaison people to talk the New Guinea natives so that they would remain loyal to our side I suppose. So we had a little bit of knowledge of it but otherwise we had a little bit of knowledge from winning the hearts and minds in Malaya. Remember that was the first

29:30 time that term was used or short for it is WHAM. So the civil affairs unit had a lieutenant colonel in charge and then it had about 4 or 5 sections. We'll leave the medical till last. It had an engineering section and that was an army engineer and their job was to try building roads, build schools, build engineering projects maybe water reticulation. They eventually started the

30:00 14 Southern Cross Windmills to provide water to the people. They may provide some advice on engineering and lighting problems. And I think in many way they were very important the engineers because they could provide aid to the local villages. Remember this engineering detachment had nothing to do with the regular army. The army engineers are for different things. They are to building, they are to go down tunnels, they're to blow up things, they're on the military side of engineering.

30:30 The civil affairs unit had an education section and they would go out to the schools and help in the teaching of English. I presume that's worthwhile English is a world language, I guess that was the reason. They would help teach in the schools. They may liaise with some of the teachers in schools to help give them advice. They may have given some technical help and assistance but in those days I guess there were no

31:00 so we couldn't hand out computers. They helped to organise youth and sports. They also helped organise boy scouts for the local Vietnamese. That's an interesting thought. We had a liaison section and these were very important. These were – there were only 3 liaison officers. They were officers who

had learnt Vietnamese back in Australian in a course and they would go out each of these 3 liaison officers

31:30 we would have our province divided into 3 and they would look after that part province. We had about 22 villages, each village had about 5 hamlets. So you can divide the 120 hamlets into 3 for these liaison officers. They would go to the village, speak to the village chief, find out is there any way we can help you. Medically, engineering wise, education wise. Is there any way we can help you at all?

32:00 And then they would come back and give the information to our civil affairs unit. Who would then consult with the other relevant people in Nui Dat and see how we would help them. Sometimes the work that was done was done by us alone, I'm talking about engineering projects at the moment, but often our chaps would supervise it. Tell them how to do and watch the Vietnamese doing it. So the Vietnamese would lay the bricks but I guess we would make the plans for the schools.

32:30 And I've read where they, our civil affairs unit built 130 classrooms which is a good effort. We built medical centres, they helped to build some roads. The Americans provided more help on that and they had of course the Southern Cross Windmills. The medical side was one doctor who was myself. We had two Land-Rovers. We had a driver for each Land-Rover. We had about

33:00 a medical corporal and a medical sergeant. Now I guess the medical corporal trained to about first aid, the medical sergeant is trained to about nursing aid standard. They're a help. They go out with me to see the villages and we also have on the back of one of our Land-Rovers a large trailer that's covered. It's about 6 foot tall, 6 foot high I guess it's more like a

33:30 caravan than a trailer and that's our medical supply. So not only do we go out and treat the villagers and tell them what's wrong we actually provide the medical supplies. They can't afford to buy them so we provide them. Where did the money come from? It didn't worry me. It may have come from the SEATO grants, the South East Asian Treaty Organisation grants, some of it and some of it I believe must've come from the Americans particularly on the medical side

34:00 because we went to the Long Bin Medical Depot in Bien Hoa every second Saturday and just loaded up our trailer with whatever we wanted. The Americans were very generous in that regard. My job for the six months that I was in the civil affairs unit was not to treat any soldiers at all even when I was in the base camp I wasn't on call for

34:30 the camp hospital. Remember that the hospital at Nui Dat was about 25 beds. It was for minor things. I think the army said it was for things that would be cured within 3 days. If it was something more serious they would be flown, more often than not, by helicopter to Vung Tau where they had the 100 bed hospital and they had a physician, surgeon, anaesthetists. Incidentally, those doctors were usually CMF doctors who would come for 3 months. The army at that

35:00 stage had very few specialists indeed. Very few and – so I guess as I wrote to someone in a letter, I don't get called up at night, it's great. It's good. My job was to go out to the villages. The medical situation in Phuoc Tuy was 120,000 people. There was a hospital in the capital which is right in the middle Ba Ria. The hospital

35:30 has 100 beds and about 200 patients… so 2 to a bed or lie on the floor. The hospital has 1 Vietnamese doctor only. When I was there, there was a Korean orthopaedic surgeon. There may have been a 2nd Vietnamese doctor at the hospital I'm not perfectly sure. All the villages around don't have any doctors at all. The province is about 40 miles by

36:00 20 miles. A lot of villagers therefore to seek medical attention from a doctor have to come into Ba Ria. There are about 3 or 4 private doctors in Ba Ria itself. Most of the local population can't – most of the local population can't afford those private doctors. Phuoc Tuy is about 70% farming,

36:30 peasants, on the land farmers, 20% fishermen, 5 to 10% the rest you know clerical and… but it is mainly a farming population. The village – Ba Ria is perhaps the biggest place of 20,000 people. The next two would be Dat Do, Long De En [?] would probably have a population of about 10,000. And then you'd go down to little villages of about 500. So our job was to

37:00 after consultation with the doctor in the Ba Ria hospital, the consultations had gone on long before I arrived and the pattern was sent that we would go to villages, 2 or 3 a day, and on a weekly basis roughly. So we'd go to about 15 villages a week I guess. And how did we choose those villages? Mm good point. Some of them were requested

37:30 by the villagers, sometimes our liaison officers had gone to the villages and said look they would like you to come. There was also an element of winning the hearts and minds so the military people through our liaison officers would choose villages that were contested, where there was a lot of Viet Cong influence. Sometimes that would – that's a good idea. But sometimes when we used to go to those villages the patients would come to us,

38:00 they didn't like us. But in general we found that they came, no matter what. We knew the villages that were Viet Cong influenced. We knew very well because they were the villages where incidents occurred. We knew the villages that liked us and we knew the villages that were indifferent. The villages that liked us were always villages full of Catholic refugees. And so the Catholic villages were the ones

38:30 that particularly were enthusiastic. There were villages that were more the Buddhist ones where they were a bit indifferent and then there were the villages where there was a deep Viet Cong influence and had been for years like Hoa Long. That particularly was a very – they were very anti.

Okay,

39:00 **Hoa Long?**

Hoa Long, H.O.A. L.O.N.G pronounced Wah, yeah.

Did you have any concern about going there? Did you need to travel with security?

Okay,

39:30 security in Vietnam would vary according to when you were there. And certainly when I was there in 1970 it was relatively good. It was said that you were safe in the villages during the day. You were not safe at night. You were not safe outside the villages. The Viet Cong in general had – were in the province. I think there were

40:00 a couple of thousand of them at least. They were in the tunnels. They were on the Long Hai Hills. They were in the caves. They were – no doubt many of them returned to those villages at night to get fed. But it wasn't too bad we did not have any escort actually, we didn't. Maybe that

40:30 was foolhardy but we actually didn't have any trouble. I know from talking to the 6th Battalion people – that was the battalion involved in the Battle of Long Than, but remember this was the next rotation of that battalion 3 years later, they used to say to us, no way would we go to that village without about 4 APCs [Armoured Personnel Carriers] and at least 50 men. But they had a very militaristic view of it.

41:00 Their opinions were coloured by the fact that they were often out in the bush where there were ambushes. We seemed to be safe in the villages. We would go with two Land-Rovers and we'd have a driver, medical corporal, 2 drivers, 2 medical corporal/sergeant, myself and 1 interpreter, a Vietnamese interpreter. So there was about 6 of us. We brought our rifles, we had a radio to radio home. We didn't have any problem and

41:30 I didn't worry about it at the time. I've since had second thoughts a bit but I wasn't worried particularly at the time. It has occurred to me since that I was carrying in my trailer enough medicines for all the Viet Cong in our province to have underground for about a year so I'm quite surprised they didn't hijack our trailer. We were also classic – we were absolute – it was a classic case that we could be ambushed because we would go to the same village on the same…

Tape 5

00:30 **Yes, we were hoping we could hear more about the civil affairs unit?**

Yes, so just perhaps going back to the start I forgot to mention that the aim of the civil affairs unit in one sentence was, and this was the army official line was 'that it was to win the support of the people for the current government of Vietnam and secondly to engender goodwill towards the Australian troop,' and that's a fair

01:00 thing but the other thing was it was really a humanitarian organisation and I suppose thirdly to win the hearts and minds of the people because you don't win them over with guns and war alone. And I've mentioned about the medical side, the engineering and the education. I neglected or I would like to add that on the medical side I had a hygiene officer who was the equivalent of a council hygiene

01:30 inspector and he was very useful because he was able to do all the hygiene aspects. Check for their water supplies, were their restaurants clean enough. Methods of disease prevention. Cooking, were they cooking outdoors. What were they doing about boiling their water. All those sort of things. And the other detachment we had, and was only intermittent was an agricultural person. And really we needed – we

02:00 needed an agricultural expert. And in our unit it just depended if there was a National Serviceman in the unit who had done agricultural science and sometimes you had pot luck and sometimes you didn't. In our case, a young gentlemen was doing a round the world lonely planet type tour. Wasn't – nothing to do with the army. His father was in the army and he said call in. So he called in and we kept him on agricultural work and advice for a couple of months. They used to ask me for various advice on

02:30 agriculture, I couldn't help them. On veterinary matters, occasionally I was able to give advice. I think they had an outbreak of Newcastle disease in WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s so I asked someone how to treat that. They once asked me to remove some shrapnel from a cow, I declined for obvious reasons. But agricultural advice on rice products, on pig farming, those sorts of things. So they were the main

03:00 components. How our day was spent was about 7 o'clock in the morning if you set your alarm you heard the Radio Australia, news from Australia which was great to hear. We did have Australian Army Forces

radio which came out of Vung Tau for a couple of hours per day just giving you Australian news. We'd head off to breakfast in the officers mess at the

03:30 task force. There was a rule we had to carry our guns into the mess and we'd hang them all with our holsters up on the little nails outside a bit like where you'd put your coat. At half past 7 quarter to 8 we had a what would they call, a meeting situation report, every morning from our own civil affairs unit where they would read out the happenings of the last 24 hours as far as the task force was concerned. And I guess we needed to know that cause

04:00 we had to know the situation out in the villages. So we would hear how the war was going from the Australian point of view. 8 o'clock 8.15 grab our jeep which had been and our Land-Rover and our trailer, it had been filled the night before and we'd head out to the village. Probably take about half an hour to get there maybe three quarters of an hour at the most cause it could be 10 miles away, could be 15, could be 5. The roads were dirt roads, covered in red

04:30 laterite dust. So at the end of the day you looked like you were suntanned but you got in the shower and all that red dust just came off. Cause this was the dry season the 6 months that I was there, the dry season. The other half of the year pouring rain, downpours the whole time. We would go to the village and we would set up in anywhere that we could. If there was a small little medical centre or a dispensary we'd set up there.

05:00 If there was a health technician or a partly trained nurse to work with us, we'd get them to work with us. More often than not, there wasn't a medical centre and we would go to the marketplace. Remember markets aren't on everyday but the point was the situation was totally public, just about. Even if you were in a medical centre the windows are open. We had a lot of people milling around. I think the average number of patients I would see would probably about 75 to

05:30 100 but more likely 100. And they all wanted to be served at once. So you could imagine the scene. You've got about 100 people, mainly I have to say old people, mothers and kids under the age of 14. There weren't too many males between the ages of 14 and 15 and up to 50. They were off fighting the war on someone's side anyway. They were all chattering in Vietnamese which is a very

06:00 noisy language where they say a lot of words quickly like a pistol shot. And they were all talking amongst themselves, they were all listening to what I was saying, hanging off every word. They would queue up and I'd see each patient in turn. Because the language problem, my Vietnamese interpreter and you could only work with a Vietnamese interpreter you couldn't have an Australian interpreter because you need someone to know the culture. And so that I could see these 100

06:30 patients in about 2 hours I would tell the interpreter that he would ask the patient for 3 symptoms only. So you've got headache, fever and shivering. Right, you've probably got malaria. The other – I would make my – diagnose on those 3 symptoms. If the patient looked unwell – looked unwell I would then actually examine meticulously under their

07:00 coats, under their clothes you know a little bit but nothing particularly private. So if they were sick I would examine them. If I wanted to take their temperature I just touched their forehead. So we had to work pretty quickly but the sort of things that we saw you know people thought that everything was very serious but in actual fact it's the same sort of things you see back in Australia, that a general practitioner would see. You know headaches, aches and pains, abdominal pains,

07:30 dysentery all that sort of thing. A lot of skin ulcers and skin infections, we could treat that very quickly. The Vietnamese liked coloured things so we gave them for skin ulcers always Mercurochrome. It was a nice red colour. It was very scientific. Worm infestations – we would say the little worms or the long worms. Now I don't have to go into the medical names but we knew the right tablets to give them.

