

Australians at War Film Archive

David Butler - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

- 00:32 **Can we start off with a history of your story? Can we start with your early years and where you were born and grew up?**
- I was born on the 3rd of December 1928 in Guildford, Western Australia, and spent my early life and my schooling in Western Australia at a variety of places. My father was a clergyman, so we moved every four years.
- 01:00 The bulk of my schooling was done at Wesley College in South Perth, where I entered in the prep school in 1940 and matriculated in 1945. In 1946, I entered the Royal Military College at Duntroon and graduated in December of 1948. In 1949, along with all the other infantry
- 01:30 graduates in my class, I went to join the 3rd Battalion of the - it was then called the Australian Regiment, on occupation duty in Japan. In March of that year it became 3rd Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment. We were on occupation duty in Japan when the Korean War began in June of 1950
- 02:00 and we went across as the Australian land contribution on the 28th of September 1950. We fought from Seoul, I suppose. We landed just within days of MacArthur doing the Inchon landing and so the North Korean army was in retreat, and that retreat then
- 02:30 turned into a rout. So we went all the way, almost to the Yalu River. We got within 100 kilometres of the Yalu River, a place called Chongju and then the Chinese entered the war in November, and we endured the retreat back to the outskirts of Seoul.
- 03:00 Late in the December of 1950 I was selected to be the ADC [aide de camp] to the commander and chief lieutenant, General Sir Horace Robertson. Red Robbie was his pseudonym. I went back to Japan and for six months served him in his duties as the administrative
- 03:30 commander of the Commonwealth force that was in Japan and Korea. So we spent time equally in Japan and in Korea. That was at the time of the Battle of Kapyong, where my old battalion held off a Chinese division in April of 1951. In the June of 1951
- 04:00 I was then sent to be the personal assistant to the general officer commanding the 1st Commonwealth Division. The division was formed in June and Major General AJH Cassells was appointed the first commander, and I served him. He was a British officer, quite an outstanding man and he later retired as Lord Cassells as the CIGS [Chief of the Imperial General Staff] in the United
- 04:30 Kingdom. He was a brilliant officer. I served him through the rest of 1951 and early of the December of 1951, shortly after the Battle of Maryang San - we know it in Australia but in fact it was a big army operation where the whole advanced
- 05:00 right across the front getting ready for the truce. When the battle was over I came back to Australia in the December of 1951. In January of 1952 I joined the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment at Puckapunyal and spent that year
- 05:30 with the 2nd Battalion, and then became the signal officer there, and the battalion got ready to go to Korea in 1953. I returned with the 2nd Battalion in - gosh, what was it? - March of 1953 to Korea and we went into the line on April or May of 1953.
- 06:00 I did a tour on a feature called 159 and then we were just right at the conclusion of the war. After a severe battle on a vital piece of territory called the Hook, our brigade was then sent to replace the British brigade that had been heavily attacked there and the 2nd Battalion was actually on the Hook when the Chinese
- 06:30 launched their final attack of the war on the British Commonwealth, and we were there through what we call now the Battle of the Hook. While we were there the truce was declared, so the truce was declared right in the middle of the battle so to speak, which was an interesting thing. We then went into

the peace mode and we pulled down the defences, and so on,

- 07:00 and occupied positions where we could readily go back at an instant's notice to the line. So we did a lot of exercises and that sort of thing, and I came home in about the November, I think, of 1953 to become the adjutant of the Citizens [Military] Force Battalion in
- 07:30 Perth, the 11/44th Battalion, and I was adjutant there in 1954 and '55, where I met and married my dear wife amidst of everything else. We went off in early 1956
- 08:00 to a place called Portsea in Victoria, to the Officer Cadet School, where I was the infantry instructor through 1956 and '57. In early 1958 we went to the United Kingdom to the Staff College in the British Army at Camberley, where I did my postgraduate course at the Staff College.
- 08:30 In 1957 we stayed on in England and I did a year in London on the staff of the Australian army in the high commissioner's office. That was 1959, '58, '59. In 1960 we came back from the United Kingdom
- 09:00 and I went straight to the Pacific Islands Regiment in Papua New Guinea, where I commanded a company, which was then on outstation duty at Moem - sorry not at Moem, in Los Negros. I served in
- 09:30 Papua New Guinea then in '60, '61 and '62. I did a tour and my company then went to Wanimo on the Dutch New Guinea border at the time of confrontation. In 1962 I became the second in command of the battalion and was permanently then in Port Moresby. In 1963
- 10:00 I came back to Perth again, where I became the DAAG [Deputy Assistant Adjutant General] of Headquarters Western Command. That was the equivalent of the personnel manager in Western Australia. In 1964 - end of 1964 I was promoted and sent to Canberra to become the first director of recruiting for the army,
- 10:30 where I did a year or 18 months, and then became the AAG [Assistant Adjutant General] Plans, which was the manpower planning officer for the army. This was at the inception of National Service and of course the contribution to Vietnam. I did
- 11:00 another 18 months as the manpower planning officer and then I was given command of the 6th Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment then in Townsville. I did a year with them while we worked up and we went to Vietnam in 1969. We were there in 1970. I came home in May of 1970 and back to Canberra, eventually, where I was
- 11:30 on the director of infantry staff, to do with the officer management of the infantry officers. Then in 1972 I was promoted to colonel and came down to be the commandant of the Officer Cadet School in Portsea again. I had three years there and in
- 12:00 1974, I think it was, I went back to Canberra as the director of plans for the army and after about a year in that I was promoted to brigadier, and became the director general of operations and plans for the army during the reorganisation phase, first of all of the army, which the army was doing separately post-Vietnam
- 12:30 and when Sir Arthur Tange was reorganising the Defence Department. I then went to Holsworthy to command the 1st Task Force, now called the 1st Brigade, and in the course of that we were called out to do the counter-terrorism task at Bowral.
- 13:00 We were called without notice and had a busy couple of days. Then from there I went to become the Australian army attaché in the United States and Canada, and the defence advisor to the United Nations, and had
- 13:30 three years there, and came back on promotion to be the general officer commanding the Training Command in Sydney. I spent two years and then retired in the beginning of 1984. There's a long round about way but eventually we got there!

I'd say that was the most direct route. Frankly, that was a really clear description and

- 14:00 **what a busy life you've had!**

It was interesting!

Was there any particular reason why you went to Vietnam so late in the show?

Oh gosh! Why did we go late? A lot of fellas went before me! [laughs] I guess it was my time.

- 14:30 At the time we had increased the number of battalions in 1965. We'd had three battalions and then we increased eventually to nine battalions. I don't think there was any particular reason. There were people more senior to me in the sense of the earlier classes that had gone on and that was their turn, and that was my turn.
- 15:00 I was also in fear and trepidation that I'd be sent to command a battalion in the Pacific Islands Regiment, and that was a worry! Not that it would not have been a great honour to command the Pacific

Islands Regiment but Vietnam was really the only war we had.

There wasn't a hell of a lot happening in the Pacific Islands that would interest you?

There was! It was all very interesting. It was nation building and they were preparing the – they

- 15:30 then raised two battalions. When I went there, there was only the one battalion and when I was second in command we had the responsibility of preparing it to split in two. They built the barracks in Moem in Wewak and we were setting that up, and they brought in drink. Now that probably doesn't seem a big issue but when they brought in drink it was a very serious thing, so we prepared soldiers for drink and interestingly
- 16:00 they had a mass of advertisements right through the whole of Port Moresby. I suppose it was all over Papua New Guinea. There was one big one they put on all the backs of the buses and there was a glass of foaming ale with a hand on it, and it said, "Say no to drink!" Of course, when the people in Papua New Guinea had drink come in, the first thing they did was to go to the bar and say, "A glass of no, please!" [laughs]
- 16:30 Which we thought was amusing anyway. No, I can't really think of any reason. It was my time to go, I guess. I was very pleased because I took over the 6th Battalion from a classmate. They'd had the first tour in Vietnam. They had the Battle of Long Tan. I inherited then the nucleus then of that battalion and a lot of the NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers], and the soldiers had belonged. Then we got
- 17:00 our fresh infusion of National Servicemen and regular soldiers. We were very fortunate. We had a very good tour, the second tour, and there were still plenty of enemy about.

Okey dokes. We will get to that and much more a little later on. I'd like to start with getting an understanding of your early childhood years and life with a father as a clergyman.

- 17:30 My father was an interesting fellow. He'd come late into the ministry. He'd been a grocer and indeed he had raised a family in as much as my, actually, grandmother had died at the age of 40. My grandfather was a bit nomadic and
- 18:00 he would establish businesses and then go off, and establish another one. My father used to be tidying up and he was the eldest of the family. There were a number. One of his brothers was killed in the First [World] War in the 11th Battalion and he had a very young brother, and then a batch of sisters. He sort of was tidying up on the way. He
- 18:30 got into the grocery business and my grandfather came across to Western Australia. Really, the family had come from Alberton in South Australia. He came across to go farming at a place called Katanning and had remarried my step-grandmother, and raised another family. So Dad sort of educated his sisters and one married, two were
- 19:00 maiden teachers, and established the correspondence business in Western Australia. He had an interesting life and after he married my mother, they were in a place called Victoria Park. He was in the grocery thing and then he wanted to go, and because he was older they made him a home missionary. They went onto the gold fields at the turn of the century. They married in 1908
- 19:30 and they had an interesting time in a place called Kew, and Daydawn, and all those places around. Indeed, on one occasion the Holy [UNCLEAR] Italian, who had established what later became Lake View and Star [Mine], came in and he said, "Father, look, I'm going into town." He said, "Undoubtedly I'll get drunk and I'll lose my title. I want you to keep my title."
- 20:00 He said, "You're the only one I can trust." My father said, "Certainly." The old bloke had his drink and he came back for his title, and he said, "I want to make you my partner!" Every family has a story like this but I do know my mother, they were serviced by the Cobb & Co business, and she spent one night with a mad woman. They had no straitjacket
- 20:30 and my mother had to restrain her during the night, so they went to bed together, and my mother kept her calm. I mean, we don't hear about those things today. So they had that time in and around, and then he became a – he was ordained. He was at a place called Jarrahdale down in the southwest of Western Australia and from there enlisted in the First AIF [Australian Imperial Force]
- 21:00 late in the war as an infantryman. He didn't enlist as a chaplain. He went off and didn't get to the war but my mother then ran his parish. She had two young children.

Why did he go over as infantry and not a member of the cloth?

That was his nature. He was a great games player. You know, he was sort of a man's man.

- 21:30 He played district cricket in Perth till he was 50-odd. He played league football till he was 40 as a clergyman, so you can imagine what they'd give him, absolute heaps, and that was his nature. He was a very well-read fellow and later became the examiner in history, and all that sort of thing, for the clergy.

And what denomination?

He was a Methodist. So that

- 22:00 was growing up with a father who was a clergyman and it meant we moved every four years. I was born in Guildford. We then went to West Leederville and then we went to Claremont, and so it went on. My first memories were at Claremont, which was quite a wealthy parish, still is. I used to go round on his parish rounds sometimes. I would have been three or four.
- 22:30 **How would he operate those rounds?**
- He'd walk. We walked around and saw these people, and had afternoon tea, and all that sort of thing. Then we went to Maylands, which was really at the height of the Depression and it was a dormitory suburb for the Midlands Junction railway workshops, a much different parish but almost every house we went into, I can remember as a little
- 23:00 kid, had one man sitting sombre beside the fire. There was largely wood-fired stoves and he would just be sitting there. He'd be either gassed or shell-shocked from the First [World] War and he would just sit there. He wouldn't talk, it seemed to me. He was just part of the family and life went on around him. He didn't contribute. He just sat there all day. It seemed to me in my, probably because
- 23:30 I was so young, it magnified the thing in my mind but at least one in three houses had one of those.
- Would your Dad try and talk to them, engage them?**
- Oh, he'd be in and around. He was known pretty widely, he seemed to marry half of Perth, as far as I can work out. Of course, he had service with his games and his service in the AIF. He knew such a lot of people.
- 24:00 He was very easy with people. He was a very popular man.
- Would he engage the World War I Veterans, try and draw them out?**
- He didn't pick them out. I remember - I have an image sitting in the tram and we were going down through the Car Barn, as it's called in Perth, which is where the tram workshop was. It's down by the WACA [Western Australian Cricket Association],
- 24:30 the cricket association ground. He used to take me to the cricket, of course. We were coming down and we were going through the Car Barn, and I saw these fellows with these funny badges. I said, "Dad, what's that?" He said, "Oh that's the Returned Soldiers' League." I said, "What's that?" He said, "That's very important. If you don't have one of those badges on, you can't get work." You know, we had people, every family had these people that would come in selling props,
- 25:00 come in and clean your yard or something, and they'd get a meal and a cup of tea. So getting work, even to my child's mind, was pretty important. He didn't single them out because he wasn't a returned soldier, you see, but he did all the work for them and he was a part-time chaplain in the Citizens Force, so he had a uniform he used to wear on occasion.
- How did your father's parish cope with the**
- 25:30 **amount of need during the Depression?**
- I don't have a memory of what particularly the parish did. I don't know that they did a whole lot. My mother always seemed to be taking in - you know, having these fellows in to work. She used to send me round with little envelopes that had money in them, and of course in manse, there was not a lot of money. Each year she'd give little
- 26:00 presents to people. I don't know, it was half a crown or something.
- I guess, because you'd be just living off the donations of the good people of the parish?**
- Oh, my father didn't get the equivalent of the basic wage until just before he retired. He raised four boys and we all went to Wesley. I was the only one that went on a scholarship
- 26:30 and we all sort of did things. They just managed well, I guess. It couldn't have been easy for any of them.
- Was getting an education a big part of your upbringing?**
- Oh yes, I think so. We were very much encouraged along those lines and my father in addition to all that was quite bookish, and was incredibly well-read.
- 27:00 He had a variety of experiences but he didn't talk much about himself. I, at the military college they had a billiard table and I became quite adept at snooker and billiards after a couple of years there because there wasn't much to do. We got ten shillings a week so we didn't go out much. It was a very sequestered [?UNCLEAR] life
- 27:30 and when you weren't playing games, you might as well play the indoor games if you had time free. I thought I was a pretty good player and my father was quite active in the Young Men's Christian Association. I said, "Dad, why don't we go and have a game of billiards in the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association]?" "Oh," he said, "I'd like that!" I thought I was going to do something. He

absolutely cleaned my clock! He hadn't played for -

28:00 he said, "I haven't played for a number of years now." Where he'd picked it up I'll never know. He could do all those things. That was life as a minister's child. Manse seemed to be a pretty active place. There were always things going on. My mother was a great theatrical and she was always getting the parish together, and doing plays,

28:30 and operettas, and things like that.

Were you ever seconded into them?

She'd been a school teacher. No, my brothers were. My brothers had all been raised in it. They could all sing and would sing publicly but as I was coming on I didn't get caught. By the time I was 16 I left home, you see, but they all had pretty fine baritone voices. One of my brothers

29:00 used to have a whole range of poetry. He'd do recitations at the drop of a hat, some quite amusing and some quite serious.

What was it like growing up with your father giving service every week?

Gosh, I don't know. I mean, he did it.

But did you pay attention to his ministry?

I suppose I must have. I had a fair diet of it

29:30 all my life. I used to go to Christian Endeavour first thing in the morning and then we'd go from Christian Endeavour to the first half of the service, and then we were allowed out. Then on Sunday afternoons when all the kids went swimming we had to go to Sunday school and I was spared the night-time service. I never had that as obligatory. So I had a steady diet of it. To this day I know all the hymns. I don't need to look at the hymn

30:00 book! [laughs]

I wonder if you ever sang any in the trenches?

Oh no, no I can't say I ever did that. No, I must have listened and I had a steady diet of it all my life, and they were nice people.

Methodists have a reputation for being a fairly dry religion.

Yes.

Is that how you would describe it?

There were things I could never come to terms with.

30:30 Methodists were not allowed to dance. Now that's crazy. All my brothers danced but my mother was adamant, no dancing classes, so you had to pick it up on the way. I couldn't understand that. One of my brothers said about one of our grandfathers, he always had this funny smell and he said, "I never could locate it until the first time I went into a pub and I smelled

31:00 whiskey!" That was my maternal grandfather but he'd raised all these girls and they were very staunch, and very opposed to the drink. Methodism was also born in a song and there was a lot of music, good music, and of course a lot of the - my parents talked about the Cornish miners

31:30 that had come out. When they were on the goldfields there were a lot of Cornish miners who loved to sing and they said they had some of the most beautiful services down there. Yes, it was a bit restricted. It didn't keep up with the times. I'm mortified now when I see what the Uniting Church is up to and I think that all the good that was evoked from Methodism has now been lost.

32:00 Indeed I think the whole of the Uniting effort has been lost.

Is it all a bit homogenised?

The same sex marriages and all that sort of thing. It just gets out of kilter, I think.

How did all of this shape up for you when you were at school with a war raging on?

We were very fortunate. We lived a life and

32:30 things were done as normal, except that we used to have an assembly once a week, and the headmaster would read out the names of those who had fallen. Of course, we'd only been established in 1923 and he'd been the headmaster since early in the 30s, so he knew most of the boys, indeed as I did, because my elder brother was in his

33:00 second year of the school, so I'd always had brothers at the school. I knew by sight, at least, most of them. That was brought home pretty vividly to us about the loss of the boys but other than that all the windows were taped up to stop the blast. We dug air raid shelters in 1942. We had a couple of scares in

Perth where they sounded the alarms. I was

- 33:30 an RAP [regimental aid Post] messenger and I was allowed to get my bike and go because we lived in the same suburb as the school in South Perth. There were a lot of older teachers there that had been brought back out of retirement because the younger men had gone off.

It's all very Mr Chips, isn't it?

Yes, it is. We were aware that there was rationing. We couldn't get sporting clothing at all. We'd

- 34:00 all be wearing the cast off stuff of our brothers before the war. Indeed, when I was in the final year in the sixth form, there were several of us who had been involved in the YMCA, in the gymnastics side of it and when the threat that there was probably going to be a bombing in Perth in '42, the YMCA split into little subgroups in
- 34:30 the suburbs, and they took on church halls, and things. We started off in a place called Claremont. We lived in south Perth, so we'd ride our bikes right from south Perth to Claremont and do the gymnasium for the young guys. Then we came back and we established it in South Perth, and in the last year I was in school a handful of us did it for the school. We'd take classes
- 35:00 in the various forms. We also prepared the cricket wicket. We put the turf down and rolled it, and watered it, and all that sort of thing, and the practice wickets. We didn't think there was anything odd about it because everyone was sort of bucking in. The whole of the country was at war but other than that, we had a very happy life. I can't remember any restrictions. Most

- 35:30 families had people away, as the word was.

Just to clarify, were you boarding at Wesley?

No!

Still at home?

No, but it was pretty much all my life there. I lived in the same suburb.

Do you remember the night that Menzies declared Australia was at war?

Yes I do, very clearly. All my brothers were home.

- 36:00 My two elder brothers were much older than us. They were older than I was. I had a brother who - the one who was killed was eight years older than I was and the two elder brothers were eight years older than him, eight and ten years older than him, so there was quite an age gap, and I was a menopause child. We were home and they'd all been off to evening service. It was a Sunday night and the family
- 36:30 gathered, and we heard Menzies say all these things. My father said, "Well, I suppose this is the last time the family will be together for a long time. We better have a sing-song." We all used to do that a lot. We had an organ and my mother or my father would play these things. As I said, the three of my brothers sang quite well and we had a lovely time that night, and it was literally the last time the family was together
- 37:00 because my second eldest brother had married the day before, and so he went off automatically, and they all went off to the war. My elder brother went into the army, was already in the army. He was in the CMF [Citizens Military Force]. The next brother went off to become a pilot and then my third brother, the one who was killed, he went into the navy. So it was the last time we were together and I remember it clearly. The other reason being that it was

- 37:30 my eleventh birthday.

September?

September the 3rd 1938, so I remember the day clearly.

Kids put a lot of meaning into their birthdays, as they always do. Was there something prescient about that?

No, not really, except that it was a birthday. We were not really rabid

- 38:00 about birthdays. I say that because my wife's family, the birthday is the beginning and end of everything each year, very serious. We just had a lovely time, not that we didn't honour it, but some families put a lot into it.