08:00 A lot of backache because they're carrying heavy pails of water, they're working in the fields. A lot of chronic diseases, we did see certainly some of the exotic diseases that you read about in the tropics. We saw a lot of malaria. If the patient has fever or chills every second day or third day it's malaria, we just give them malaria tablets. My interpreter almost just

08:30 said to me malaria and that was it. If the patient was very ill we would advise them to go to hospital in Ba Ria or sometimes we would take them ourselves. We saw other tropical diseases like typhoid fever. One of the problems of course was that I had no x-rays or pathology tests so it's going to be hard to diagnose things and in fact the case of typhoid fever, because that affects the bowel down near the appendix

09:00 I diagnosed that as appendicitis but anyway the patient went to hospital and I was told it was typhoid fever. I think I saw one case of polio. I saw one case of plague which was actually the bubonic one with the large glands not the pneumonic plague from the middle ages. It was good to see that. I didn't see any smallpox but I saw quite a lot of the older people had smallpox scars. They're sort of like pigmented,

09:30 recessed lesions over their skin so they had survived smallpox. We did see a bit of leprosy. Again leprosy you can see. Fingers half atrophied off, lumps in the skin, occasionally troubles with their nose. Leprosy was a chronic condition so we often didn't treat that. There was a lot of tuberculous and again I often didn't even take a

10:00 chest x-ray. If the patient had that dry hacking cough and I could hear them as they were queuing up and if they had a sallow complexion they had tuberculosis. And every time I took a chest x-ray I usually found that half their lungs were infected with tuberculosis. Here we had a problem, Western medicine decrees that you have to take 3 different tablets, no 2 different tablets and one injection for about 6

10:30 months to 2 years for tuberculosis. We had a big problem with that because we only used to go to the villages every week. So what we did, we compromised and we just gave them the tablets and we'd give them an injection once a week when we turned up. I probably only treated about a dozen people with TB because of the difficulty of treating them. Cancer, only could we diagnose that if a lump was found somewhere on the body. Dysentery yeah, common.

11:00 Western diseases like heart failure, we hardly saw it and every case of heart failure we saw I presume that it was beriberi due to vitamin deficiency. We saw a lot of cases of anaemia. Again, we did not bother to investigate them we just gave them iron and folic acid. I think I was ahead of my time, I used to give every pregnant lady folic acid and it's only I think relatively recently that we've decided that folic acid maybe the reason that

11:30 there's a reduced incidence of spina bifida amongst babies now. We were very nice to the pregnant ladies, we used to give them a hygiene pack that had been donated from Australia. Toothbrush, soap, toothpaste, tea towel, flannelette or something. I was not involved in any of the maternity work and the reason for that is I'm only in a village for two hours once a week. The babies aren't going to be born then and the Vietnamese seem to have a primitive

12:00 but you know reasonable way of treating with that so that every large village would have a maternity sister. And the Vietnamese women are very stoic so they would come in, in labour, this is my memory, that they'd be in labour only a few hours, perhaps their babies are smaller, have the baby and off they'd trot home. So there was no in-patient facility. There were occasionally complications but

12:30 I only ever was involved in one complication when I was asked to see a lady who had, would appear to be dead about a week after delivery and I've no idea what she died from, she was already dead when I arrived but I think was some sort of infection. I saw cases of mongolism. It was interesting work. It was, I guess the disadvantage was not having tests or specialists to guide me.

13:00 We had all the modern medicines at our disposal. As I said the Vietnamese liked bright colours so the sodium salicylate tablets were very popular instead of aspirin. The sodium salicylate was red for the aches and pains. It was an American supply system and I remember the cough mixture was called novahistine, nova meaning Latin for nine. It had nine different ingredients.

13:30 In fact it tasted like a good sherry and that was a very popular thing. I suspect that some people, occasionally some people would say that they had an illness so that they would get some medicines. And I suspect some of them may have sold the medicines rather than used them and I expect some of them would've given them to the Viet Cong but we don't know that at all. We didn't ask questions, we had no military people with us. And I think this is the

14:00 reason why we weren't particularly harmed. It did intrigue us why people did not try and stop our work and when I went back to Vietnam with a friend of mine from the civil affairs unit, twenty years later, we deliberately asked that question of people in authority back in Phuoc Tuy why didn't you stop our Med Caps

14:30 or our medical clinics. Well, first of all you can't ask Asians a direct question, you never get a direct answers. And 20 years was too long to pass but to ask that question but basically we were told when we interviewed the deputy commander of the Viet Cong battalion in that province of ours which was D445, he said we knew you were doing these medical clinics, we knew other people were doing civil aid and engineering projects we

15:00 decided to tell the people to accept this from the Australians, accept it. But, remember they're only doing it to try and convert you to the other side, you stick with us. So therefore you have to wonder, you wonder whether we converted the villages that were already sympathetic to Viet Cong. I don't think we did. The villages that were not sympathetic and were on our side, they

15:30 were going to be on our side anyway. So I rather feel we were unable to achieve that and the villages were able to distinguish between gifts from us and they knew it, they were given in goodwill. And they were also able to distinguish between the Australian soldiers and their real enemy perhaps the government of South Vietnam. So I don't think that swayed them but we're glad they took that view. And they also said to us, when you left we would do our own

16:00 civic action project. I wasn't quite sure what they were going to do but anyway. So that – so we'd go to about 2 or 3 villages a day, as I said see a couple hundred patients. In the end, I thought we were seeing about a 1,000 patients a week which is a lot of work actually but we were seeing them pretty quickly. We had another program and incidentally these medical clinics, everything in the army has a name and these were

16:30 called MEDCAPs, Medical Civic Action Program. I think it's American of course. We also had another program called ICAPS and that was Integrated Civic Action Program and this was a bit different. What we'd do for that is we'd have a nice early dinner put on by the army cooks at about 5 o'clock in the

afternoon which we didn't eat virtually. We would then go

17:00 to a village and sleep the night, so half an hour, three quarters of an hour this was night time so we did have a protection party of between 12 and 30 soldiers depending on how friendly the village was. We'd put on our flak-jackets, we'd bring our rifles this time and we would again select a village 2 or 3 times a week we'd do this. And this was – this had extra meaning this one. I did the same thing,

17:30 so I'd set up my little clinic in wherever we would stay. Often a medical centre, often a school at night or the market place and I'd see my 100 patients or so. The record was 400 one night. Luckily we knew it was coming this was the big Catholic village so we had another doctor to come with me that day and I got the medical sergeant to also see them all and I'd be doing that. At the same time we'd have our

18:00 liaison officer there finding out from the village what they wanted us to do for them. It was a good chance to have a quiet chat with the village chief. But importantly we also brought along the psychological operations people and that's an American term. I don't know if we ever had that sort of unit in the Australian Army but we did have it Vietnam and they were also winning the hearts and minds. The psychological operations unit was the unit that dropped the leaflets saying 'Give up, join our side'.

18:30 Dropping leaflets from aeroplanes. They would do face to face contact with the villages telling them why they should join our side. They went out being friendly to everyone and we did the same thing. We were on that sort of thing in a minor degree. We were giving presents to people. Throw bandaids to the kids. We had no toys to give them so we gave them bandaids. And the psychological operations people would set up –

19:00 the main thing they would do that would be to set up a big screen, set up a projector and show a movie. And of course the Vietnamese loved that, free movies out in the warm night. The movie was always a propaganda movie. Any time I had a chance to glance at it it was always the same theme. There was a boy or a young man in the village and he was a nice boy but then he decided to join the Viet Cong and he left the village and then he saw the error of his ways

19:30 and he returned home and all was well. So, I suppose the psychological operations group, it's really like military advertising. So we worked closely with them at night. The other aim of those ICAPS was to gather intelligence and that was a hope of the Australia army that in winning their hearts and minds the villages may pass on to us intelligence about the enemy. In fact that virtually never happened and we

20:00 didn't bother asking. So that came…

Were you expected to ask?

No, no we weren't, no. That was more an early hope, early when the unit first started. And another use for the civil affairs unit early on was in cordon and search operations where you cordon off a whole village and search it for Viet Cong or any evidence and they would call our unit in to

20:30 you know because we had interpreters to talk to the villagers, explain what was going on. Maybe to say them look we're searching your village for Viet Cong but what can we do to help you? Is there something we can do t help your village? The time I was there, they virtually did not use us in that capacity really we were totally on our own except at night as I said when we used to sleep overnight in the villages. Get up about 7 a.m. and shoot home for

21:00 breakfast. We'd just bring our little stretchers, canvas stretcher sleep on that. Pretty hot, just all you needed was your underwear and a sheet on you and your mosquito net. Course you had to have mosquito nets the whole time because of the problem of malaria. We also had to take anti malarial tablet everyday called Palludrin or Progranil.

21:30 So that's…

You wouldn't eat in the villages?

Ah… no we wouldn't, we had dinner before we left and we didn't eat. It wasn't considered overly safe to eat in villages. But I have to say, my unit, we were supplied by the Americans for our ration packs. So when we were out, sometimes we used to come back to Nui Dat for the lunch but sometimes

22:00 equally as often we would not have time and we'd just eat out in the villages and what we were given was the American ration packs. Now they are, were not good, not good at all. So in general my unit said right we're going to eat in the local shops. So, our favourite food was noodles with something in it. Not quite sure what was in it half the time but noodles. We particularly

22:30 liked what were called VC rolls which was a roll of bread, remember the French were in Vietnam so the bread was good. And they used to have a sort of tinned mackerel and tomato and then they'd add a bit of cucumber. Did I survive that? Yes I did almost. We had a favourite fruit juice shop just out of Ba Ria. There was, and the serving behind the desk was probably the prettiest girl in Vietnam so

23:00 it was a very popular shop but unfortunately that's where I got my attack of dysentery I'm sure. They used to crush the fruit juices and they'd serve them in a little polythene pack with a straw and rubber band around it and that's where I think I got my dose of bacillary dysentery which laid me low for about

10 days but otherwise I was very lucky. Others were not so lucky, my hygiene corporal who ate out

23:30 more often than I did was eventually sent home from Vietnam with a huge amoebic abscess on his liver and had half his liver removed. So, these were the – so perhaps the culinary or the food aspects were more dangerous than the Viet Cong.

What about the villages would you not be offered food by people you were helping?

We would be offered food a lot and quite often at night and sometimes yeah we would have it. We would definitely have it. I can remember one village that we went to

24:00 at night, they gave us a fantastic meal of pork, greasy pork actually, and we had to wash that down with their favourite brand of strong powerful rice wine. Where occasionally they're – and they're always homemade and sometimes we had to wash it down with a green liqueur. I never did ask where the green came from but that night in Dat Do after the

24:30 green rice wine and after the pork, was – had the worst indigestion or gall bladder trouble I don't know what it was and our other problem that night was it must've been there were the Chinese Festival people were in town. Now a Chinese opera goes for about 6 hours, and about every minute they bang on something extremely noisy and our vehicle, we decided at that time to sleep in a truck, cause we didn't want to be robbed, so we knew in a truck

25:00 you know they won't climb up on the truck and there was our team trying to sleep in this truck. We've had the green white rice wine and the pork, we've got the worst indigestion and we've got this Chinese opera going for 6 hours so that was probably one of the more restless nights. I remember once the village priest invited us for sherry and things like that. We had some official meals where we'd go out to a restaurant in maybe Ba Ria. I

25:30 also have a very vivid recollection of one restaurant that we were in a habit of going to once a week in Bin Jar Market. It was a sole owner, sole cook restaurant and one week when we arrived, this gentleman who was the cook and the waiter came up to serve us and he was deep orange colour. As orange as an orange, he had hepatitis,

26:00 infectious hepatitis. So in those days there was no prevention for hepatitis. Now there is an injection you have to prevent you getting hepatitis. In those days the only possible thing once you've been exposed was the anti globulin in the backside about 10 mils extremely painful and probably only I don't know 25% effective. Anyway I said to my

26:30 chaps there were about 3 or 4 of us, I said right chaps we're going back to get that hepatitis injection. And they said no way, no way, we've checked it out, hepatitis gets you back to Australia. I thought about it okay I'll stick with you I won't have the injection either. None of us got hepatitis luckily but we were a bit more carefree in those days. When I later, for the last 8 weeks, or 7 or 8 weeks I was at the Australian hospital and I was

27:00 seeing cases of dysentery, malaria, hepatitis all the time. I thought my godfather, gee, you can get these things. You can get them. Of course there's no treatment for hepatitis you normally get over it yourself. So I gave the gentleman 7 vitamin tablets so that at least if he got better we'd get the credit. He took 1 per day and a week later he was better. I had my hygiene corporal check out his

27:30 restaurant. He said there were rats, there were flies, there were pigs, it was in the outdoors and that put us off a little bit eating outdoors. But my men were keen on the local, on local eating and of course it was unbelievably cheap I'm sure. We carried water bottles with us but our favourite drink would've been Coke and what they would do is

28:00 a village restaurant shall we say, would get a large, large, slab of ice delivered at the start of the day from the central place in Ba Ria. They would cover it in sawdust to stop it melting and of course they don't have refrigeration so when we have our bottle of Coke they would tip the bottle of Coke into a large glass and they would get their slightly grubby hands and chip off a block of this fly-ridden bit of ice and plonk the ice in our

28:30 Coke but if you're thirsty enough – if you're thirsty enough you'll drink it. The two later times in my life when I revisited Vietnam I did not adopt that attitude we were very, very careful. When you're a bit old you don't take so many chances. So they're the sorts of diseases we saw. I didn't see much in the way of psychological diseases.