What was your understanding of war

- 38:30 **as an eleven year old?**

Oh gee! My first memory of it all was in the first adult book I was ever given. I was given a small New Testament by my father and he was a very good penman. He'd done the thing

- 39:00 in gothic, which I liked, and he gave me that or my mother and father gave me that – it must have been for a birthday or Christmas. It was an edition that was produced to celebrate the end of the war to end all wars. Now that intrigued me and I asked my mother what it meant. She then described to me the
- 39:30 elation that heralded the end of the First [World] War, in which she'd lost a brother, and my father had lost a brother. They had lived under this terrible dread with these long lists of casualties that would be published. She described that to me and I managed to get an idea of it from her but my father had
- 40:00 a set of magazines. They were an English magazine called The Great War and I guess they were a weekly or a monthly or something. He had a whole set of them and I poured over these for years. I could spell all the French names but I couldn't pronounce them and I had no idea of the context of the war. I knew how it started and all the rest of it but I couldn't place together all the battles except I have
- 40:30 these memories of these photographs of France, and of shell holes, and all the rest of it. Then all the stories that you'd hear when all your family would gather – we had a lot of family gatherings and people would talk about the war, and their times in the trenches, and numerous things like that. So you'd gradually get an idea so that my first memories were rather like that and I had some idea of war,
- 41:00 and some idea of the expectation of it. Then in the 30s things began to step up a bit and the CMF were called up about once a year for a couple of months, so you'd have people in your family in uniform at the family gatherings, so you were accustomed to that in addition to the Anzac Days. Anzac Day was a very big
- 41:30 day in Perth.

Tape 2

00:34 Anzac Day in Perth?

When I was a child it was a great day. We used to go in and watch the march, and the thing that intrigued me, one of the units was the Cameron Highlanders of Western Australia, and they had kilts, and looked very high, and I was fascinated that they'd bought their own uniforms or a portion of their uniforms. I don't know what it was

- 01:00 but the highlight for me was when the pipes and drums of the Cameron Highlanders, when they marched past. They had this big imperious bandmaster leading or drum major leading. To my child's eye he was a huge man and he'd swing this stick, and then every so often he'd throw it up in the air, and without looking he'd go two or three paces, and put his hand out, and it would land in his hand, and it would drive you wild!

- 01:30 Then I used to have to look very carefully because one of the bass drummers then had a leopard skin down the front of his uniform and I was intrigued by that. That really used to get me going. I thought that was marvellous and I must have bored my father to sobs. I used to chatter on about that for ages. That was Anzac Day and then I went to my first dawn service. I must have been

- 02:00 ten or eleven, I suppose. We went to the dawn service at Kings Park and of course we went in the dawn, and it was very dark, and I suppose it was the first time I'd ever seen the dawn from Kings Park looking across. I went with a family called the Everetts, as I recall. He'd won an MC [Military Cross] in the First [World] War and was running General Motors in Perth at the time. I went to school with the eldest son.

02:30 Did your Dad ever march?

No. No, he wasn't a returned soldier. That had very rigorous rules. The RSL [Returned and Services League] was the RSL and it took me a long time to work all that out. Indeed, it's only in the last few years that I've worked it all out. What they were really doing and saying was that they really were

- 03:00 the most outstanding force of the First [World] War. It's very hard to conceive this because we were then less than seven million, about three or four million people in the First [World] War, but the things that they did in 1918, not Gallipoli or anything, but in 1918, from March of 1918 when they were called to Amiens when the Germans were breaking through, and their stands there, and the battles that they fought, and the battles that were in the Hindenburg Line –

- 03:30 My parents used to tell me about the Hindenburg Line and how great it was that on the 8th of August 1918 they launched the attack on the Hindenburg Line, and broke through, and so on. At the time they were doing that the French army had revolted and the British army suffered, as John Keegan, the great historian, said, a severe moral collapse.

- 04:00 I mean, the slaughter of the thing, it's too much to comprehend but above that the Australians had reviewed what they'd done. They'd looked at Gallipoli in a very objective way and said, "Hey, that wasn't very good." They'd looked at their first attempts in France in 1916 and 1917, and said, "Hey, we can do a whole lot better than that." While they were running

- 04:30 out of reinforcements because they wouldn't accept conscription and their manpower pool, and therefore their leadership pool was declining, they increased the quality of their leadership at all levels, all the way through from the lance corporals up, and trained them, and trained the soldiers, the few that were there, and they really developed an army that was based on the things they were strongest at.
- 05:00 Their aggressive manner and way of going about war, they realised was their asset, and that's the way they reduced their number of casualties, and they developed a whole series of tactics, minor tactics for the battlefield that really paid off. They trained and trained, and in 1918 they were really at their very best, when they were in the full view of the world in France. The AIF that came home was
- 05:30 trying to say that, "Hey, we were pretty good," but the message got diluted because they were all seen as a lot of old bores. They drank a bit of beer and the rest of the community then said, "Oh, look at them. All they do is get drunk together." When in fact they were trying to say, "Hey, it really was an outstanding feat of arms." That's why
- 06:00 they were so rigorous about the whole idea of keeping themselves together, to sequester themselves, why they called one another mate and a mate was someone you could trust with your life, and it was a very valued salutation. It's not like it is now where it is just a throwaway euphemism for everything. You can say mate sardonically and just insult people now.
- 06:30 The misuse of mate is one of the great tragedies in this country. So the First AIF had this idea of mateship and it meant a whole lot more than we think about now, and that's why they guarded it, and it was only the RSL, only their mates because nobody else came to them. They got no - reinforcements were cut off and they battled it out after all of the tragedy of '16 and '17, Gallipoli.
- 07:00 It's something that we should be very proud of and that's what they were trying to say.

Were you ever taught any of that when you were at school?

Oh yes! We had bags of that. Yeah, we got all the glories of the First AIF. We were told at the time that they were the best in the world. As you get older you say, "How can three million people produce that?"

- 07:30 That's just talk." In fact, when you read and you read deeply into what they achieved you understand how really great they were and that's why my father didn't march. It was for only those from the AIF.

You must have had some World War I vets teaching you at Wesley?

- 08:00 No, no we didn't. The head of the prep school was a fellow called 'Puffy' Hanton, and he was very active in the army reserve. He was quite a militant little fella and he used to give us large doses of Tennyson, and all that sort of thing. He was of that generation. He was very good for us, I think.

Well that's interesting!

He was pretty jingoistic.

Just from some of the

- 08:30 **reading I've done there seems to have been a curious dropping away in terms of military fervour in, say, the early '30s. Then it obviously built up again when a war was imminent.**

I suppose the fervour was there because the families had this fella sitting by the stove and people were really struggling. Perth really got hit by the Depression and

- 09:00 people don't realise how tough it was. In the great wool stores in Fremantle by the wharf with concrete floors, there were people sleeping there without blankets. You know, Perth is supposed to be mild but in the winter there was a great problem with respiratory things and these poor devils didn't have anything. There were a lot on the road and the struggle was really for existence. It was not for anything else.

Were there people coming in off the land into the city of Perth to try

- 09:30 **and survive?**

I don't know. I've never looked at that. From the top of my head I would suggest that the movement was the other way. They went into the land looking for work because there wasn't a lot of work around Perth and that was certainly true in the eastern states. People went walking looking for work. Whether they went up to the wheat belt I don't know. There wasn't much of a wheat belt because they were dry years, too.

- 10:00 **What about down on the docks?**

I don't know. I really don't know. I just have that impression of people sleeping there. Whether we saw them - Dad and I used to go in to the footy, and we'd catch the train, and go in to the footy and walk by the docks, and occasionally we would go fishing down there on the docks but I don't remember the people. I don't know much about it.

- 10:30 **How did your schools cope during the privations of the Depression?**

The school established in 1923 and I don't think the fees were really expensive. The first pupils did a lot of the groundwork there, preparing the paths and things like that, but everyone bucked in in those days. Everyone was pretty matter of fact

- 11:00 and there was no entertainment as such. The radio was in its infancy and the pictures but other than that there wasn't a whole lot of entertainment, so people were cast into finding things to do.

I would imagine in a school like yours there would be some pretty interesting common room discussions amongst the boys who were getting closer to the age of enlistment?

- 11:30 I don't recall that we discussed it much except that we knew it was our time, you know? You'd matriculate and go into the forces. I remember a lovely fellow called Brian Ladyman, who was our champion tennis player. The first year the school won the cup he was the number one player. I'm pretty sure he was in 1941.
- 12:00 He was killed in 1944 in the air force, a farm boy, a lovely fellow. So it was your lot but I don't know that we discussed it much. We must have talked about it but I don't remember anything earth shattering about the discussions.

Did your schoolmasters not keep a lively discussion or debate as to what was happening overseas?

- 12:30 No. The discussions we had were on philosophic things that you had to learn as part of growing up. They tried to keep things as normal as possible. We didn't have briefings on the war as such but the papers were full of it, so everyone read all that and when you'd go to the pictures there'd be documentaries
- 13:00 about the Wau campaign, and Nadzab, and it was part of our jargon, and the streets were full of servicemen. I mean, you talked earlier about the war. The war came to Perth really in 1942 and of course all the flotsam if you like, of what had been going on in the north around Singapore, turned up in Perth, escapees and all
- 13:30 the rest of it. I remember clearly when the sailors from the Prince of Wales and the Repulse, they were sunk in January of 1941, they came to Perth and they were literally walking on leave in their - they didn't have decent clothes to give them. They were still in that clothing. So you'd see that going home from school.
- 14:00 As the divisions passed through they'd march through Perth and so on or vice versa, so you were continually being reminded of what was going on, and then you'd hear the stories about how they were sunk, and how the people swam away. Then they brought the divisions back and put them to the Kokoda Trail and I remember our next door neighbour had a son killed on the Kokoda Trail, and he
- 14:30 had fought through the desert with the 6th Division. We all thought that was uncommonly tough for a fellow to get through his first series of campaigns and then to be killed in New Guinea. So they were the sorts of things that you talked about but I don't remember that at school we had specific talks or that we all went into solemn conclave, and said, "We who are about to
- 15:00 enlist - !" We didn't talk about that but we expected that when we were eighteen we were going to go in and we were talking about what we would go into.

I bet some of you had brothers though that - ?

We all had - all of us had brothers.

What about when brothers' names were called at assembly and the brothers were dead? That must have been strange?

Yes, my brother was in '41. My brother was killed in November of 1941. That was pretty hard. He'd been a master at the school.

- 15:30 He'd matriculated, done a year as a sort of junior master and then gone straight into the navy. He was the only one I can remember that was like that. There were other great days when the headmaster's son got the DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross] and he was a Rhodes Scholar anyway. I remember that was
- 16:00 a big day. Anyway, there we are.

I'm interested in imagining an assembly and you have to hear your own brother's name called out. What I'm trying to find out is, in this run of the mill, getting on with the day-to-day activities in the middle of a war back in Perth, did the masters take the time to take you aside?

Oh yes, everyone was very kind. He was a very popular fellow

- 16:30 and of course he taught in the prep school, so he'd known everyone there. In fact I went to a school reunion, I went over to talk on Anzac Day and I remember a fella called Alec Diggins coming up to talk to me. He'd been one of Ken's pupils. He's now a retired old silly old fart like me

17:00 but it was very touching.

May I ask what ship he was on?

He was on the Sydney.

That was my next question really, was how did the sinking of the Sydney impact on you and your community.

It affected my mother. She could never really accept that it had been sunk. There was always a hope. That was her attitude, there was always a hope.

17:30 Of course, there never was really. One of my nephews is a missionary in New Guinea now. He's deeply interested in that still. He's got all the literature and he keeps writing to me about it. It was one of the things probably that prompted me to join, I think. I couldn't believe that a regular would be that incompetent as to

18:00 endanger his ship in the way that it was. So I was embittered over that. I find it very difficult to comprehend how they must have died. Clearly the whole ship was on fire. It must have been horrid. I just think of - I've had a lovely life, really. You see, my brother was killed a month after he was 21.

18:30 I've had 50 years! You know, he missed all of that. He was very talented. He was a great cricketer, really, since he was this high. He'd drag my father's bat around and that's all he wanted to do, was play cricket but he was pretty good, and may well have played for Australia. You know, all that sort of thing. He really now - I wrote a piece for the school. We've done a history of all the boys who were killed

19:00 and while the descendants are still alive and these men are clearly remembered, they said, "Let's do a piece on each of them so that we just don't have a sterile honour roll." We've got beautiful honour rolls at the school, one in the rose garden and one in the chapel, and all that sort of thing but they've now got a book, so in fact people tell you about what they were like when they were alive and their impact on people. It's a very good idea.

19:30 Anyway, I did a thing on my brother and of course he was eight years older, and I just have warm fuzzy feelings of him. I was allowed to clean his cricket boots and that sort of thing, and he was a very nice brother but I don't know what prompted him to teach for a year. I think he was just filling in time waiting for his call up for the navy. He'd done his medicals and everything as soon as he matriculated.

20:00 I don't know that he was going to spend his whole life teaching and all I could really talk about was sort of his games history, and I was able to track down all his averages, and everything from Western Australia. There's a team that do it. They even tracked down my father's averages because he'd played in Country Week and all sorts of things. I decided that that was his way of speaking. Cricket was the way

20:30 he expressed himself. In 1936 he bowled - the English Test Team in '36, coming to Australia in 1936, provided four men in a team called Incogniti. The gifted cricketers in Western Australia go around to each school in turn and play them, and my brother bowled Ames and Wyatt, Ames was the wicket keeper and Wyatt was the vice captain, bowled them cheaply

21:00 and then he was the highest score for the team, and he was lauded in Melbourne. He got his photo in The Sun Herald and everything, and he was quite something. I was able to dredge all that up.

I was wondering if your image of war changed at all with the death of your brother?

No. I thought it was part and parcel of it.

21:30 Dad's brother was killed on his first day in the line, in the 11th Battalion. My mother's brother had been to Gallipoli and had gone through all of the terrible things. He'd been a machine gunner in the 28th Battalion and then when they formed a machine gun battalion, he was in the machine gun battalion. He was killed in March of 1918 down around Amiens and the family story is that it was by giving his gasmask to a reinforcement. I don't know whether that's true. I've

22:00 never dared follow it up. So I don't know what one's image was. There was always a cost. I'd lost two brothers - two uncles and then my brother. My father told me when I joined, one of the things he said was, "As a family we don't have a great history. We usually get whacked the first time." So that was interesting!

Well, you changed the odds there!

I got wounded the first day!

22:30 No, I think we were aware of the cost.

Just before I move onto your actual career, I just wanted to ask two questions. One was that I've read that the sinking of the Sydney utterly changed Australia's understanding of what was going on in wartime and took it away from something abstract into something very tangible.

- 23:00 I don't know that I can be that objective. We were so wrapped up in our own family's concern. I've never thought about it in those terms. An interesting thought. I think that all the terrible things that happened after Pearl Harbour were the most traumatic. I mean, the fact is we lost
- 23:30 a division of fine young Australian men and for God's sake, we're a peculiar race! That's the greatest shame that has ever been inflicted on our nation, to lose twenty thousand fine young men, surrendered! It should be our eternal shame but instead we glorify their bravery when they were in captivity. I think that's quite right. I think it was awful. There's no doubt about that.
- 24:00 The only image we have is of Weary Dunlop, great man that he is, but we surrendered! Nobody has said, "Why did it happen? What have we got to do to make sure it never happens again?" If ever we get into a thing as terrible as a war, we've got to do it more professionally. We just can't commit our fine young lives to that sort of thing. We don't care! We really don't care. Now
- 24:30 all the names of the great men have been subsumed from the Second and the First [World] War[s]. People talk about Jack but they don't know what Jack did. There was a book that came out about Harry Murray the other month and none of the battalion commanders were remembered. Ralph Honner was remembered for commanding the 39th Battalion. The name that really is the name for the Second [World] War now
- 25:00 is Weary Dunlop, for God's sake! To surrender! Oh, goodness me! He was brave beyond belief, no doubt about that but that's all we remember about the war. I hope we aren't going to have a whole series of generations that just bloody well surrender!

Well if they watch the 2000 odd hours of tape that we're recording for this project, they might have a different perspective.

No, but you see where I'm coming from?

- 25:30 What followed Pearl Harbor shattered us to our bootstraps, shattered the nation. We had no comprehension. We had always been in the backwater and it was worse at the senior level. I mean, they make a great thing about Curtin being an outstanding Prime Minister. He may well have been but he and his senior politicians, and his senior bureaucracy, were
- 26:00 totally panic stricken, totally panic stricken! They didn't know what to do! It was beyond their experience. They had never been involved. They'd been happy to be part of the Imperial organization up until then, where they would sit with the British and the Canadians, and the New Zealanders, and they'd devise Imperial strategies but they had never been practitioners. The worse thing that ever happened was on the 17th of April
- 26:30 1942. Curtin signed a piece of paper, which made General MacArthur his sole military strategic adviser and in one stroke of the pen he just surrendered our sovereignty. He put it in the hands of a foreigner. Now you can accept that the Americans are our cousins. They're not our cousins at all. They're a foreign nation and he was bound to
- 27:00 satisfy the self-interests of the United States.

Well I can bring this back to your perspective, what was going on for you as a young man then?

I didn't know anything about that when I was a boy.

For example, the sinking of the Sydney, the entry of the Japanese and the fall of 8th Division, did it start to shatter your faith?

Yes, we just didn't understand all that. As I said, we had the

- 27:30 Prince of Wales and the renowned survivors were walking through the streets of Perth, and people coming back from the - the escapees. They couldn't dress them or anything for some reason and they were just allowed out. Then this onrush of the Japanese! In next to no time they were in Papua New Guinea and then they bombed Darwin, and Broome. It all shattered us, pretty much.

At school, I gather

- 28:00 **there were cadets of some kind?**

Yes, we had an active cadet movement and we dug the air raid shelters. Then before they'd been dug, the American Catalinas came in and landed on the Swan River, and based themselves down there at the university, at the BOQ [Bachelor Officers' Quarters], it was Curry Hall and so they were flying off, and there would always be stories about one came back, and it had been hit, and it was - all this sort of thing. Then there

- 28:30 has always been some suggestion that they had a submarine attack, either near Geraldton, which is where the Sydney was sunk, or between Fremantle and Rottnest [Island], out that way.

Has that not been confirmed?

If it has it didn't get a wide publicity and I must say, I've never followed through. Somebody was telling me about it the other day, an elderly lady, Mim Marks. She was a Perth girl. She said, "It was true, you know!"

How vulnerable do you think -

29:00 **how vulnerable did it seem to you at the time in Perth?**

We were totally, totally - we were always the furthest capital and we were totally isolated. We didn't see it - at least as kids we didn't see it that way but they formed the voluntary defence corps of the First AIF. We imagined as cadets we would go off and

29:30 carry water for them or something.

Did you have a plan yourself? Did you know what you'd do if the Japanese turned up?

No, not really. I was an RAP messenger and I was in the cadets, and I was a boy scout, so we had a mixture of all sorts of things but no, I don't think I had a personal thing. We rather imagined that we'd go off as cadets and have a go.

Well, the war finished before

30:00 **you could do that. What was that like, the - ?**

End of the war? VP [Victory in the Pacific] Day we all went to town and the people were running around the streets of Perth dancing and kissing and so on. It was a time of elation.

Was that your reaction?

Yes, I think so. I remember I came in on my mother and she was down on her knees praying.

30:30 She prayed a lot. Poor old thing, it was pretty tough for her to have lost her son but that's the only thing I can remember. Then there were all sorts of celebratory services and concerts. Life didn't change much. We were doing our matriculation and we continued on. I can't think of anything dramatic. The men started to come

31:00 home. I had a cousin who was a prisoner of war came home and I spent the day with him.

Where had he been?

He was in Changi, rather lucky, fortunate to survive. I remember that.

When you spent the day with him did he tell you anything about his time there?