29:00 I know, I remember one village chief who was extremely anxious and couldn't sleep at night because he thought the Viet Cong were going to kill him and of course they were so we couldn't do much about that. We also did a number of other things, when there was the outbreak of plague we were requested to give about a 1,000 plague injections to the village where they were expecting

29:30 that outbreak and in Phuoc Tuy depending on where you were in that province you were more prone to certain diseases. For example plague would be more expected in coastal areas where there were rats. So that was down in the south, Long Hai or Phuoc Hai. Malaria was more in the – more wooded or forest areas or rubber tree plantation areas in the north of the province. And I remember making a note that other worm infestation

30:00 called ankylostomiasis where the earth was richer and another condition was more common phylloraxis which gives you very fat elephant like legs. That was also commoner in other areas. We learnt this on the job. We did have some contact with the doctor in charge of the Ba Ria Hospital. Doctor Vong, V.O.N.G., but in general he got with his work at the

30:30 hospital and I got on with my working going around the villages. You could say I maybe more profitably employed working at the hospital but I guess our aim was to gain support from the villages so that was really what we did in the end.

Do you think it was more that than medical than actually getting people through illnesses and so?

Do I think…?

The idea of winning hearts and minds

31:00 **I mean obviously it had that…?**

Well the army was my employer and that was their brief. I did go against that a little bit in that I said to them you shouldn't choose a village according to whether they're wavering on the other side and then ignore a village that's already on our side. That's not very humanitarian so I said let's go to the Catholic villages more, they like us and they all turn up. That's not to say they didn't turn up at the Viet Cong villages.

31:30 Some we were popular some we were not so popular. Hoa Long was never a great turn up. But that was my idea that you should do it on more humanitarian not military propaganda purposes.

So those villages where you were less popular, was it just a matter of the numbers not being there or were there other expressions of that distrust or?

No just the numbers not being there and perhaps the local health technician not joining you, not being

32:00 seen to be with you. But you could win them round for example there was a village called Hoi Meh that was a very, very anti Australian and Viet Cong infested village and I remember the first time I went there not a single person turned up and it was midday and you'd think it was the Spanish siesta. There was no one on the streets. I think they'd been give the word but we went there and within a few weeks, that was a village that actually a reporter came with me once. And I remember

32:30 reading his report and he said we had 100 people all yelling 'ouck deloy number one' and queuing up, now that's his words. 'Ouck deloy' means Australia. 'Ouck deloy number one' is they like you that sort of thing. Did we learn any Vietnamese? I didn't learn so much Vietnamese because I had an interpreter. We knew some words, you know I knew Vietnamese for cough which is 'hoh', Vietnamese for belly ache which is 'darbomb',

33:00 Vietnamese for headache which is 'nook dou'. I would be able to say chow ong, chow em, chow bar depending on whether it was man, woman, child that sort of thing. And a couple of other words that Australians used a lot, one was 'zin loi' and that means bad luck, stiff shit, that sort of thing and another was 'diddy mow'

33:30 because so many people were often crowding around. Every now and then you had to say the word 'diddy mow' which means go away. And the other word that's very useful to know, probably the best word to know in Vietnamese is 'choy oi' that means 'oh dear, what can you do about it, bad luck what can we do' you know so they were the words that – and the other thing that you have to remember about Vietnamese that they think it's impolite to say no. So if

34:00 they asked you – if they asked you were you married, you weren't allowed to say, "No," you would say, or they would say, "Not yet." Or, "Have you been to this or that?" and the answer was, "Not yet," not, "No." We did get – we did have some interesting cases, I think probably the two cases that I

34:30 remember most was first of all I took an interest in hare lip and cleft palate children and the reason for this was twofold I guess. Children who are born with any deformity in Vietnam or Asian cultures, particularly one that makes you look disfigured like a hare lip or a cleft palate they were often ostracised by society, even sometimes they weren't allowed to go to

35:00 school. And of course there was no plastic surgery really available to them from the local surgeons. So they just went through life being disfigured. And I saw one and then I made enquiries and it turned out that there was an organisation, a world organisation called The Children's Medical Relief Organisation and they had a unit in Saigon called the Barskey unit which did plastic surgery.

35:30 International surgeons, nurses, nice air conditioned hospitals, or not – a small unit set in the big public hospital in Saigon but run on Western lines and they said if you can get the patients to come to us we'll treat them. Now the problem was first of all to find these cleft palate and hare lip patients.

36:00 They didn't always come to my clinic. If one came for something else, great I grabbed them and I persuaded the parents to either take them into Saigon, the 70 miles, or if they said no we can't, we can't afford to, or we trust you, I would then take them in by Land-Rover or by RAAF [Royal Australian Air

Force] plane. And then we started to search for them. We wanted to find more and more and

36:30 in 6 months we found 20 which is I don't know, that's bad I think the incidence is about 1 in a 1,000 so I guess there might've been a 120 of them lying around in our province, we found 20. And that was very satisfying. The parents were extremely grateful. Now again we had to play it the Asian way not the Western way because in Western medicine when a patient has a cleft – a hare

37:00 lip, and then that cleft or divided palate what they do is they always in Western medicine repair the lip first and then 3 months in a separate operation they repair the palate. They couldn't do that in Vietnam because if they did the lip first the patients never returned for the palate because they looked all right on the outside. Sure they still had nasally voice but they looked all right.

37:30 So they had to reverse it and the other thing they found with these patients is again there were lots of vitamin deficiencies and they had to give them vitamin K before their operations otherwise they would have bleeding tendency. And that was the same, I think, with the medicine that I dispensed, I gave a lot of vitamin tablets iron and folic acid because there was a lot of anaemia and iron deficiency because their diet was rice and not much else. Tiny bit of

38:00 fish, chilli and to flavour the rice they would have some sauce 'Nuk Narm." Now Nuk Narm sauce is black evil, like pure – like anchovy sauce. What they do is they get fish out of the water, the sea, I've just forgotten the type of fish now but little small ones, might even be sardine type

38:30 fish and then they leave it out in the sun, so you wonder what gets on this if it's left out in the sun for weeks till it dries, and then they mash it up and it's a very black, black sauce. So they're the – and the other case that I remember was the night that I was in that village that I mentioned in Bin Jar, a Catholic village where we did the ICAP at night where we had 400 patients

39:00 because towards the end of that clinic the nurse that used to work with us brought along her sister. And she looked deathly pale. She was about 18, she looked deathly pale and she was bleeding from the nose, bleeding from her lips and had all bruises on her – over her body. Now I didn't know what that was. I actually thought it may have been

39:30 leukaemia because in leukaemia the things that stop you bleeding like platelets are decreased. And so, there was nothing much I could do except I started her on some prednisolone or cortisone tablets because I knew that that works in leukaemia but I really wasn't sure. I told her the very next day to go down to Ba Ria hospital. She went there, they did nothing for her over the next 24 hours

40:00 so her family took her out of that hospital. I said right, let's drive you to Li Loi Hospital in Vung Tau again a Vietnamese Hospital. At least there they named the disease and remember that Vietnamese medicine is very French influenced. This is, the French had only left 16 years before and the Vietnamese doctors learnt in French. They learnt French textbooks. So they called her – diagnosed her as 'anaemia

40:30 grava haemorhhagic' which all it really says is 'a severe bleeding anaemia' again we weren't any further so by this time I'm thinking this girl, we did a blood test on her she had 5 grams haemoglobin in the day I did the blood test, 2 days later she 4.3 grams, we're meant to have 12 to 14 so she was slowly bleeding to death. So I then asked the

41:00 Australian military hospital in Vung Tau would they take her. And they agreed, but remember that the Australian military hospital was really only meant for Australian soldiers so they said look we'll take her but it's got to be for 24 hours. But at least they were able to do some accurate blood tests and they found that her platelets were low. So we decided on the basis of that, myself and the doctor, the specialist physician at the hospital, decided that she had idiopathic thrombocytopenic

41:30 purpura, it occurs in young people. It's a type of perhaps auto-immune condition where the body attacks all the platelets. Your spleen gets large and you bleed and the treatment is high doses of cortisone and prednisolone. So we knew we only had the overnight stay at the Australian field hospital so I thought she's got to be treated now, let's take her to the main hospital in Saigon.

42:00 So I put her in the Land-Rover and I take her…

Tape 6

00:33 **So John you were telling us about the story of the young lady with… I won't repeat what the diagnosis was but you …**

ITP.

ITP, indeed, you'd taken her to Saigon.

So I have the day off and I take her into Saigon to the general hospital at Choe Rae Hospital and I had been there before because part of our job in the civil affairs unit was to be slightly au fait with the

medical set-up so I visited places like

01:00 the medical school in Saigon. So we took Win Tea Tam into the Choe Rae Hospital thinking that that's the biggest hospital in Vietnam they'll know what to do. Unfortunately when we arrived there, the doctor in casualty said she has haemorrhagic fever which is an often fatal infection that you receive, I've forgotten now whether it's a rickets style infection

01:30 or not and I said, "No, no, please" anyway and he said she'd have to go to the infectious diseases hospital. But anyway, I prevailed upon him and was able to convince him that she did have this idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura and he agreed to admit her under the lady Professor of Medicine. And there I left Win Tea Tam

02:00 almost but the professor said to me look you've started the prednisolone, it's going to take several weeks for her to get anywhere near what her blood levels should be, she needs a blood transfusion urgently. And I said, "Right well give it to her." And she said, "But we don't have any blood in our hospital, we don't have any blood at all." So they did not have any International Red Cross.

02:30 So she said we could actually give her 2 pints we will give her that amount but she'd have to pay for that. So she paid for that or I paid for it and she said but what we do need and the blood that we have is not fresh, platelets don't survive long. She said you have got to get some fresh blood. So I said right, so what we did then is we went off to the 3rd American Field Hospital and the Americans are very generous. Australians would want to know why

03:00 but the Americans said, "Yeah what do you want? Okay. Yeah 2 pints of fresh blood, you can have that, yeah anything just take it. Yeah go for it." So we got the blood we'd cross-matched it by then, gave it to the professor and she got her blood. I went back to Nui Dat and I came back about 2 weeks later to see her a whole lot better. All the bleeding stopped, the bruising had stopped and I was quite flattered by the Professor of Medicine because it was obviously a very rare case in Vietnam, and she said look

03:30 I'd like you to tell the students all around the bedside a little bit about this case so of course I had read up on it by then so all in all that was a satisfying case. Was there any cure for this girl? Would she get it again? I don't know. She didn't have a relapse I remember whilst I was there. She may have got a slight relapse and we increased her cortisone dosage. I knew she was going to get married several months after I left. I don't know whatever happened to her.

04:00 There is another treatment for it and that is to remove a person's spleen. But I think you would be very game to do that in Vietnam so we didn't recommend that or even attempt to tell her that. So often used as an example of you know a lot of our examinations are very cursory or but sometimes we were able to do good things.

So how many days were you away from the camp?

I'd come back each night. I'd get back at night.

So was there anyone

04:30 **there to cover your duties?**

Oh no the medical sergeant went off and did all my Med Caps in my absence, yeah.

So would the medical sergeant been in a position to do that from day one or was that or was that because they lacked experience?

Yes, yes, yes, he would – he would. He'd seen the doctor operating and working. People often ask too do we do many operations out in the field, we didn't, we did very few. The only things I ever did was open up abscesses and I remember that

05:00 then we'd give them antibiotics and they would always work brilliantly. Presumably there was no antibiotic resistance amongst Vietnamese. We think they were very grateful. They were very friendly. I used to get presents of mangoes. I had so many mangoes I'd always have them in my tent and within days they'd be rotting so in the end I wish we'd never had mangoes. The family by the way, of that girl that we looked after with the ITP,

05:30 we remained friendly with them because remember her older sister the nurse, was one of the nurses in the Bin Jar village that I used to attend. And her family who were relatively well off through a great feast in our honour. So it was myself and medical corporal and my driver and we all came for a big feast of chicken to celebrate. So that was a very satisfying episode, very satisfying.

Sorry John, what about with

06:00 **the kids with the cleft palate or harelip and you said you had to Land-Rover them out?**

Yes some of them would go on, about half of them would go on their own accord with their parents. Some of them the parents couldn't or wouldn't take them into Saigon so we would go to the village in the morning, pick up the little child who was aged you know 3 to about 10 and often, more often than not, we'd then go to Nui Dat and catch the Wallaby Airlines, if I remember rightly, Caribou

06:30 Aircraft to Saigon. We'd then take them, we'd have an Australian medical – an Australian Army Medical Corps Land-Rover waiting for us at the airport and they'd then take us to the hospital. Sometimes the parents picked them up but certainly on some of the occasions I used to pick them up myself and take them back to the village a couple of weeks – a week or two later. And the times I did that of course the child had a great home coming form the parents. They were the most dramatic cases

07:00 I guess. We really did have to hunt these people down because they were – they did not know that anything could be done. And I guess we wanted to do it both for the impact on the person themselves because they were not accepted in society. It was considered that their parents were inhabited by the devil or the Vietnamese equivalent but also I think it was a good propaganda thing for us to prove that we could do things that they imagined could not be done.