Not that I can recall. We went up and had a haircut together or something. We'd

31:30 always been pretty close, all the family, though a family of the Scottish tradition, my mother's family were tight as a drum. When my grandmother was alive all the sisters would go every week to the family home and they'd take a plate. Then when she died the elder sister took over and I was about the last of the Mohicans. All the older cousins got married and

32:00 were working. I used to have to traipse off every week until I started school but the food was good! The food was a very big test and as the cousins married, their wives would be introduced to this, and some of them were super cooks. Vera Lance used to make brandy snaps you would die for! Anyway, it came our time and my wife Anne, she had to

32:30 produce, and by then the aunts were venerable. She didn't know what to do and everything she attempted to make went bad. It was something to do with the oven. We were in married quarters down in there, where the SAS [Special Air Service] is now, so she went over to her own home with her mother and she attempted a sponge there, and that fell down, and she was beside herself. I said, "Look, why don't you go

33:00 to Mrs Bovell's?" She's quite a famous lady in Claremont. "See what she can do." Mrs Bovell, she's now syndicated. She made Australia's best pie or something. It's a big business but in those days it was Bovell's Cake Shop. She said, "Look, I can solve your problem. You bring in a plate and I'll do the sponge, and then I'll ice it in a sort of an amateurish way." Anyway, my wife trotted along with

33:30 Mrs Bovell's sponge. All the aunts were there and they tasted it, and my aunt, who was my godmother, was the sponge specialist. Aunty Nell had always been the sponge specialist. She took a taste and she said, "Anne darling, I'm so glad you've used my recipe." Didn't say anything else. The sisters didn't know but for forty years she'd been going to Mrs

34:00 Bovell! [laughs] My mother didn't know that! I never did tell her. She would be furious to think that Aunty Nell had outwitted them all. Anyway, that's by the by.

When the war finished - ?

Oh yes, getting back to the war.

Was there a part of you that was almost disappointed that you didn't get a shot?

No, I don't think -

34:30 I'd have to really ponder that. I don't think so, although I still believed that I had an obligation, somehow, somewhere or other and that's why I went to Duntroon.

That's interesting because -

I had this commitment. I thought it was my turn had come and off I went. So while it wasn't the sole driving thing, it was one of the benchmarks, I'm sure. So I'd probably say yes.

Was there not a chance then to say

35:00 **you could do something else with your career, as opposed to a military career?**

Yes I suppose so but I hadn't seen it that way and I did all my medicals and so on in 1945, and then went in '46. I suppose I could have thought that.

What did you have to do to get into Duntroon?

We did a whole series of tests. We were

35:30 the second group to be psych-tested. That was a new thing and then we had our academic results, and references, and then there was a selection board. We did a whole series of interviews and then we went away to wait for our exam results, and then eventually they sent a letter. We did a medical thing.

I'm sure you would have sailed through all those interviews and examinations.

36:00 I suppose yes. I don't know. I hadn't thought of that.

The psych-test that they gave you, I'm curious to know whether you can recall some of the specifics of that?

It was all raw shark and all that stuff, and what do you see on that inkblot.

Really! It was like that?

Yes, all that stuff. We were very fortunate. We had a fellow called Ted Campbell. I don't know whether you've heard of him?

36:30 He was a very great man. He became our first director of psychology in the army in 1944. He'd been a gunner, I think, and then established the psychology corps. He was eventually replaced by a very good friend of mine, a chap called John Affleck, who was the MC [master of ceremonies] at one of my daughter's weddings. He and I then did a whole series of selection boards when I was at OCS [Officer Cadet School]. So we've been through the selection boards

37:00 bit. On odd days when no one was looking we used to change and he'd become the commandant because we were in plain clothing, and I'd be the psychologist for the day. It gave us a bit of variety!

Well it gives me sort of a chill to think how quickly you could size somebody up but I'll brave on.

A chill!

Well just in terms of sitting here with you and you've probably already sussed me out.

I mean we had

37:30 a pretty thorough record. I mean you had a very careful and good medical examination. You had the academic record, which is a clear indication of a fella's capacity and self-discipline, and in the course of interviews you'd determine somebody's family background, and all of those factors. Then there was this pure psych-test and so we had a whole series of things to lean on, and then the

38:00 evidence with experienced men looking at young men across the table. It was pretty thorough. The big thing was to determine the cut-off points and there's a marginal level, and you can't go below that. We called it SG3 Minus [measurement in psychological/aptitude testing system], and that's where the troubles come in, when you go below that.

SG Minus did you say?

SG3 Minus, I think it was called. That was for soldiers.

38:30 The officer's thing was the officer intelligence ratio.

Just before this tape finishes, your ambitions as a young man? How far did you imagine you would go in the army?

I thought I'd get to the top! I don't know, I really don't know!

You bloody well did, didn't you?

No, but I always wanted to be a battalion commander.

39:00 I don't know whether that was from the beginning or from later on, I don't know but some time in my life I got that ambition. I think every fellow when he starts off thinks about that! It's like you might as well be the head of the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] when you start, why not? Give it a go!

I don't know if I could cope with those ulcers after dinner!

[laughs] I don't think they get too many ulcers!

39:30 End of tape

Tape 3

00:32 **Let's talk about your training at Duntroon and whether it lived up to your expectations.**

Yes! On the military side it was excellent. It really was. We had the opportunity to really get a great knowledge of the army. We were trained to become platoon commanders or the equivalent in every arm or service,

01:00 so in addition to the infantry undercurrent that went right through - that's the basic thing that everyone does in the army. We were trained to be gunners. We actually knew the gun numbers, the gun layers, the surveyors, the battery command and the DR [despatch rider], the whole thing. In the artillery we actually fired the guns. We corrected the fire of the guns. We did the surveys. We did all that. We did the same for engineering. We did the

01:30 mathematics of bridge building and all those sorts of things. We did all the signalling things that were necessary, from learning Morse code through to operating the larger sets and we did the armoured corps training, driving the tanks, and servicing them, and maintaining them, and commanding them, and commanding troops of tanks, and so on. We did get an introduction into the logistics side. We certainly did the logistic planning and the staff

02:00 duties and so on that's associated with it, and we visited the various ordnance and service corps facilities. We used to do each year a trek with motor vehicles and with tanks and so on, so that we were accustomed to these things. We did prolonged infantry exercises as well. So in the three years - we were the last of the three year courses that were established for the war, we had a very thorough grounding and I can honestly say that I didn't

02:30 learn anything on the structure, and the organisational side of the army, new after that time. Even at the staff college, we went through it all again but I'd been very thoroughly grounded at Duntroon. It was an excellent program and we had also a very solid military history basis. We did English and

03:00 mathematics, and the sciences, chemistry and physics. It was a good all-round program.

What was it like having to leave home virtually for the first time and come across the other side of Australia?

A bit strange, a bit strange. I found it all a bit extraordinary. These little kids would come up in front of you and tell you to stand to attention, and do all this hazing stuff. I found that a bit

03:30 passé but you got used to it.

I'm also interested in the fact that you were there so close after the end of a massive theatre of war for Australia. I read a little about Duntroon and it went through a few peaks and troughs through the years but then it must have been really quite focussed in what it was trying to achieve.

We had very experienced instructors, obviously, but understand [that] they had been away

04:00 for six years and they were getting used to home life again, and so I think they were pretty interested in that. The cadets have traditionally always run themselves at Duntroon. That's one of the ideas of the thing, so that was different.

I don't understand that, sorry, the cadets have run themselves?

Well, there are four years' worth of cadets now and the senior class, the ones that have been there three years previously, in their final year, run

04:30 the cadet organization. They are more than prefects. They actually run the thing. They run the parades within the cadet body and administer the discipline as required, and so on.

It that why there is so much hazing?

No, no, no. No, that's a separate thing. This is a properly administered basis and if a cadet is cheeky or if his gear is dirty, or

05:00 his bed is not properly made or something, he gets an extra drill. He puts his pack on and parades around. Hazing is something in addition to that, the bastardry and so on, and that's probably when the hierarchy gets too far away. It's customary for cadets to run it but there's a company commander and an officer responsible for each of the companies, so they keep an eye on it. If they get a bit too distant

05:30 you'll get some people who are authoritarian by nature and they'll get out of hand.

While you were training and studying, BCOF [British Commonwealth Occupation Force] was well underway, was that something you had set your sights on already?

No, but it was the only thing that was going on and it was out of the country, and the cadets who had graduated before and had gone to Japan were writing us letters telling us what

06:00 they were doing, and it was all very exciting because it was foreign. We were a very isolated group. There were only 140 of us and we called it the clink but it was pretty much that we didn't go out much. You'd get leave on Saturday night until midnight and if you went out on the Saturday night you had to be

06:30 back by nine o'clock on the Sunday night or if you hadn't gone out on the Saturday night you could come back at ten on Sunday night.

Is it a place that you could be happy in? Happy has a lot of different meanings for people, but - ?

It was pretty sterile. Of course Canberra was only eighteen thousand people then, you know, and it had all these beautiful suburbs but they were separated by miles of highway and trees, and nothing in between.

07:00 They'd got the ground design but to walk from Manuka to Civic would take you three quarters of an hour and you'd just walk along these roads with nothing on either side. Of course, we didn't have money. We had ten bob our parents would send us, so we rode bikes or walked and there was nothing much. There was a dance at the Albert Hall. There were still servicemen there and

07:30 there was a servicemen's hut at Manuka near the swimming pool there somewhere.

What about the absence of girls at that age?

What about it?

Most 18 year old boys I know seem to have only one thing in mind and I appreciate the times were different but - ?

Well there weren't a lot of girls. There were some and each class had fellas who found girls in Canberra.

08:00 Then we'd have functions about once every three months and girls would be imported largely from Sydney, and they'd come down for the dance and all that sort of thing, and have the weekend there.

Very little normalisation in that respect then?

No it wasn't, except for the people that had their girls there. They were very keen.

So what made a good soldier at the time? I'm going to ask you this

08:30 **again later when we talk about the selection process.**

Well, it's all sorts of things. The good soldier - the man who would most profoundly affect all of us was the RSM [regimental sergeant major]. That was a man called 'Fango' Watson, and he was a remarkable man.

Well, he's got an interesting name.

He had a profound affect on our lives actually and he taught us all sorts of things. He was the same person on day one as on the day we graduated. He didn't change.

09:00 He was severe. He was demanding. He set the highest standards of dress and behaviour and bearing, and he just didn't deviate, and he was a very nice man. But that was being an individual soldier in that sense of the way you go about it. Then to

09:30 be a soldier you've also got to be competent in addition to having the soldierly skills, always pointing your cap badge at the enemy and all that stuff but then you've got to have some competence, and that's a variable feast as you know. That depends on the skill you have, your day-to-day competence, the way you can

10:00 command and get things done, your ability to be on top of everything no matter what, and you get lots of funny things happen, and the way you are able to set the standards for your own people, all of these

things. Each of these things make a soldier by definition but the

10:30 individual qualities, that fellow Watson, he was a remarkable man.

Could you tell from your perspective who was going to turn out okay and who wasn't?

Some fell by the wayside and you picked those.

How though, for example?

Well you know, there were physical

11:00 limitations or something like that, lack of determination or something. You got some people who were very bright and very able and great commentators but when it hits the fan they suddenly aren't there. That's like life wherever you are, in your job too.

11:30 **So I guess the true test of a soldier isn't really until they are in a battle situation?**

No, no, no. I think you can get a gauge before that. You can get an idea of a person and the way they conduct themselves, and how they deal with soldiers and soldierly things. Some people are just theoretically very capable but can't do practical things. You know, they can't catch a tram

12:00 but there's a place for them and the army is a vast place. We've got some remarkable talented people and everybody finds his niche. I was talking about one this morning. I was playing golf with a fellow the other day and we talked about somebody who had been killed in Korea, whom I knew. I tracked

12:30 this boy down in the war histories and read out how his friend had been killed, and he was quite touched and very grateful, but the bloke that did the history, the official history of the war was Bob [Robert] O'Neill, who was a cadet, and got an engineering degree and all the rest of it and went with an infantry battalion to Vietnam. Subsequently he's

13:00 become the Chichele Professor of History at Oxford University, a Rhodes Scholar and all of these things. He had a vast talent. He – precise and practical professional qualification as an engineer, and yet turned into a historian of world calibre, a nice man too. So there are places for everyone and not everyone is going to the face of battle, and this is why the

13:30 definition of a soldier is such a marginal thing and there are people that just aren't equipped to go to the face of battle, and shouldn't be allowed, and that doesn't mean that they're cowards or anything like that. They're just not equipped to go but they've got other things that they can be doing and we've got a range of jobs and opportunities that are available to people.

What were your thoughts about being sent to BCOF then?

Thrilled, thrilled! We thought it was marvellous. We'd

14:00 come out at the end of the war, as you said, and we went to the School of Infantry, which was then in Seymour, and we did a postgraduate course, where we were introduced to the corps, and all that sort of thing, got used to living in officers' messes, and got used to having an opportunity to take a drink from time to time because we had lived in a monastery. We got used to getting a bit of a wage.

14:30 It occurred it us that we weren't going to get to the war. We were the only people in the army without a medal ribbon and that's terrible.

Is that what it is about?

I don't know, but to young fellas we felt that we were pretty bloody obvious! [laughs] All the older fellas would look at us like this, you know? So the whole group of us applied to go to Indonesia as military observers. We wrote these

15:00 things out, laborious letters, sent them in and they were sent back summarily, and we were told to pull our heads in and get on with it. So going to BCOF was at least going abroad and that was exciting.

Certainly in the first year or so after the war finished there was a lot of instrumental work to be done by the occupational forces. By the time you got there was it more of a nominal position to be holding?

15:30 No. We had particular duties. [technical break]

Well, let's talk about arriving in Japan and the experience, what that must have been like for you?

Oh look, mind boggling! Let me tell you about going up there. We went up in a Lancastrian, which is a converted Lancaster bomber. The door has got a bulkhead and there

16:00 were not a lot of seats in it, and so on. We went Sydney, Darwin. We were overnight at Darwin. We went Darwin, Manila. We were overnight in Manila. Then Manila, Japan. When we got to Manila, we were fed by QANTAS [Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Services] at a café on the airstrip, a vast airstrip, normal café.

- 16:30 We then chose to have steak and we each got a whole T-bone steak. I'll never forget this as long as I live, the first time I've ever seen a meal come on a carving dish and doesn't everyone have a whole T-bone. Well as a matter of fact now, but in those days we had steak in little bits and we didn't get very well fed when we were cadets I've gotta tell you! This was mind boggling and I remember that clearly, the
- 17:00 T-bone steak and this gregarious café owner coming around talking to us. He was known to every Australian visitor there in those days. We landed at Iwakuni, which was the base of the air force and where 77 Squadron was, who we got to know quite well later. We were met by a classmate who'd gone ahead on another flight and we went back by launch from Iwakuni
- 17:30 up through the inland sea to Kure, and then we went to Hiro, where the battalion base was. But first of all the classmate was then properly dressed. He had his old World War II service dress with white webbing and highly polished boots. We were really impressed and a whole lot of insignia. There was an LXV1167 across the top in
- 18:00 a sort of gold bullion on a maroon backing and then there was a BCOF badge, and it all looked very impressive, and the battalion lanyard, and he had a walking stick. So we were mightily impressed and eager to find out everything. It was our first look at the Japanese, obviously. They were the groundsmen and all the rest of it, cleaning the barracks and so on. We had a shower there
- 18:30 I think, something like that in Iwakuni and then we went on. So we got to the battalion and they had very nice barracks, and there was a nice officers' mess, and we all had a room, and it was beautifully prepared, really.

What did you think that you were ultimately there to do?

We were engaged largely in the resettlement of the Japanese army, the return of the army from all over

- 19:00 the world and resettling them. We were also there ultimately to keep the peace if all else failed. Nobody knew what to expect really and of course the Japanese were a very well ordered society, so nothing happened, but that was primarily why we were there. We did this in a number of ways. We were a very small battalion by then. We were all up about 400 people, I think. We had
- 19:30 a company always on duty in Tokyo, where we mounted guard on the Emperor's Palace and a number of guard posts, and of course the British Embassy, and the Australian High Commission, and places like that. We shared these guard duties with the First Cavalry Division, the American division, which had the responsibility for Tokyo and we would do formal guard mounts on the big
- 20:00 expanse just in front of the palace. It was quite beautiful, actually, with all the bulwarks. The walls of the palace are this big bluestone and there's a lovely moat, and birds, and so on. So we did that. That was one company and they did that for three months at a time, and then they'd come back to Hiro. The company that was in the barracks had the responsibility for the Kure
- 20:30 Docks, extensive docks, the base of the Japanese fleet and it was still evidenced that the fleet had been there. We had guards on the docks and various points on the docks, and there was one company, which would be away training. We had a farm up in the hills near Seijo, where they make the - what's the drink they have?
- 21:00 The wine? Sake! Where they make the sake because the water is very clear at Seijo but we were at a place called Haramura, which had been a Japanese cavalry training barracks. You'd do three months there. You'd do three months at the base and so on.

What sort of an attitude did you and your other lieutenants have of this conquered race?

Firstly we were learning our business. I've got to make this quite clear. We were

- 21:30 there to learn to be the platoon commanders and to deal with the soldiers, and to look after their problems, and to train them, so that preoccupied us. The Japanese, Australia and Australians had a terrible attitude about the Japanese and there was just a schism. We wanted no part of them. We'd all been aware of what happened with the prisoners of war and we wanted no part of the Japanese.
- 22:00 We had outside of the barracks a beautiful education centre, brand new, beautiful library, the whole shooting match and we should have been frog-marched into there and taught Japanese but we had no contact at all. You know, it was stupid but it was Australian. The whole of the country was, would be offended if we'd been seen to be associating with them.

Did you think of your cousin when you went to Japan?

Oh yes!

- 22:30 We all did and we had a real thing about it because the war had been very bad. The Second World War was very nasty against the Japanese and we've learned since but in those days no fraternisation was it, and that's the way it was. So we lived a life totally involved in ourselves. We had little mess parties and people would entertain people from other

23:00 messes, and we played games with one another, basketball and squash. We were quite busy milling around.

If a country like Australia is going to maintain a professional army then I can understand why they needed to send you certain places but I'm curious to know whether there was any sense that the war they'd just fought wasn't even really over, whether there was a constant sense of - ?

Oh no!

23:30 It was over and we saw some consequence in the United Nations and indeed we'd like to think that we were recognised through the occupation for our contribution to the war. The commander in chief was an Australian. It was the first time there had ever been a non-British C in C [commander in chief] in charge of a Commonwealth force and he was engaged at the level with

24:00 MacArthur, and so on, and they would discuss things. We had particular responsibilities for a number of prefectures when we got there and gradually it all reduced back to the Hiroshima prefecture as the force got smaller and smaller. We got to the BCOF at the end of the BCOF. 77 Squadron was sending its engines, they have two engines were aeroplane. They were sending the spare engines home. It was all on the scale-down and we were

24:30 the only battalion left. The other two battalions had long since gone home in '48 and the force had scaled down. The New Zealanders had gone home. The British had gone home. The Indians had gone home. We just represented 34 Brigade, a pretty tiny little thing. We were the only ground force. The battalion was the ground force. So we understood we were at the end of it all and it was winding up.

Had you heard whispers of Korea

25:00 **at that point in time?**

Oh no, not at all. I was on a train coming back from Tokyo. A fellow called Bernie O'Dowd and since you're not allowed to tell me, he's a dear friend of mine. We've got a photo here somewhere of Benny and I. He was the transport office and he and I, and a fellow called Eric Larsen, who was killed in Pakchon

25:30 in Korea, had been sent by the battalion to represent the offices of Allen McCann to an American girl in the Tokyo General Hospital chapel. So we'd gone up and we'd had the wedding the day before, and we were on this train coming back to Kure. The trains were terrific. They ran right to the minute and all the Americans in this long train started to talk about Korea or something. They all had

26:00 portable radios and sure enough they said, "North Korea has invaded South Korea." I said to Benny, "Now Korea?" I knew where it was but I said, "Where is it?" "It's over here somewhere. I wonder what's happening to Sugar." Sugar was the American girl he'd been squiring around and she was in the American Embassy in Seoul. So that was our first notification of

26:30 the Korean War. Benny of course went on and became the hero of Kapyong and a whole series of things. He's a great soldier. So that's when we first really heard about Korea and that was on the 23rd or 24th of June. From then on we kept an interest going. We were alerted once in August, I think, to go and then we got reinforced through

27:00 the end of August, September, and we went on the 28th of September, so it was 1950, and our first view of it that was mine was sitting in the train listening to the Americans say, "North Korea has invaded South Korea."

Quite graphic, that image. Was MacArthur still around in Japan when you were there?

Oh yes. Yes he was and, you know, he was a very distant figure.