07:30 And our ways of finding out, we used to find the best way when we went to a village we would talk to the boy who was the ice cream seller. He was the one with the block of ice on his little funny converted bike and bike chest, and ice chest, with a few little icy poles in it, we'd ask him because he'd have his fingers on the pulse. We ended up in all sorts of places. Barry Smith the liaison officer and

08:00 myself had heard about one cleft lip and palate child and we went right through this village looking for his child and we finally found the child in the local bar and that's where we finally tracked that one down. So that was probably one of my major – if you have a project I guess that was my project.

08:30 What were the conditions like on the road? As I said, hot, dusty, dirty roads. A lot of bullocks on the road and you'd have to go round them. Lambros everywhere, a Lambro is an Asian bicycle that's got like a little van on the back, three wheels, noisy like a lawnmower. A Lambro, I think it comes from that Lambretta bike,

09:00 would carry two Australians if you're lucky, four, five Vietnamese. Three pigs, you could on a Lambretta, a Lambro or a whole lot of hay or produce. It was their fantastic car. The front was like a motorbike with handles and that was your one wheel on the front and the back was like a mini little truck or van. And occasionally had a ride in those but they were all over the highways. Most the countryside was flattish,

09:30 rubber trees in some areas. No real jungle, seaside down towards the south. A couple of the villages we went to, you could not get there by road. One of them was Long Son Island which was situated in the south east of the province among the mangrove swamps, so we used to fly there by helicopter and we'd stay the day there. Long Son Island we also gave them a water reticulation

10:00 set-up and we gave them a medical centre so they were favoured. The other village was the village of Xuyen Moc which was in the far east of the province. We were only allowed to go certain roads in the province and they covered about two thirds. We were not allowed to go in the northern one third of the province it was unsafe and we were not allowed to go in the eastern one third beyond Dat Do. And Dat Do if you may remember was the place where they had the minefield

10:30 put down by the Australians from Dat Do south to the coast to stop the Viet Cong crossing across. To keep the Viet Cong down towards the coast and to keep them from infiltrating the villages but all the Viet Cong did were pick up those mines and plant them so that our chaps were – walked on them. So we kept away – we always kept on the main tracks. The road beyond Dat Do, we were not allowed to go. So Xuyen Moc

11:00 they flew us by helicopter there. Dropped us there for the 3 or 4 hours and then came and picked us up again. It was good to go by helicopter we could get an idea of all the scenery. We weren't particularly worried, we were told the Viet Cong did not have weapons to reach helicopters. Well that wasn't true anyway. Soldiers always like to feel they're safe. In many ways I think

11:30 we were fairly blasé I don't recall even putting seatbelts on in the helicopter. The helicopters they used to transport were the familiar Iroquois ones. Our other duties, we'd do this about 5 days a week and I would say about every 2nd Saturday. Every other Saturday, we would drive to the big American base at Long Bin to collect our medicines.

12:00 So we'd drive about 50 miles, about two thirds of the way to Saigon and we'd go to the Long Bin American base. Now that place was so big that once we got in there we often couldn't find our way out again and I was reading recently I think it was something like 6 miles by 7 miles so no wonder we had trouble. And it was there that I learnt about the size of the American war effort. For example, I think the Australian Army

12:30 probably had 3 buses to transport troops if we were lucky. At Long Bin I saw a big junk yard with 100 crashed American green khaki army buses, just crashed ones. And they just dumped them there they haven't got time to repair them. The medical supplies depot we went to was my first, this is back in 1970, my first

13:00 confrontation with the computerised world because everything was computerised. You have to ask for one unit. Now one unit could be 100 tablets or it could be 1000 tables so you had to be very careful. You couldn't just say I want 100 tablets of this you had to say you wanted so many units and you had to get it right. The Americans were very, very generous and we would make our order and two weeks later we would come and collect it. And we would take away a whole trailer load

13:30 full of things. I learnt about the problems of computerisation there also in that I wanted a laryngoscope to put down people's throat to look at their vocal chords. And the Americans said I'm sorry this does not come as a computerised unit. If you want a laryngoscope we have to give you the entire anaesthetics apparatus for a 100 bed field hospital so I said forget it,

14:00 forget it, it doesn't matter just keep it. And it all came out on those computerised forms that we're now quite used to. Long Bin was also a good place because after collecting our – and again this would be, about 3 of us would go, a driver one of the corporals and myself, after collecting the medical stores we would go to the base Chinese restaurant which was air conditioned.

14:30 And that is the only air conditioning I ever, ever experienced in Vietnam so that was great. All right, now…

You need your notes now, don't you?

I need my notes.

How about I take this opportunity to ask you a few questions?

15:00 **I was just hoping we could get a picture of your team just if you could tell us who these individuals are and how you all worked together?**

My driver was Graham Smith or Smithy he was a National Serviceman. The driver of my 2nd vehicle his name escapes me now I'm afraid, they drove the Land-Rovers at all times. They looked after the servicing and Land-Rovers needed servicing every 2nd week amazingly so. My

15:30 medical sergeant was Dan Gregory, in following when he left it became Henry Jackson. My medical corporals, 2 of them were National Servicemen, one was John Mile from Tasmania the other was Ian Evans from New South Wales and I had one further one who was a regular army a chap and his name was Bob Kelly and then my hygiene corporal was

16:00 Bob Jolly. He again was National Service. Their job – the driver's job was to drive me to the place. To go and get us morning tea and to guard the vehicle because we had to – otherwise our weapons would be pinched. My camera was pinched so we had to have someone on guard duty at our vehicle. My medical corporal was there to help dispense the medicines along with the Vietnamese nurse. My medical sergeant would

16:30 either dispense medicines or sometimes he would play the doctor role as well if we had a very busy clinic. So we were a team and they learnt on the job. They were their roles. The other things that we got involved with occasionally we also used to visit the Chew Hoi Centre. A Chew Hoi

17:00 is a person who turns themselves over to our side on the so called Hoi Chan Program. Now they do that either on their own accord because they want to leave the Viet Cong or they do that because any weapons they bring in they're given money for that so I used to go to the Chew Hoi centre about every 2nd or 3rd Saturday to a least treat the patients that were in the Chew Hoi centre which was a temporary holding place while I guess they were re-educated.

17:30 We used to make visits to the local hospital but in general we didn't get involved with the local hospital. I did give them gifts of scalpels, scalpel blades any other equipment. They did say to me thank you very much for those scalpel blades but they were so sharp and we're not used to sharp ones we almost went right through the patient when we started incising so but we would give them as much equipment as we could.

18:00 Blood pressure machines anything that the Americans would give us I would hand over to them.

So the Americans were just giving these things away or were they paid for in time to come or…?

No, no, no, most of them I believe all the medical stores and equipment was from the Americans and it was under the US AID Program, United States Aid to International Development

18:30 and that program ran – that program allowed for that. And some of them were donations from Australia. I mentioned the hygiene kits for all the pregnant ladies they were donated from Australia. At various times different things were donated from Australia by well meaning people. Sometimes it was agricultural equipment it wasn't always suitable and sometimes it was condensed milk and most Asians are allergic to milk so unfortunately a lot

19:00 of people did send up inappropriate things. Other times, another time I can remember we were in a village and an American unit said look we've just captured a Viet Cong fishing boat here's the fishing net. It's a big fishing net, very valuable for a fisherman so we wondered what to do with it. My Vietnamese interpreter whose name is Quon. Quon was a bit older than us, he was about 30 and Quon was basically a playboy, I know. Quon said

19:30 right we sell it we have a big feast. We drink the Balmy Bar Beer which is what they call their Beer 33. And I said no, no, Quon I'm afraid we find some poor fisherman and we gave it to the fisherman, at least we made someone happy. Later on I had a second Vietnamese interpreter who worked with us just in

case we had two clinics going on at the one time and we chose

20:00 a chap who had lost his hand when a Viet Cong attack resulted in a 3,000 volt wire amputating his hand. He wasn't as good an interpreter. Sometimes we used to – we were friendly with families who deserved help. One family I've got a photo of had 12 children so we used to give them a little bit of extra help or extra medicines. You –

20:30 there were people that you would know from each time but seeing 1,000 patients a week you can imagine it's hard sometimes for continuity. I used to try and write down their things on cards but then I wouldn't know which hundred would turn up and what their full name was and I don't know if my card system really worked all that well.

How did that work? Or how was it supposed to work?

Well theoretically if I did something for them the week before and I wrote it on a card when they queued up one of

21:00 my men would have to ask them their name and look for the card which we may or may not have left it in the dispensary or we had brought with ourselves so it didn't work so well that sort of thing – Western system didn't work quite as well. A lot of people ask – one of the common questions people ask is did you see – no, always ask this one, did you see any

21:30 concert party shows, any Australian concert party shows. Now, unfortunately they did come to Nui Dat but I must've been always busy. They did particularly go down to Vung Tau and we used to go to Vung Tau on R and C, Rest and Convalescence, convalescence is the word, about once a month we were meant to go but we were so busy I think we got there about once every two months.

22:00 And you'd go for a weekend and if you were lucky you might catch an Australian concert show. I remember being there once and I could see it from a distance but I didn't really attend it. It did not play a large role in my life, in my time there. I think some of the troops would've enjoyed it. Lorrae Desmond up on the stage, that sort of thing. Johnny O'Keefe would've gone there.

22:30 Little Patty, the Deltones and whoever they are. People from that era they all enjoyed going. We never received a Bob Hope show he always went to the big places like Long Bin. What sort of entertainment did we have in the camp? Okay, entertainment, I think drinking was probably entertainment for a lot of the

23:00 troops. Remember the camp situation was segregated there was an Ors' [other ranks] mess where the other ranks sergeants – corporals, privates downwards went and ate. There was the sergeants' mess for the sergeants and the warrant officers and there was the officer's mess. So you didn't socialise after hours with different ranks. That's the army system, I don't know whether it's still the case. I wasn't a

23:30 big drinker at that time and still am not but I do recall all the nicknames we had for the beers. We'd either have a green, a yellow or a blue. Yellow was the XXXX, green was the Tooheys and blue was the Fosters. No, round the other way green was the Fosters or VB [Victoria Bitter] in those days and Tooheys was blue. That was 5 cents a can and soft drinks which we called 'gofers', I don't know

24:00 why, "go for it' might be, soft drinks were only 10 cents they were twice the price. Other entertainment that we had in the officer's mess were movies about 3 times, 3 nights a week. Remember I'm at the village night time medical clinics about 2 nights, about 10 nights a month, so yeah about 2 nights a week. So we'd often say we'll give it the first reel, see what the movie

24:30 was like. My favourite movie from the time was Peter Sellars, The Party, I thought that was hilarious. The other movie I remember was the movie, Battle of Britain, but the chaps liked comedy, they didn't like any serious movies. They'd be out in the open, you'd bring your own camp chair and sit down, your old camp deckchair.

25:00 You'd write at night, remember we were pretty busy so you'd spend your time writing. You were a bit domesticated, you'd have to do your washing. Not all the campsites had the facilities that our civil affairs unit had. Remember we had engineers, we had tradesmen galore so we had the best shower system in the camp but even that was

25:30 only working morning and night so you had a shower, talked, read books, read the Age. In fact my parents after awhile decided to send me up Saturday morning Age. Remember no telephones. We could send telegrams but they were according to a formula and you could put down phrases and there were a hundred different phrases and you put down number 3,

26:00 number 10 and number 2 which might mean, having a great time, miss you a lot, see you soon, so that was useless. So writing letters was probably the best way but the good thing was tapes. Tapes had just come in then and they were cassette tapes. Reel to reel had just finished in the late 60s and cassette tapes had just come in so you

26:30 would tape yourself, average conversation might be about 20 minutes with your little cassette recorder, you little $35 cassette recorder and you'd post the tape. It'd get to your wife in about a week, your wife or girlfriend or family in about a week's time and I guess another 4 or 5 days or another week you'd get

a reply back. Tapes were great.

You were getting a tape back were you?

Mm, about once every week

27:00 to 10 days would probably be the case I don't – I'm not sure whether I kept any tapes, I wish I had. I think I may have, but I seemed to have – they're in a box somewhere, some tapes have been kept. What is interesting on one of the tapes I did listen to years and years ago was all the background noise, it was very interesting because what – the way to defend Nui Dat was not only

27:30 to have sentries every so often, remember it was a couple of miles but it was also to have a, I think it was called, a fire free zone for 3 miles around therefore, at night the 105 or 155 artillery would fire artillery rounds into that zone. And I don't know how far the artillery was away from me, it might've been half a mile but it was very noisy.