27:30 He lived in the American Embassy, a white stucco building, typical American sort of building. Then he would drive from there straight down First Avenue, down to the Dai Ichi Building, Number One Building Dai Ichi, a big building, and every morning all the traffic lights would go green at this particular time, and MacArthur's car would come straight down. Then in the lunchtime, the traffic lights would go green

28:00 and he'd walk out of the car into the Dai Ichi Building, and then the lifts would all be stopped, and his lift would be there with the door open. He'd step in, the doors would close and up he'd go. You know, he used to get a lot of jocular stuff about him, so that we never saw him. We saw his wife.

28:30 Mrs MacArthur was much younger and she did all his representational things. We used to have on Empire Day, May the 24th I think it used to be, we would have a big parade in Tokyo. The whole battalion would go to Tokyo for the parade and we'd do it in front of the Emperor's Palace. It was a lovely day and then there would be a cocktail party and everything in the evening. She used to come to those functions.

29:00 He never did. He never went to anybody. He didn't even see his own soldiers and he lived this very extraordinary life. I later met him but do you want to do that now?

Where did you get a chance to meet him?

When I was working for General Robertson because Robbie really was MacArthur's confidant in as much as

- 29:30 a senior officer. You're a bit isolated when you become very senior and you can't exchange confidences with your subordinates. It's the same in any business and so Robbie was a lieutenant general, and he would have a meeting about once a fortnight. They'd talk through a whole range of things and so they became quite close, and I used to take Robbie into the briefings every morning. There was a briefing
- 30:00 at army headquarters and we'd go into that to start the day. On one of these occasions we were taken into MacArthur's office and I said, "How do you do, sir?" So there you are.

Did he say, "How do you do?" back?

Yes, something like that. I've got to say this about him though, when you talk about MacArthur you've got to get it into perspective,

- 30:30 whatever you do. I mean, he was a larger than life figure, a most extraordinary man. He was fifty years a general officer and he did remarkable things in the American scene in the First [World] War. He did extraordinary things in the Second [World] War and then in the Korean War, he sort of held things together but his landing in Inchon was one of the world's great strategic moves but the big
- 31:00 thing about him was as a proconsul. Whether he had a prescience or whether he was so direct I don't know, but I think it was a bit of both. He did two things right at the beginning of it all. First of all he did nothing to the Emperor. He preserved the Emperor and treated him with dignity all the way through, and this to the Japanese was extraordinary. They couldn't believe that an occidental would have such an insight
- 31:30 because they were in a terrible dilemma, because suddenly the world had been revealed to them, and he wasn't immortal, and he was no longer a god. So they were having a terrible, terrible, emotional, philosophic problem. The other thing that MacArthur did almost straight away was to enfranchise women and
- 32:00 the Japanese were just knocked flat by this, and they then revered him, and they placed him almost as a substitute Emperor. They couldn't believe that a white man would have had such sage and intuition to do the things that had to be done. He was a brilliant proconsul. There's no doubt about it. He had a good team but his settlement of Japan
- 32:30 and his moves that got them to transition towards democracy are just fantastic when you look at where they are now and how little trouble they were. I mean, not three years before, the possibility was that every Japanese would commit suicide preventing the landing of the allied forces. I mean, it was an enormous step and all throughout he was able to preserve their
- 33:00 equanimity. He's a remarkable man. I don't think he will ever be fully understood.

On a trickle down effect as a young officer in a foreign land, did you have any sense of being imperial in any sense?

We were very much - we had no thought for them at all.

And were they the

- 33:30 **vanquished lower forms?**

Very much. Can I tell you about my one moment of history?

Please!

Andy Warhol says you get fifteen minutes, you see!

We're getting about six hours!

I got fifteen minutes once in my life and it was when I was with Red Robbie, and in addition to everything it was at the time when MacArthur was removed, and went home. We'd been through all that and

- 34:00 in fact I'd had to brief him when it happened but he'd been away and he'd come back. Finally MacArthur is leaving and if you remember the newsreel, he flies out in his C54 called Bataan, a big four engine monster. You'll see the last photograph of him, he's got his marvellous cap on and he's saluting at the door, next time you see the documentary. Let me tell you
- 34:30 about the background of all of this. Robbie said, "Now look, there's no way under the protocol arrangements that he (Robbie) could attend the farewell at all." There was no formal farewell in that sense but he did want to make sure that a bouquet was given to Mrs MacArthur. He said to Mavis, that was our
- 35:00 AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service], she was a lieutenant in the AWAS. She was the secretary.

She's now a lady you should really talk to. She still lives in Melbourne. She worked all her life after that for the CES [Commonwealth Employment Service]. But Mavis has got to give the bouquet and he said, "Now Butler, you take her out. Escort Mavis and make sure she's - Miss Lane - escort Miss Lane. Take her out to the airport."

- 35:30 He got a sheaf of gladioli. I kid you not. This was before Edna Everidge and so I've got this vast sheaf of bloody gladioli, and she said, "I'm not going to carry that!" I said, "Well, how are they going to get there?" She said, "It's very simple!" Anyhow, I lost! So we go out and it was an unusual day. Haneda is about fifteen miles from Tokyo
- 36:00 and we went out ahead of course but we didn't go in Robbie's big car, a big black Rolls Royce. We went in a Chevrolet, a '41 Chev, but there were no other cars on the road when we went through. The street all the way from Tokyo to Haneda was lined by hundreds of thousands of Japanese, as sombre and as obedient as you could ever see. There was not a sound. They were standing there and as we passed
- 36:30 they all came to attention, and they bowed. A most eerie thing, if you go through the whole of a city and there's this totally silent crowd. They were then getting ready for MacArthur, who was going to troop along later, a most eerie thing. Anyway, we got to the business and all the people were there, and there I was with this sheaf of gladioli, and all the other ADCs gave me heaps, absolute heaps. There was a
- 37:00 General Ridgway there, of course, who had arrived and his ADC was a fella called Arnold Galiffa. Arnold Galiffa was an all-American quarterback, an all-American guard in the basketball from West Point. He was an adonis. He gave me some curry and there were a few others. I remember them still. It came the time and Mavis duly got in front of Mrs MacArthur. I'm not sure
- 37:30 she didn't curtsy and gave her the gladioli. Now in that final photograph and in the newsreel, if you look carefully to the left ear of MacArthur as he's doing that [saluting], you'll see Mrs MacArthur with the sheaf of gladioli. Now, if you think that's the end of it, it is not so! Years later - we're taking all your tape - Mrs MacArthur at
- 38:00 84 years of age, was presented to my wife or my wife was presented to Mrs MacArthur, by General George S Patton Junior under the black walnut tree in the superintendent of West Point's garden. This was 1980 or something. It was a homecoming in West Point in 1980 I guess and the Pattons and the MacArthurs have
- 38:30 always been close as families from way back. Young George was escorting Mrs MacArthur and she remembered the gladioli, and she remembered the Empire Days, and everything. She was lovely and Anne will tell you later about that. Anyway, that winds up my moment of history. My fifteen minutes was carrying the gladioli! There we are.

Well I'll look for that next time I see that reel.

Don't forget!

Tape 4

- 00:32 Australia had the overall responsibility with the commander in chief and established the base, and so created a logistic instrument of some size. We had a big workshop with all its facets, radio and the upper part of the vehicular and all that sort of thing. We had a vast ordnance enterprise there. We had a vast hospital.
- 01:00 But more than that, we were dealing with the administration between the Commonwealth nations to run the thing, so that it represents a bit of a watershed for Australia in that it started to involve our hierarchy and our bureaucracy at an international level of things. We'd had teams that had gone in 1919 to
- 01:30 Versailles but this time we were physically running things and as it turns out, when the Korean War started we had the significant problem then of basing and maintaining the force that was eventually established there. So it was a real growing up period for Australia.

And you personally, what was your perspective on that role of Australia in Japan at that time?

- 02:00 I don't know that I had a perspective. It was interesting getting to Japan and seeing the extent of things that were done there. We had people who were involved in the interpreting function and the intelligence function. The military police were active in things other than just traffic duties. They were doing CIB [Criminal Investigation Branch] type functions as well.
- 02:30 We had a vast signal empire there too with an ability that was worldwide. So one became accustomed to that in the occupation, so to speak. Then when the war came and the Korean War began, cells added to each of these things from Britain and from Canada and so on but it wasn't an easily run thing to even assemble the force, and assemble the Commonwealth

- 03:00 division. The Canadians, for instance, were in the same situation as we were and they saw their contribution as being to the United Nations, not necessarily to the Commonwealth. They had to be swung around to the thought that they were going to serve the United Nations through the Commonwealth. Now that would have taken a bit of an intricate arrangement knowing the sensitivities of other nations and the sensitivities particularly of a bilingual
- 03:30 society. So that couldn't have been easy for our diplomats, for instance, and it was very difficult for the British to come to terms with the commander and chief as an Australian. As soon as the war started, the British chiefs of staff appointed an air vice marshal to be their representative on General MacArthur's headquarters, forgetting immediately that of course we had a commander in chief
- 04:00 there to do just that thing. They took some time under a man called [Sir William] Slim, who was in the head of the joint chiefs in Britain, to come to terms with that and they had to be reminded that we already had in place all of these things. So they kept the air vice marshal but they somehow restricted his function or something. So we had to stand up for Jesus a bit as a country on issues like that and it was a
- 04:30 real growing up time for Australia.

And for yourself?

Oh yeah, gee, I wasn't even 21. It was really coming to terms with things.

What sort of contact did you have with other nationalities when you were over there?

When we first went to the occupation? Well, the Americans particularly, the Japanese to a lesser degree. We didn't see much of them but they were there and we got to know them.

Were there policies regarding

05:00 **fraternisation at that stage?**

Yes, there were. When we were there we had our mess staff and there were house girls that looked after us, and people doing the kitchen duties, and all those sorts of things. We got used to having them around and they were nice people. We seemed to get on alright. Then when the war started of course it was then that the Canadians appeared and we saw -

- 05:30 when we got to Korea we saw the French and the Turks and all the rest of them.

The Second World War had done wonders for the Australian identity, I believe. How did that play out in the occupational force? Were you still trying to enforce a sense of Australianess over there?

Yes well, we'd built on that and we'd had quite a senior role in the conduct of the force, so we'd got accustomed to these things, and I think that our

- 06:00 administrative and logistic leaders and staff officers had been that much more experienced as a result of dealing with foreign nationals. We didn't see them much but just the workers at the low level, but you know, you'd meet them socially.