28:00 Wakes you up and you could hear that on the tapes. We could also hear when we were in the villages at night because you can hear so much better at night, we could hear sometimes depending if the village was on the side of a hill we could hear distant battles, distant bombings. It would seem to be about 10 or 15 or 20 miles away. Did we have any great troubles? One night when we were in a village out of Long

28:30 Dien, our guarding party of whatever it was, 20, 15 soldiers had a contact on the perimeter where they were guarding us and I guess they would surround us they'd be 300 metres around us I guess to make sure for safety and they had a contact with Viet Cong. There was a bit of a short exchange of fire and nothing else happened after that. We

29:00 reassured ourselves in regards to that event because we were not slated to go to that village that night where the last minute we changed our mind so we suspect that the Viet Cong gave us a wide berth. We were also very friendly to the, you know, little boys in the village aged about 10 to 14. Give them the odd present, I don't know what we used to give them, bandaids and things like that, talk to them because in the 6 months

29:30 before I arrived there were 2 instances where when the MEDCAP was over and the Land-Rover was due to leave a boy in the village pointed out to a mine put under the Land-Rover tyres. So they were the kids who would be loyal to us but I had no – there were no incidents that involved me.

30:00 But I think it was very important for us to be non threatening. Even though we carried weapons and I had a gun in a holster, either on the, it must've been on the right side because I'm right handed. A bit strange when you're seeing patients and you have a gun in your holster but they were the rules that we had to wear those. We wore jungle greens, we wore the full army uniform, jungle greens which became jungle browns by the end

30:30 of your trip. That showed how long you'd been in Vietnam if your greens went brown because we used to use the local Bari washing service and I think they were in to recycling dirty water long before it was fashionable. As I said, often the officers of the civil affairs unit would go out maybe for a dinner with maybe some of the local people in Bari the province capital just for PR reasons. Often they would invite us

31:00 actually because they'd be thanking us. Not with me because I was on the medical side but there were often little ceremonies if a windmill was being open. They'd have a parade of you know 30 Vietnamese soldiers and that sort of thing. Did we see a lot of the military throughout our travels? Yes we did, we did, we were always seeing Australian Land-Rovers going up and down the roads and that was reassuring. We didn't see so many Vietnamese soldiers because

31:30 there weren't many regular so called ARVN, Army Republic of Vietnam soldiers in our province. They were mainly Popular Force and Regional Force soldiers who are one bit lower and they always stayed in the villages and the district centres so we didn't see a lot of those. Did we see the Americans? We say them a bit, it was our province but every now and then they would blow in an think they could do something

32:00 and then they'd leave so occasionally we saw them and I can remember one day going down a road and we saw at least 25 American tanks going past and that was always very reassuring. You know the more tanks the better. In general we didn't see those sorts of vehicles. Did I see any B52 bombings? I don't think I did. I think they were so high up you don't even see them. I did see bombings of the Long Hai Mountains. Now these are – this was a sanctuary for the

32:30 Viet Cong the Long Hai Mountain Range was in the south of the province. It had caves where the Viet Cong could hide. Every time our troops went into the Long Hais there were ambushes, there were mines. In the 2nd month I was there 8 soldiers were killed in one day. So the Americans bombed that a lot. I remember seeing Phantom 4 Bombers, Phantom 4 Divers, diving down and bombing. We used to see helicopters.

33:00 We had the plain simple Iroquois but the Americans had the very flash looking Cobra looking helicopters and they were very nasty looking with weapons on the front. I can remember one just

buzzing us for fun. Sort of swooping down and 'whoosh' doing that. We used to have contact with the village – the village chief was always a very important person so if there was a medical clinic the village chief would be the man

33:30 that you'd serve first. The other sorts of things that we came across were the Asian ideas of medicine. So if someone came to me with red blotchy things over their chest or over their back that was because they had a cough. And what they would get if they had a cough or chest pain, they would put

34:00 hot oil under rubber suction cups and it's called cupping and they would put it on their chest. It's a bit like why we use Dencorub if your skin is so hot and virtually they were getting slight burns from this hot oil and your skin is so busy absorbing the pain impulses you're not noticing the chest pain or the cough. If they had a sore throat they would indulge in cupping in their throat. They no doubt took a lot of

34:30 Chinese medicines. And I bought quite a lot of Chinese medicines just for fun and kept them for about 30 years but eventually I threw them out. Funny little coloured powders and things like that. And the other thing we came across was betelnut chewing. Everyone, if someone had a sore throat, or complained of a sore throat and were over the age of 35 I knew that when I asked them to open

35:00 their mouth I would see a black, reddy black mouth, tongue, lips and they'd spit the betelnut out right in front of me so you knew to stand clear. So betelnut chewing was very popular. I've been to Vietnam since and I don't notice it as much now. I'm told that they used to chew on this betelnut and it used to have some lime mixed with it and it somehow had some pain relieving effect. It may have been addictive but their mouths

35:30 were reddish black and it would slowly rot their teeth and gums away. Very distressing sight.

Where any of these treatments, Asian Vietnamese sort of treatments deemed worth adopting?

Not by me, no, and I didn't see any acupuncture. Not by me but they believed that they worked and of course a lot of illnesses you get over them yourself so it's not unreasonable to suggest that the thing you took

36:00 the Asian, the Chinese medicine or the cupping was the reason. And just talking about betelnut chewing and teeth, I suppose I really should mention about the dental side of the program. Whereas I was out in the villages every day, each of the doctors for the infantry battalions and there were three, the doctor for the artillery regiment that's the fourth and the fifth doctor from the hospital in Vung Tau would all spend half a day a week

36:30 doing the same sort of civil aid. So it was a reasonably concerted effort and it's also said that in 1970 when I was in Vietnam 1 in 12 soldiers was actually undertaking civil aid projects. So not was our unit performing civil aid projects but we were advising all the other units like the infantry battalions who might have 20 men working on a unit and each unit, each battalion would adopt maybe

37:00 a village and would do a project. Again it was organised by the civil affairs unit to work out exactly what the villages wanted and what they needed. Some of the mistakes we made include the fact that we sometimes gave them things that they didn't really want, sometimes we gave them things that weren't effective and sometimes we didn't involve them sufficiently so that they had no interest in maintaining. And the windmill saga is probably

37:30 illustrative of this. When you look at Phuoc Tuy the countryside looks a bit like the Australian countryside so someone said look the Southern Cross Windmills work beautifully in Australia, they'll work in Vietnam. They need water, and so eventually 14 windmills were placed around the villages and I guess they are an icon for Australians because even if you return to Vietnam now

38:00 they're still there and they usually have the village name on the top. Now we made a mistake, first of all the windmills were put over existing wells but in many cases there wasn't sufficient water in that well for the windmill for its pumping capacity to obtain that water. So, I guess that was an engineering problem, we made a mistake, there was sufficient underground water. The second mistake we made was a windmill requires constant maintenance

38:30 so I know how the windmill works but it was the mechanism that would break down. And I suspect that just about every windmill eventually broke down after we left and we were not able to teach the Vietnamese how to maintain it. So the windmill saga is interesting but things don't always work in Asian countries. As I said, we mustn't forget I

39:00 mentioned the other units that did civil aid and the other doctors that used to do half a day a week. All the dentists in the task force used to also spend about half a day a week on coming to the villages and doing dental work. Sometimes they would come with me, sometimes I would meet them there. And their dentistry was very basic. What they would bring would be a funny old wooden chair that they'd concocted and they would – their sole dentistry was

39:30 tooth extraction. So if someone had a tooth abscess and was in extreme pain they would've given them the injection, they would extract the tooth. And they were very busy doing that. The Vietnamese had very bad teeth. The rice was not good for their teeth. I'm sure they didn't use the latest toothpaste and toothbrushes. But that was very necessary because a tooth abscess can be extremely painful but the

dentist weren't able to do any caps or crowns,

40:00 amalgams and all that. On the other hand I did notice some local Vietnamese dentists in some of the larger towns and Vietnamese love gold so these dentists I noticed that their drills were not electric drills, they were run, they were powered by the dentist's foot. So it's a bit like an old Singer sewing machine. And I noticed the result, their little offices were like little barber shops and I noticed their results. Some of

40:30 the wealthier people would have these very – they looked like 9 carat gold, gold caps over every tooth. And the people who had those were very proud of their gold teeth, very proud. The other thing that perhaps I should mention, I've mentioned that going into Saigon at times, going to the Choe Rae Hospital,

41:00 dropping kids at the plastic surgery unit there. Very early on in the first month, we had a rule in our unit that you had to go to a one week, perhaps you may ask what sort of a training did we have and a lot of the training was on the job but all the officers in our civil affairs unit were sent to Saigon for a one week civil affairs course run by the Americans. This wasn't really so much medically involved, it was the general subject of civil aid

41:30 and how the country was going all the non military aspects of the war because the Americans realised that that was important and the various aid agencies that were available and the various organisations that did get involved. They all had many names, ACORDS [?], I've forgotten what that meant now, the United States Navy had the SeaBees [US Naval Construction Force] and we just learnt about that, we learnt about the…

Tape 7

00:36 **All right, okay, now you're just going to finish off talking about the briefings with the US about the civil aid unit, the economy of the country and such matters.**

So, that I found quite useful being on that course, but it was a bonus for me

01:00 with that course in that they were unable to put me up at the Australian Army officers' mess and I had to stay in the Intercontinental Hotel which was great to see the icon hotel where Graham Green spent his time in his famous book. And we later found out that the gentlemen in charge of that hotel was in fact a Viet Cong colonel, so he was able to spy for his side. The Continental Hotel

01:30 has changed since. It used to have open balconies where you'd sit and have drinks and all the boys would try and sell you things. Now if you go back to the Continental Hotel it's all been glassed in but if you watch Graham Green's movie starring that Englishman his name I'm now going to forget, the movie called The Quiet American they have created a computerisation recreation of Saigon in 1953

02:00 when that movie was set and it's fantastic, I don't know how they did it. They got all Citroens in the street, they've got the right age and the hotel looks like it used to be, so that's the power of computerisation. So after 6 months in the civil affairs unit, the commanding officer, the previous doctor had been there for a year but the commanding officer said, "Look one year is too much, you're going to go troppo if you do this for a whole year," so he agreed that 6 months was too much and I was destined to

02:30 spend the last 6 months of my time at the hospital. But before he intervened, there was a matter of Rest and Restoration, R&R and you had a choice when you wanted to do that and soldiers used to debate the pros and cons. You couldn't do it for 4 months but you could do it after 4 months. A lot used to say it was all downhill and you're all a bit depressed after you came back from R&R because seeing your loved ones for 5 days and then being dragged back to the war, it sort of made you

03:00 go back to square one. So anyway for reasons known to me I decided to do mine virtually halfway and so I went off to – flew in a Pan Am plane, this time, Pan American plane from Saigon to Sydney for 5 days R&R with my now pregnant, or pregnant wife Christine. One thing that I noticed with the Pan American plane as I may have mentioned before, here we had hostesses but no drinks.

03:30 But I have to say all the Australian soldiers cheered the first the hostesses went down the aisle which must have done their morale a whole lot of good. The plane was delayed several hours because we had the usual monsoonal downpour. The plane can't leave in all that – Ton San Nhut airport was about 2 feet under water. A great time was had on R&R but I have to say you're very happy the first day, the 2nd day you're fine, by the 3rd day your're thinking

04:00 uh oh I've only got 3 more days and I'm back to the war. I went back to Saigon, I had the worst laryngitis not helped by the diesel fumes and dust in Saigon. And then I went straight down to the hospital at Vung Tau. By this stage by the way, my replacement had come and I had handed over to the doctor who followed me, his name was Ghetis Goodzinksus, I think he was born in Latvia

04:30 he was a National Serviceman and he followed me and he was the last civil affairs doctor. He's now

Professor of Obstetrics at the London University. At the London Hospital at Whitechapel and I've seen him once since which was great to catch up with him. So I was down to the hospital which was the job I had put in for originally so I was happy. And I put in for the medical ward because I wanted to be a specialist physician. The cases that we had

05:00 down in Vung Tau it was different because first of all they were all Australian soldiers and New Zealand soldiers. On the medical ward again the things that dominated were – sometimes a lot of the things we saw were with the local Vietnamese, malaria, we had about 20 cases when I was there, some of them very severe. We had dysentery both bacillary and amoebic, we had hepatitis and we had an isolation ward for them. We had a steady stream of VD

05:30 cases, gonorrhoea, chancroid, syphilis. We had the odd thing like heat exhaustion. We had heat rash or prickly heat. Prickly heat is something you get in the tropics. I don't think you'd ever see anyone in Australia, not in Victoria with it. And prickly heat all your skin is red and has tiny little sand like things in it which are sweat glands which are swollen. And there's only one cure

06:00 for prickly heat and that's being in air conditioning, so a bit of the odd case of prickly heat. We had the rare things like the crate snake bites. We had the odd dog bite where there was a chance of rabies so we'd given them the anti-rabies injection for 10 or 12 days. We had the peptic ulcer maybe, the things like that. We had the occasional psychological condition but not many but

06:30 mainly they were infectious – infection diseases. Remember I was in the medical ward so my only contact with battle injuries was when a large number of injured soldiers would come in on our dust off helicopter system brought in by Australian air force pilots during the day but American Air Force pilots at night and they may

07:00 bring in 2 to maybe 10 at the very most. In that situation all the doctors and all the nurses had to go to the triage centre which is like a casualty station and I was on the number 3, the third most injured person. Each of those trolleys, or fixed trolleys would have if I recall two doctors, one nurse and one orderly. Everyone had their job to do.

07:30 The orderly, his job was to cut all the clothes. The radiographer would come in and x-ray them. The 2 doctors would work on the patient with resuscitation which would mainly be intravenous fluids, blood, putting in intravenous drips. The patient would then be readied for surgery and then the surgeons would take over our job was over. The surgeons would take over they would operate. If we had a very bad, a great number of injuries

08:00 then they'd get some of us medical doctors help assist in surgery. That happened a few times. And then the patient would go to intensive care and luckily at that time we had an intensive care specialist as well so we were very well off in that regard. In the medical ward I was, shall we say the resident or the registrar whatever you like to call it, underneath the CMF specialist who was

08:30 Doctor John Pern, who later became the director general of medical services for the army and he's actually a Professor of Paediatrics too. So he's a man of many, many talents. We had an orthopaedic surgeon, I remember helping the orthopaedics surgeon perform abdominal surgery which wasn't exactly his field but never mind he did the best he could. Life in the hospital was easier than being out on the roads

09:00 all the time. The bed was awfully hard I have to say, that was a problem. Vung Tau was a more salubrious place then Nui Dat and you were allowed into Vung Tau township but I think you had to be back by 10 o'clock but in fact I rarely did because we were on call at the hospital a lot and there really no great delights in Vung Tau that I was looking for.

09:30 Yeah we had – there was everything we could do in the hospital. During my time at the hospital there were distressingly quite a few friendly fire incidents which was unfortunate. Where accidentally, you know where artillery accidentally pounding our own troops, accidentally firing on our own troops, that was quite disappointing actually. There were also a lot of mine accidents. As there were,

10:00 had been for a couple of years. And the mine accidents were not easy to deal with because in general someone stood on a mine and it would blow away a large part of their lower body. So there were lots – quite a few amputations, that sort of thing. We had one helicopter crash, there were about 3 or 4 in the helicopter and I think about

10:30 2 or those died. Interestingly, they died of burns not other injuries because the fuel tank exploded on impact. I can remember, they seemed to have a party at the hospital about every Saturday night if I recall and I remember one party after a few drinks we heard the call to head down to triage and it's amazing that you do sober up very quickly

11:00 indeed. A lot of the specialists were there, were in their, I suppose, 40s late 40s and so they were highly qualified and the Australian Army was very lucky to be able to get them. In earlier years the situation had not been quite as good but when I was there some of the best surgeons and anaesthetists from Melbourne were there and from other cities too. So the standard of care was very good. We had the nurses

11:30 from the Royal Australian Nursing Corps. The hospital was fairly fixed. It was not at the tent stage. It

wasn't primitive it had been gradually improved over 3 years. We had radiology facilities. Some complex cases we had to send to the American hospital. We couldn't do everything, far from it. Thoracic surgery, I would say neurosurgery had to go off to the American hospital. Anything that required more than just a plain x-ray like for

12:00 example a barium meal went off to the Americans either at 36 Evacuation Hospital in Vung Tau or I think the 3 Field Hospital in Saigon. It was very interesting being there, very interesting indeed. And about, when I was heading for about my 7th month in Vietnam or at the end of the 7th month heading on to the 8th month, I knew I had about 4 months to go and I would be out of

12:30 National Service in 4 months time, the army said to me we will have a vacancy in Singapore in October would you like to go in return for staying in the army for another 2 years we'll post you to Singapore. So I decided that would be a good idea. Singapore was a very good posting and I thought it would be quite a good idea to stay in the army. They looked after the families in Singapore, so there was more varied medicine

13:00 and so I agreed to go to Singapore for 2 years and I think I was due to leave Vietnam in September to get there by the end of October and I said look do me a favour seeing I'm doing this just get me home a few weeks earlier and I'll see my first son being born. So they said yep you're on the 707. If there's any – this was all last minute, if there's any room and there wasn't. So

13:30 they said don't worry you can get on the Hercules the next day. Unfortunately the Hercules takes 4 days to get to Melbourne instead of 14 hours and I got there one day too late. But at least I made the effort. I came back on the Hercules with the wounded because the Hercules aircraft brought the wounded and sick people back. Sick if they were not going to get back to their duties within 30 days and wounded obviously

14:00 were not going to do either. So the Hercules was set up with all bunks for all the sick and wounded and it made an overnight or one-day stop over in Penang. It took them all, it took them oh I don't know how long about 4 hours to get to Penang but then it was about 16 hours from Penang to Richmond Air Base in New South Wales. I was just a passenger on the plane. The air force are in charge of their own medical evacuation and guard it very jealously. It was good to see Penang, the air base at

14:30 Penang, to see how well off the Royal Australian Air Force were. All the china and silver at the officers' mess and the movies and air conditioned theatre and the personal servants they had there and the finely clipped grass. It was very nice again. It made me think, mm, Malaysia is a very nice place and I was glad that I had agreed to be posted to Singapore with Malaysia not very far away. Also on going to

15:00 Penang, it was also a big – quite a surprise to me to see a country at peace because I'd always equated Asian countries with war so it was great to see an Asian country where they were all just going about their business at peace.

John, just before we get to Singapore though, there's a few bits and pieces back in Vietnam and one of them

15:30 **was, we talked about it earlier, about your relationship or the unit's relationship with the military – and that there were some tensions there?**

There sometimes seemed to be tensions. On my medical side, there was no tension, the doctors from the battalions were happy to do the half a day's work per week. The medical corps I wouldn't say were

16:00 that interested in the civil aid work and understandably so because their brief was to look after the medical needs of the Australian solider and they knew they had to do that and they knew that that was absolutely critical because no one wanted to lose soldiers. There were tensions though between the civil affairs unit in general and some of the other units who thought that are work was just the work of 'do

16:30 gooders' it was not relevant to the war and a lot of the perhaps infantry battalions their only contact with Vietnamese is Vietnamese enemy soldiers and it didn't really cause a problem but you did sometimes realise that they – 'they' the other soldiers in the task force, did not think as highly of our work as we thought they should.

17:00 It did not concern us because our funding and our decision making was virtually independent of the task force.

Did they just see it as irrelevant as what you were doing that there was no point in trying to sustain these villages? Or were they concerned about your contact with the Viet Cong?

No, they're military men, so naturally they're going to think that winning wars is the main thing. They didn't think we were helping

17:30 the Viet Cong. I don't think we were. I mean a few medicines don't help. I know initially they were hoping that we would get intelligence as a result – military intelligence as a result of our work with them but they'd obviously given that idea up because we were never instructed to find that our to try and pursue that.

Where you ever questioned about…?

No, no.

No?

No.

18:00 Not myself. We were lucky in that during the time that I was in the unit, I think there were some very good people in our unit I can mention some of them. Barry Smith, the liaison officer became eventually worked for the Department of Immigration and worked in Europe for several years. David Noble, the engineer, became the head of military engineering

18:30 for the Australian Army. the education officer, Mark Hitch, became the head of education for the Australian Army. Our CO became the Head of the Australian Army, Air Force and Navy, Peter Gration. And I'm told, I read that another member of our unit also became in charge of the Australian Army, Navy and Air Force. And it is said we are the only unit in the Australian Army unit that has produced two Heads of Defence –

19:00 two Defence Chiefs. So in many ways we – they've done well. Our CO at the time was in the engineers but unusually he had a Bachelor of Science, a Bachelor of Engineering and a Bachelor of Arts so we were not your average soldiering in many ways – in many ways. And just the reunion or activities that we've had since sort of reinforce

19:30 the positive aspects of our service really – certainly.

You were there also at a time when there were movements to wind, start winding up all the Vietnamisation that's happening because there were a lot of US troops that had been taken out just before you arrived?

Yes, that's true. Yes I think about 6 month's before I arrived, President Nixon enunciated the

20:00 Guam Doctrine or something like that, where he was going to pull out troops. I think he'd pulled out about 50,000 or 75,000 we still had about 550. No Australian troops had yet left. We had a feeling that the war was going to wind down sooner or later but it hadn't quite happened and in fact May 1970 it was suddenly announced that the American Army invaded Cambodia. So that

20:30 in fact escalated the war in many ways. Remember they invaded Cambodia to try and find the hiding place of the Viet Cong and they didn't find many Viet Cong but they certainly found a lot of military weapons. So that was actually an escalation of the war, so it hadn't really obviously wound down while I was there but there was, we knew that it was going to and there was always thoughts of 1 battalion – I think 1 battalion was going to be pulled out a few months after I left.

21:00 Protest movements had been gathering pace in Australia, certainly some of the earlier Vietnam veterans when they came back as unit were given tickertape receptions in the streets. And people forget the early days, they mainly forget the later times. I think Jim Cairns moratorium march may have been May 70 and of course I was in Vietnam then but I did not read much about it. I got The Age on Saturday

21:30 and if Jim Cairns demonstrated on Monday I didn't hear about it. That's the thing when you get a paper once a day – once a week and it didn't concern me. The demonstration – the moratorium was also in 1971 too. So I think, and you have to remember also that there was an election in Australia in December, from memory it was December 1969. That election was

22:00 Gorton versus Whitlam. Now Gorton was for keeping the troops or doing something like that. Whitlam was for bringing them home and Gorton won. So in December 69 a month before I left people were still in favour. And yet, by December '72 people were certainly in favour of removing our commitment. And when the Labor Party came to power they ceremoniously brought the troops home but what people forget is they brought home

22:30 about 50 troops. The rest had already been brought home before then but I think Whitlam was very happy to bring – to make a point of bringing those last 50 or maybe 100 and they were only advisors. So that's another myth, the Labor Party brought the troops home.

So what degree were you aware of what was happening inside the country? Say for example with you know the US troops being sent home and the prospect of that

23:00 **Australian battalion not going home at the end (UNCLEAR)?**

Oh yes I was aware.

I mean were you privy to very much information?

I can't remember now but I think I was aware of that but certainly none of that had happened while I was there. I think that battalion went home a few months, as I said, after I left. And the work for the hospital wound down quite quickly after that too.

So given that you were so much out in the field

23:30 **in these villages and you were seeing what the people were up against, how did you feel about**

the prospect of the civil affairs unit the aid being withdrawn in a year or so which was what it was starting to look like?

There was nothing I could do about it so I was happy that at least we provided a temporary benefit for them and hopefully a lasting benefit for some with improved health. My successor, who

24:00 was aware that it was going to be wound down, definitely, he did change the way that he provided medical aid. He changed it recognising that one day he wouldn't be there so he tended to see only patients that the local Vietnamese nurses didn't know how to treat or didn't know how to diagnose and he acted more as a consultant to tell them how to do it

24:30 and he would've given them more instruction. By the same token I think the statistics that I read, indicated that one month he saw something like 600 patients, so I guess he was seeing about 30 patients a day where I was seeing about 200. So he saw a lot less but in a consultant capacity and he was teaching the Vietnamese local nurses just to use the drugs that they had at their disposal. Whereas I was using every drug that we had our

25:00 disposal so I guess my approach was humanitarian at the time and his approach was realistic for the changed circumstances that he knew were about to occur. And he also felt that there may have been some element of competition between my doing the visits around the villages and the local hospital doctor who may have felt

25:30 undermined. May have, he never told me, or may have felt threatened. That's as I understand it and I've had a talk with my successor, we've had a good talk about it and we've found it all very interesting. But it'll always be a difficulty in providing aid to anyone. How much do you just give yourself and how much do you try and teach them how to do for themselves. It's a hard

26:00 balance. It's quite hard.

So on reflection, what do you think the balance is for you?

I did the right thing for the time that I was there and he did the right things for the times he was there, it was appropriate.

Were you able to see that there was development over the period of time that you were there in terms of people of knowledge and able to self medicate and…?

No I don't think I was able to gauge an

26:30 improvement in health, that would be very hard to see but certainly our civil affairs unit over the – talking to people we were able to ascertain that over the last year or two that we were there, that the things improved considerably in the whole province in that roads were built. Now if you build roads you enable farmers to bring their produce to the market. If the farmers do that then they make a little it of money.

27:00 The people in the – the larger villages get their produce and are healthier as a result. Building the school rooms, building the medical centres, all those sort of things, providing them with farming knowledge, that improved the economic situation and the place, when we left, was humming along reasonably. The Viet Cong were more marginalised, they were not silly, I think they decided not to take us on really but just to sort of

27:30 annoy us a bit you know make sure we knew they were still there but to wait for the day that we would leave because it's the same with Iraq today. I think they're in it for the long haul and they just waited they knew time was on their side.

So it didn't serve them to sabotage what you were doing?

It would not have served them one little bit. No, I think it would've turned the people away from them and that's the policy they seemed to adopt. Let the Australians –

28:00 let the Oook Delois give you gifts but don't be deceived by them. Take those gifts, take what you can get out of them. Take what you can get from them, why not. The Vietnamese, or the South Vietnamese are still quite commercialised type people. We – why not just get what you can.

Did you oversee any of the medical centres being built? Did you know anything about them?

No I didn't actually. Look they were very,

28:30 very simple structures. They were usually four walls, open windows I didn't oversee any at all. There would've been, there was a medical centre built on Long Song Island when I was there. There was one built at Hoi Me just before I arrived. No, that was an engineering thing it required no medical input because they were really just plain simple rooms. They required no architectural expertise I'm afraid.

29:00 Just – but it's good to have a room, just a room to treat people so they were very basic structures.

Okay…

The other thing I suppose, the other little funny tale that I can tell, strangely enough I felt safer in those

villages at night, staying the night in villages because I always knew we had a guard party.

29:30 I felt safer than in Nui Dat with its couple of miles by couple of miles and the reason was I had the misfortune of having the 2nd closest tent to the Viet Cong prisoner of war compound. The closest tent, was the psychological operations lieutenant. Of all the people in the camp we had to be next to prisoner of war compound. And in true, the Australian humour

30:00 does come out occasionally, and so an Australian soldier had put a sign on the front of that POW compound, and it was there for the whole time I was there, it was called the Play Boy Club but I've never heard any Viet Cong escaping I think they're treatment must've been reasonable. But just in case I used to have a gun under my pillow. I had by Browning automatic under my pillow. And unfortunately also,

30:30 we had – it was autumn by that stage and all the leaves from the rubber trees were on the ground and I had to learn to tell whether it was a man walking through those autumn leaves or whether it was a dog. Luckily we eliminated the dogs after awhile because rabies was a problem or if it was a mongoose. And in the end you can tell a mongoose and a human they make not quite much of a noise the mongoose. The mongoose were very aggressive,

31:00 they came into your tent at night looking for food and if they couldn't find any, I caught one one night chewing through my toothpaste. Now he had to chew through the metal. We called them mongooses, it sounds an American term doesn't it. It might've even been an Asian version of mongooses.

So tell me about the compound, POW compound?

I never went in it.

How secure was it?

I don't know I've no idea.

But was there a big barbed wire

31:30 **fence or…?**

Oh there would've been, there was a barbed wire fence. It wasn't particularly large, it was only a holding facility for I think several days until they were sent somewhere else. But yeah, it was put a bit close to our camp.

So you never treated any of them?

No I didn't, that wouldn't have been my responsibility. No, because it would've been the doctors at the – the one at the Australian task force hospital would've done that. And the odd Viet Cong

32:00 did – the occasional Viet Cong did get admitted to the Australian hospital. I didn't see any but just occasionally. Just occasionally that would happen, yeah. Alcohol, was alcohol a problem with the Australian soldier? I don't know, I didn't have enough contact with the average Australian soldier. Was it a problem with the Australian Army officers?

32:30 I think one or two, there were some officers did abuse alcohol. In general they were ones who had base camp duties. If they were out in the field they were not allowed to drink alcohol and they were not allowed to do it but if they'd been confined to base there may have been some problems with alcoholism. People ask about drugs, I never saw any problem with that. I'd seen surveys that

33:00 said marihuana that abuse in Australian soldiers in Vietnam was very low. I think in the Americans it was much greater. And certainly when I used to go to Long Bin I used to see a lot of Americans spaced out and just wandering around doing nothing which wasn't what you saw in an Australian camp. We often get asked what was morale like, as far as I could see it was excellent,

33:30 excellent, maybe I didn't see beneath the surface but morale was high and confidence was very high. The other… the army did feel a need to combat the alcohol problem and during my time there the commander of the base whose name was Black Jack Weir, put the men on

34:00 rations, two cans per man, per night. I think there was still enough for people to drink though because if any infantry man was out in operations for 10 days surely he would've accumulated 20 cans in his time and it stock piled but it was very strict you could not drink out on operations. And interestingly enough when we used to visit the American fire support bases which would be a base that might have, I don't know, 300 or 400 soldiers

34:30 that would – the fire support base would mainly be artillery and headquarters and the soldiers would be out they were not allowed to have alcohol full stop. So a couple of our chaps used to find it quite useful to trade the VB and Fosters with them in return for a television set or one enterprising fellow was able to acquire an air conditioner to improve his lot. Slouch hats were at a premium, the Americans would pay for that. Pay anything for one of those. The Americans always

35:00 respected us because they thought we were a bit quaint, us Aussies. With their military uniforms if they have three pips on their shoulder they are a 3 star general whereas we're just a captain so they were

always a bit taken back by that. We liked, in my unit, we liked to raid the PXs, [American canteen unit] their –PX what does that mean… the Post Exchange, that is

35:30 the American army department store in the field but in won't be in the field, it'll be in army bases where it was always said you could buy anything up to a Cadillac from it. You know, wouldn't have it on display. We had an Australian Army canteen store where we could buy a few cameras and cigarettes probably and things like that. But to go for really good things like pearls for your wife or you have to go to an American PX store and for some reason they used to forbid us to do that but nevertheless

36:00 we used to go in occasionally and try and buy something before they found out who we were.

Who would forbid you from doing it?

It was an Australian Army directive. Just after I arrived there they said Australian Army people are not allowed to purchase things in American PXs. I don't know why. I also visited the American – in Saigon I visited the – the Americans have an amenities unit for their soldiers, oh what's it called, okay,

36:30 I can't remember now. Used to always see it in the movies where there'd be poker machines as much Coke as you could drink, it would be the equivalent of the American Red Cross. Oh I've forgotten what it's called now. The poker machines were great because they didn't have to make profit so you could win quite often. You could have as much Coke as you could drink and donuts and things like that. The American, oh I've forgotten the word now, never mind. So we did have some

37:00 contact with Americans but not a great deal of contact and we actually preferred to remain separate. They fought their war a different way and we felt that we were in charge of our province. And we were happy for that to be like that but they were always very generous if ever we met them.

So they were always happy to sell you stuff at the PX?

Once we got away with it and once they found out we gave it up after being (UNCLEAR). Cause I mean look when you buy something it's a human condition isn't it. Imagine not being able to buy something for months and months that sort of thing.

So would that mean anyone who was going up to the base, the US base, where was it in…?

Oh Long Bin we used to go that's where sometimes be tempted?

They would detour via the PX?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. The Australian one would have just a few cameras the American'd have all the cameras. You know they'd have more stereo things. So really the Australian soldier the only things that he bought when he was in Vietnam were alcohol, cigarettes and if I remember rightly a camera and a tape recorder. He didn't – they didn't need much else. I don't recall them being into books all that much I'm afraid. There was no library, there was some sport at Nui Dat, not so much though, not so much sport a little bit. There

37:30 was more at Vung Tau because that was a fixed base. People had more time on their hands and you'd have more time to do that. We organised in our unit, we had the odd football match and the odd basketball match that sort of thing. People ask did I see any Agent Orange being sprayed, no I didn't. I understand they stopped it before I arrived

38:00 in Phuoc Tuy. A lot of people say they were drenched with the spray but in most cases that would be DDT spray for mosquitoes. Did I see defoliation? Yeah, yeah, the trees didn't seem to have any leaves on them. I only realised that when I went back 20 years later and there seemed to be trees and bushes everywhere. So all along main roads for example, they cut down the trees because

38:30 otherwise there was a danger of ambushing. Someone could just hide behind a tree and take a pot at you. So that's the thing I noticed when I went back 20 years later all along the roads we used to travel on were trees, a lot more greenery. And where before you'd go from one village to another, 20 years later because of the increase in population you didn't know when one village started and one ended. There were just houses all along the way.

Tape 8

00:35 **So you left Vietnam?**

So I returned to Australia on August 13th 1970 the day after my son was born and we had, Christine and I had about 6 or 7 weeks in Melbourne before I was due to go to Singapore on about October 31. Christine was worried about our

01:00 son Alex and living in Asia so she said in consultation with her doctor he's not going until he has his smallpox vaccination so Christine and Alex turned up about a month later because you weren't allowed to have smallpox vaccinations until you were about 3 months old. Singapore, I arrived and was – I was still a National Serviceman at this stage and in

01:30 fact to go to Singapore what was done was to extend my National Service by two years. I did not join the regular army just extended my National Service. You were able to do that and I was posted to the Garrison Medical Centre at Nee Soon and Nee Soon's about 8 to 10 miles north of Singapore but on the island and it was the home of the 28th Commonwealth Infantry

02:00 Brigade which consisted of one battalion of Australian soldiers, of which Jeff Kennett was there at that stage but I didn't meet him, one battalion of New Zealand soldiers and one battalion of the Royal Marines. So it was one battalion from each of the three countries. And eventually it was called the ANZUK [Australia New Zealand United Kingdom] Military Force. Why were we in Singapore? That was a good question because it was basically because

02:30 the Malayan Emergency was over but we were there as an insurance policy that it didn't occur again. The confrontation with Indonesia was over but again we were there as an insurance policy. The British were in the process of pulling out of Singapore. They, at the height of the Malayan Emergency they would've had 100,000 troops in Singapore Malaysia and there was still a lot of the infrastructure there. The Ghurkha

03:00 battalion was still there when I arrived so it was a very international force. And my job was to work in the medical centre with two other doctors one British, one New Zealand looking after the families and this was good because after looking after soldiers perhaps looking after the locals in Vietnam it was good looking after the families. You had a different perspective on medicine. The British had very good hospitals. First of all at the

03:30 the British military hospital at Singapore itself and then at the ANZUK military hospital in Changi and they did most things including deliveries. So, between the 3,000 soldiers on the Island I think there were about a thousand births a year. Wait a minute, about 2 per… no I'm sorry that's too many, it's about 2 per say so that's about 600 a year. So, and Singapore was, as they say, domestic bliss. You

04:00 had your own home on the base if you were an officer or perhaps sometimes you were outside the base but because the doctors were on call we were always on the base close to the hospital. Usually with a view of the golf course. We had servants, paid for by the Australian Army. Someone to wash the car and medically it was good and it was two very pleasant years with… You were able to purchase a

04:30 car duty free. The medical side was excellent. Singapore was a very exciting place to be and it was a great place for families. And all in all that was in many ways for me a reward for being in Vietnam. I didn't really return to Australia and indifference or antagonism, if that existed. I already went to my reward in Singapore. Interestingly enough, there were a lot of people in Singapore, Australian soldiers,

05:00 who'd been to Vietnam but I don't recall us discussing it at any great length. We sort of considered it was in the past and we didn't talk about it. But then perhaps you don't talk about things until they're gone, until they reach – until quite a bit of time passes. I pursued my education a bit – furthered my medical education a bit further in Singapore. I went – because I was – I was in the families medical centre then I went to the

05:30 hospital and did obstetrics and so I sat my diploma, my obstetrics exam and passed that in London and then I passed my first part of the membership of the College of Physicians. So medically it was good, family wise it was good and the two years went all too quickly. I came home, spent a month at – or a couple of weeks at Puckapunyal which reminded me why I

06:00 wanted to leave the place and then it was out of the army for good. I chose to go to a Repat hospital for a year after that because it was a better transition back to civilian medical life doing medicine and at that stage I then decided I wanted to be a radiologist so I went to St. Vincent's Hospital did the 3 year course that it used to take then, became a radiologist and I've be a radiologist ever since. So

06:30 that's the history.

Why did you decide you wanted to be a radiologist?

I actually don't remember why. I think it was a well structured course but sometimes your biggest decisions you don't actually realise why. I think it was because it was a well structured course and I was – I became interested in it. I hadn't been interested before but I often don't know why you pursue certain careers.

So you

07:00 **medical experience in Vietnam what did that sort of culminate for you?**

What did that do for me? It really just told me the problems of a Third World or Asian country that is the lesson I got out of it really. Medical students these days do electives or where they can choose where they want to go for say a month or two anywhere in the world. I mean they might go to Frankston but some of them choose to go to Pacific Island and

07:30 other places even though they're medical students they are asked to do the things that a doctor would do and they find that good and I guess I found that good to see the both extremes of medicine. It's good to see the underdeveloped world and it's good to see how Western medicine is different. So it's interesting, it's just interesting really. And I didn't really think much about Vietnam, I reckon, I would think for about – I don't

08:00 think I wouldn't have thought much about it for about 7 or 8, 9 or 10 years. No one particularly asked about it and I didn't – I particularly didn't harangue anyone about it at all but the Agent Orange issue in the late 70s and then the disaffected Vietnam veteran issue about 1980 early 80s sort of brought back interest and you will find also that Vietnam veterans themselves did not form unit associations

08:30 or have reunions until about 15 years. And the turning point was probably the Welcome Home Parade that was organised in Sydney in 1987. And really if you think about it that's about 20 years – well it's 15 years after the end of the Vietnam War it's a long time to have a Welcome Home Parade and it was certainly didn't appear appropriate to have that when the Vietnam War ended. But that parade was

09:00 organised by the Vietnam veterans themselves. And actually a person in our unit, a chap called Peter Polton was if any one man who can be seen to organise it he did. So again a little plus for our unit. At that reunion I think about 1 in 4 Vietnam veterans may have turned up and as a result of that reunion I believe a lot of units formed unit associations which have gone ever since. And our unit,

09:30 I'd never seen virtually anyone from my unit until then again and I think that was all their experience too cause we'd all gone back to very different parts of Australia and we all got together again and formed a unit association which is still going today. And this reunion theme was strengthened in 1992 when they opened the Vietnam, when Mr Keating open the, Paul Keating opened the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial in Canberra

10:00 down The Avenue in front of the War Memorial where you see all the memorials to World War 1 and 2 and all that sort of thing and now they have memorials to the nurses, to the Korean veterans. That was also very affirming also I thought. And our unit has meetings every year and reunions about every 5 years. That seems to be enough. I did have – I did join the CMF, the Citizens' Military Forces, about a year

10:30 after I left the army but I have to be honest and say that was mainly for economic reasons the pay was non, not taxable and I was still studying then. I found the CMF not to be helpful. They were not particularly interested in what Vietnam veterans had learnt from the Vietnam War for reasons that I'm not perfectly certain. So I didn't stay in that long and I don't think many Vietnam veterans did continue with the CMF.

11:00 **What did you do while you were with them?**

CMF, I was a medical officer for the Victorian Regiment. I think it's called the 22nd Victorian or Scottish Regiment. We went on camps to Buxton, we went on camp once to Alice Springs but I didn't really find it like the real thing so after a couple of years I said goodbye to them.

11:30 I guess my other things from my Vietnam days are Christine and I along with other families sponsored some refugees from Cambodia. I guess I'd like to think I was involved in that from my Vietnam service and we've seen all those refugees do very well indeed. And they've brought out more of their family. So there's about 18 of the family members now in Australia. We saw a lot of them early on

12:00 in the first year or two when we had to get them established because they had no money at all and nothing. And now we have the pleasure of attending their weddings when their children get married and they always like to see us there.

So how did that come about?

Well remember the great influx of Vietnamese about, and boat people in the late '70s from Vietnam and there was also a great influx from Cambodia cause remember you had the Pol Pot and the genocide there

12:30 so there were – there were a lot of refugees from Cambodia. Well, relatively a lot but not as many from Vietnam because Cambodia's only a small country. Our refugee family had – had 1, 2, 3, 5 children and the sad thing about that family is four of them had died or one of them had been killed by the Pol Pot. So, they were a family

13:00 that were very badly affected and they were in a refugee camp in Thailand and under the Australian government rules at the time, they were really only allowed in families that had a chance of economic independence. And this family was deemed not to have a chance with 5 children and they'd only be allowed in if they were sponsored. And whereas, if you were allowed in under the normal system you would go to what we had in those days it wasn't called a detention camp it was called a refugee camp. They had them at

13:30 Springvale and Footscray which is why the Vietnamese are particularly prevalent there. But if you were sponsored, the Sponsoring Families Organisation had the complete – they had provided accommodation, everything so the government just stepped back. So that was very satisfying to do that. And those families have been back to both Cambodia and Hong Kong. They like to go to Hong Kong

14:00 and they've done very well indeed. One of their children's an architect, one's doing law, so it's been good to see them do well. The other good thing that's happened I guess since my – over the last 20 years have been two trips back to Vietnam and I'm lucky to have gone back twice. Once I went back in 1990 and that's when a member of our unit, Barry Smith was asked by the War Memorial to write a

book on the civil affairs unit and he's – he's

14:30 obtained exhaustive information and he's – I think we'll see this book soon but these books do take time and Barry brought along myself and a member a former commanding officer of our unit, John McDonagh. And what he wanted us to be was company for him and his aim was to just go round the province of Phuoc Tuy and just see what legacy we had left. What was left and mainly we found buildings.

15:00 We found the windmills. I couldn't – the Ba Ria Hospital was in disrepair but they were building a new one. The country was getting on its feet but it wasn't yet on its feet. I don't suppose I saw a great legacy from my work because we didn't announce that we were visiting the place and therefore you don't really catch up with people you knew. It was 20 years anyway so it was more seeing the physical works that we left behind. And then finally in 1997,

15:30 it had been 30 years since our unit was first begun and of course our unit only went for 4 ½ years but they asked for people who were interested to go back and do a bit of trip again to Phuoc Tuy province and surprisingly only 6 of us went, 6 former member with our families, you know, came along our wives and a few other people came along too but that was again very interesting and it was very interesting for my wife Christine to see the places that I had

16:00 talked about and it has been very interesting taking photos the 1st time in 1970, the 2nd time in 1990 and 3rd in 1997. Sometimes you're taking photos of the same place. In 1997 we visited the Catholic orphanage in Ba Ria that we'd been to back in 1970 and we'd helped back then. The nuns there showed us the little play, little play equipment that was obviously made out of Australian Army

16:30 2nd hand equipment. They told us they'd been closed down by the Vietnamese government and they were no longer an orphanage but they had now been authorised to start up again obviously under a more open policy and they were a kindergarten now with about 400 kids. That was good. We went a little bit further afield on our 2nd trip and again that was good because we went around the Long Hai Mountains from Long Hai to Phuoc Hai.

17:00 We'd never been allowed to go there. We drove from Dat Do to Xuyen Moc before we could only go by helicopter so we went over forbidden territory. We went to the north of the province where we'd never been. We drove out of the province. It was like a voyage of discovery and our world had been quite small in Phuoc Tuy it had been good to see other parts. And we felt reasonably at home in Vietnam, you know, even the people don't really know us now. We used to smile,

17:30 a lot of the old ladies and they used to always smile back and I never quite sure whether they did remember us or not. But it really would've only been the old people that remember us now, that would remember us. And also we're not dressed in army uniforms. On our trip in 1990 when there were only two of us, we did get arrested for visiting Ba Ria without a permit. That was a little bit distressing. They took us to the local police station

18:00 and the policeman looked awfully like a Viet Cong man to me, he could've been. Except he was too young to be that. Questions us and we made a formal apology and a formal confession and they said all right we'll let you go now don't do it again. And we said right can we order our taxi. They said no you are not allowed to order taxis you go on the bus like everyone else. So off we went on the bus and we met a lot of Vietnamese on the bus that were very interesting. I met

18:30 a former captain in the Vietnamese army who'd just got out of 10 years of detention and he told me that if you were a captain it was 10 years, if you were a major it was 15 years if it was a colonel you never got out. Just told us the other side. When we back in 1990 some of the local population told us of family members in Australia. They told us they weren't happy particularly with the North Vietnamese. And they particularly weren't happy with how the war had gone in that

19:00 the Viet Cong were often South Vietnamese but the people who had taken over the country were North Vietnamese. So they weren't particularly happy. But by 1997 I think all the South Vietnamese were working hard and trying to earn, make a living and the place was much more prosperous, lots more motorbikes, hotels.

What about the health of the people?

I couldn't judge that to be honest because I'm not seeing them medically

19:30 but certainly in Ba Ria there was a brand new hospital so that was something. Whereas in 1990 it hadn't been built yet and the old hospital was absolutely terrible and rundown. So I believe there has been a distinct improvement. But nearly always economic progress goes first and medical progress follows a lot later because it's very costly, very costly. We visited the Presidential Palace and

20:00 National Assembly had become the Concert Hall in Saigon. Saigon was Ho Chi Minh City the main street named by the French Rue Catonare [?] where Graham Greene used to have his drinks had become Dong Khoi Street after some Vietnamese figure of history. The Ku Long, The Majestic Hotel had become the Ku Long. Everything had been Vietnamised.

20:30 Phuoc Tuy province had become Dong Nigh. Ba Ria was sometimes called Ba Ria but that's after a

French name. I think it's after a French sea captain. It'd become, it's often called Long – Long Lee. So it's been great and I don't know how many Vietnam veterans have been back to Vietnam but some of them are very disappointed because they go to Nui Dat where the camp was and think they're going to see something.

21:00 And there is virtually nothing at Nui Dat. The only thing that you can really make out now is the hill, there which the SAS [Special Air Services] used to camp on and the airstrip which is now the main road to a village. I think Normie Rowe says he found out where his tent was and he may have found a bottle top or something like that. There's virtually nothing, even the rubber trees have been mown down and I think there is some farm, farmlets on the area.

21:30 So it's a bit like going back to a party the day after. Everyone's gone. Party's over and everyone's gone home. But for us in the civil affairs unit it was good because we knew the villages just as well. We could still recognise the villages so that was good. There was recognition there. So…

22:00 that's where the story probably, probably ends I believe. I'd like to go back to Vietnam again. It's now six years. This time I want to go to Hanoi. At least see Hanoi. So we'll just wait a little while. One of the members of our unit

22:30 became a travel agent and the first time he went back to Vietnam was in our reunion in 19.., Rob is his name, he organised that trip in 1997 and now he organises trips every year to Vietnam so he's an expert now. We might go with him one day. His trip's a more extensive one, he gets up to Hanoi and sees everything. Rob Lovell is his name and he's the person who also publishes our newsletter.

23:00 So I guess that's where this story should, perhaps should end. There's been other little things along the way, delayed recognition. My school, my old school Xavier decided in 199… 1997 they said it was on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of

23:30 the ending of the war that they should try and bring together as many Vietnam veterans as possible who went to the school and they found about 32. Which was great and we all got together. Strangely enough not many of us had met the other person before and this is because as we explained to them we were all in Vietnam in different years. We may have been 10 years' difference in age so we did not even know that person in school. And the oldest person in that reunion

24:00 had been in Vietnam in 1953 so we wouldn't know him. But that was a very good thing to do at the school. I've occasionally been asked to give talks to as part of history lessons on Vietnam to school children. I don't feel I'm the typical Vietnam veteran so perhaps that's not so appropriate. Our junior school, when my boy was going to his junior school, they wanted someone

24:30 who had been in the military to give a talk on Anzac Day so I gave that which was pleasing, which was good to do. So I guess they're the things that – I don't think there'll be many more occasions now I think we've just about explored everything and I think just about every book that can be written about Vietnam has been written. Everyone has dredged their memory. They have done – performed critical analysis. I think just about

25:00 the whole history's been written now. As soon as Barry Smith's book comes out we can then wrap it up. And a few months ago there is a forecourt at the Australian War Memorial and there are little plaques there which are from various, I understand, units. And we've now a little unit – a little plaque there which has also been very good for our unit. I was unable to attend that unfortunately but that's in the forecourt.

Has your association had,

25:30 **I mean you've had these trips over there but have you maintained any contact with any of the people in the villages at all?**

No I haven't. No, no.

But the association?

No the association hasn't really. I guess that is the disappointing thing that we all went our own way and we only thought about it 5 years ago and what it was decided was to make a donation to an organisation called The Vietnam – Australian Vietnam Veterans' Reconstruction Group. They

26:00 are Vietnam veterans there may be some from the civil affairs unit but I don't think there are many, if any, just Vietnam, ex-Vietnam soldiers who wanted to make some difference and it's run by a chap called Paul Murphy and they have built an orphanage in Ba Ria. They have made some donations to build infrastructure and I'm a member of that. A few years ago became a member of that and as well you can sponsor a person in the orphanage which I do.

26:30 So we hadn't really, there's only a 150 of us and our only thing really was to make a donation individually or as a group. We go and we catch up with – I thought that you were going to say do you have much contact with your other people in civil affairs unit. We do march on Anzac Day, I march not every year but I march more often than not of late. I think like a lot of Vietnam veterans I didn't – they didn't march in Anzac Day

27:00 marches for a long time and I certainly didn't march until… 17 years after I got back. It just didn't seem appropriate. So it is a bit disappointing but at least the Vietnam Veterans' Reconstruction Group is certainly helping they're consulting with the local Vietnamese and they're trying to put something back into Ba Ria province to make up for the devastation of the war.

27:30 And places like the beach resorts, places we used to go to like Long Hai now have expensive resorts to try and get the tourist dollar. Vung Tau has been slightly gentrified. So the place certainly has prospered since then and our province looks pretty good. There's still rubber plantations in the north of the state. And everyone certainly – but it'll take many years.

28:00 Many years, mm.

So where do you work now?

I work – I joined a Radiology Group called Melbourne Diagnostic Group and about 5 years ago we amalgamated with some other groups and eventually we sold our group to Mayne who run hospitals and radiology and pathology so I work with Mayne at various hospitals and clinics in Melbourne. It keeps me out of trouble. I'm not retired. Quite a lot of Vietnam

28:30 veterans have retired by now. They're over 50. A lot of them over 55 but I haven't retired yet. Look forward to doing a bit more radiology yet. I'm currently doing quite a lot of tele-radiology where you – the image comes from a distance on a television screen. So I'm finding that interesting and certainly the new technology is helping so we can read, like yesterday I was

29:00 reading, x-rays, CAT scans and ultrasounds from Warrnambool and Woomera, so new technology.

Okay, well we could probably stop it there.

Stop it there. Stop it there, yeah.