I suppose just in a social interaction or professional with the Americans in Japan, what were the ways

06:30 **that you'd try and reinforce your sense of being Australian?**

I think we were pretty obvious, actually! I mean, even the way we talk, Australians stand out. I don't know. We just seemed to get on alright with people and see them socially. The Americans had all the clubs.

- 07:00 We had clubs in Kure but in Tokyo of course it was all American and we had honorary membership to certain of their clubs, so we'd go and see them, and that sort of thing.

Any conflicts at all?

Not that I can recall, no. All that went along very nicely. Everybody was bon ami [good friends]! We had a nice time in Japan.

Okay then, well, could you describe

07:30 **to us your preparations for heading to Korea?**

We did a little bit of extra training, not a lot, and the battalion headquarters went into the field for the first time that I can remember,

- 08:00 and left its offices, and it was out for four or five days, if that. What else did we do? We started to get ready for the receipt of the reinforcements and the stocks that were coming up from Japan. We realised that we had sent most of our stuff home. We were getting ready to go home

- 08:30 and so we had to be built up. The battalion was very small and they had to build it up but in building it up they had to change its structure in as much as we didn't have, for instance, a support company. A support company is the machine gun platoon, the mortar platoon, the signal platoon, and so on. We didn't have those extant in the occupation. The machine gunners and the mortar men we had were
- 09:00 serving in other places in the battalion, so that when we were getting ready for the war, they had to then come forward, and go back to what they had been trained to do. So we had to structure them as a support company and administrative company, and four rifle companies, and headquarters had to be increased, and the intelligence factor had to be increased. So all of these things were created and in addition to which
- 09:30 we started to get ready to receive all the stores, so the Q [quartermaster] function had to be improved. All that was going on fairly steadily. We got one alert and I can't remember when this was. It was before the reinforcements started to arrive and we were going - I think it must have been in early August. We were going as we were, tiny as we were, a platoon now is better than a company tomorrow
- 10:00 sort of idea that the Americans had. We even got to the point where we were issued boarding numbers to carry as we went up onto the ship and we'd all packed our stuff and so on, and then it turned out to be a false alarm, so we dismembered. Then we got - I've got the figures somewhere here but we got about 400 reinforcements, including a new CO [commanding officer], a new RSM,
- 10:30 three or four company commanders, a pretty substantial reinforcement starting towards the end of August, and it was finished by about the end of the first week in September. So we increased by a - we doubled in about three weeks and all of these people were significant, and we left on the 28th of September.
- 11:00 So we didn't really have a whole lot of time but the hardest hit, of course, was the new CO, a man called Charles Green, who arrived with the last group of reinforcements as I recall, on the 14th of September. He was commanding when we left on the 28th, so he drew the short straw.

How was he received as a new leader?

- 11:30 Very well in the most unusual way. Firstly, he was a very typical Australian, if there was such a thing. He was tall and pretty skinny and he didn't talk much, never talked about himself, and he was pretty shy and withdrawn. He was not assertive in any way and he just sort of turned up.
- 12:00 The first thing he did was - there were some officer postings to be settled and the officers had to be sorted out. He had a series of interviews with the officers who were to be posted. I was one of them. My company had virtually been dismembered to go off to the support companies, so all my soldiers had gone.
- 12:30 The three of us, the three platoon commanders were left and we hadn't got jobs. We were just standing there sucking our thumbs and so he interviewed us and we all went our ways. Two of us, another bloke and myself, went to C Company. We all went to C Company, that's right. There were some officers who very quickly went somewhere else outside of the battalion.
- 13:00 All of these postings were effected very quickly after the interviews and the interviews were within two days of him arriving. The people that went, everybody was pleased about and the soldiers applauded. They knew. Everybody said, "He's a good chap. He's got a good finger on things." He spoke to us in the officers' mess,
- 13:30 again about two days after he got there. He said things that if I said them to you, you'd think, "That's pretty trite," almost banal. Like he said, "If there's anyone here in this room who is able to command this battalion well, I will do my damndest to make sure he does. You are my officers and
- 14:00 from you will come the leaders of this battalion. I don't want reinforcements. I want you people that are here now. Now!" [shrugs] He said, "Look, I expect from now on you are going to be working very hard. When I was a young officer I didn't have much time in the mess. By the time I'd finished my day's work it would be ten or eleven o'clock at night and
- 14:30 I'd be glad to get to bed. So I don't suppose we're going to see much of you fellas in the mess any more." And things like that, but the intrinsic goodness of the man, this genuineness of him literally shone out of him. You see that very seldom in life. I've seen that probably only about twice myself where it really just comes out. One was
- 15:00 when I was at the staff college, Lord Harding came to speak to us. He was Sir John Harding originally and he'd just come back from being the commander and chief in Cyprus, and he was a diminutive fellow. He just stood in front of this 180, 200 people. He walked away from the lectern and just stood there in the centre of the stage, and his inherent goodness just took over the room, if you can
- 15:30 imagine that, to the point that the sardonic people, the Americans for instance, said, "Goddamn! We've never seen anything like that!" We had a host, Mountbatten had spoken to us, Montgomery, a host of American four star generals and people like that but this man just stood there, and Green was like that. He was farm boy. He was a dairy farmer's son. He'd left school at 13.

- 16:00 His Dad bought him a horse and a scraper, and he went to work on the roads. His Dad said, "Now you're not to do any pick and shovel work." But he knew after a little while if he didn't do it himself, it wouldn't get done. This fella just had quality and he took us over. Then bless his soul if he didn't stand up in front of the battalion on a battalion parade several days and
- 16:30 did the same thing. He just spoke about very simple things and set standards quietly, and his integrity just took the whole lot. The battalion just – within four or five days he had the whole of the battalion like that. I've never seen it before or since, quite remarkable.

As a young leader yourself at that time were you seriously taking mental notes?

- 17:00 Oh, hell no, but I suppose you were. You learn from everybody you see but usually people that stand up like Christ before the multitude don't succeed, do they? This five loaves and three fishes doesn't work with the less gifted and he just had this capacity. Yet he was not a flamboyant figure. He'd been
- 17:30 kicked by a horse when he was young but he was good with horses, so he had false teeth, so his face had set this way. You know the way? Well, the Depression look. You know, you've got the thin face, although he was quite a good looking man. He was tall and thin. He didn't thrust his body around. He was not one of these militant things. He wasn't an automaton.
- 18:00 Anyway, I've written a book about him but he really intrigued me and I thought he was the youngest man to command an Australian battalion in the Second War. I thought, "Now why is that so?" And I started on the wrong premise.

Did you know that then when you first met him?

Yes, he'd commanded the 2/11th Battalion and

- 18:30 I thought that in the war the systems would be the same as the systems were now, in other all the lieutenant colonels are kept on a common roll, and they have seniority from the time that they were first promoted, so to speak. So that this fellow would have been chosen against the whole of the lieutenant colonels in the army during the war but I didn't know then that was not so.
- 19:00 Each battalion had its own roll and he was senior within the Second Battalion, so that when he was selected he was only selected against a handful, so to speak, and they measured him probably against the people within their common knowledge, so that it was a slightly different thing but I didn't know that for years, and I kept hunting, asking people why did they choose him, what special thing did they see? Did he present this thing that I'd seen in Japan
- 19:30 that impressed us all? Was that the way he'd gone about his life? I went to Sir Frederick Chilton, who was one of this nation's most distinguished civil servants, who was deeply involved in the establishment of ASIO [Australian Security Intelligence Organisation] and ASIS [Australian Secret Intelligence Service], and he was very highly regarded. He'd been Green's company commander and then he'd been his CO in Greece. He'd been the best man at Green's wedding and I said,
- 20:00 "Why did you pick him? Another platoon commander at the same time in that battalion was 'Jika' Travis, an international rugby player, Barbarian, Captain of the Barbarians, raconteur, graduate of Sydney University, graduate of Oxford. How would a young boy from a dairy farm compete against
- 20:30 such a man?" Even in those days he was a very cultivated man, later became a very distinguished headmaster of Shore. He said, "Green was a good chap."

It's pretty simple, isn't it!

Oh yes. Then Sir Paul Cullen, you read about him. He's still alive, Paul Cullen. He commanded the 2/2nd and I said to him, "Now why did you pick Green?"

- 21:00 He said, "All the officers in the 2/2nd were good chaps." You know? This was a man who was one of the leaders of our industry. He's a good chap but they wouldn't qualify it. It fascinated me. Anyway, he grabbed us in a week. He was pure talent and very few people have ever been given such a job. I mean, to pull together such a disparate group of people. He accepted that the 400 reinforcements
- 21:30 were experienced people. They had either been in the Second AIF or they came from the other battalions in the regiment but even so it was a disparate group of people and he just pulled it all together. He was a marvellous man.

Still, it's a very quick turn around. Honestly, how confident were you of going into action?

We had no – this is the other thing that intrigued me about him. There was never any questioning and in fact we, who

- 22:00 had not been to war, were really given the impression that this always happens. Things come together quickly and away you go, doesn't everybody? We did a couple of exercises, which were of a very modest nature and were really organisational as distinct from tactical. We just tried – for instance, they'd never tried a support company in the field before. They'd had the weapons before but they'd never had an
- 22:30 actual company holding all of them, so we weren't quite sure how to feed them, and it turned out that

none of the support company got any bloody rations on the first exercise we went to. Sure, Green, replaced the fellow pretty quickly but we were still finding these things out. But everyone was very confident. All the reinforcement company commanders carried on. I remember one fellow, a captain, he had

23:00 every ribbon you could have. He had the Middle Eastern, all those things we didn't have. This fellow had been the staff officer to a very senior politician during the war and he'd been all sorts of things. He cut a very fine figure. He had one of those developed moustaches and he was a punctilious returner of salutes, and all the rest of it.

23:30 He accosted me at breakfast one morning and of course in those days sometimes we'd get up late and you'd have two minutes for your breakfast, then you'd have to be down on parade, so everything was in a hurry, and this fellow said, "Tell me lad, what headdress do the officers of this battalion wear in action?" It was a thought that hadn't even occurred to me! "Oh blah, we haven't been in action!"

24:00 He said, "It's a very important question." He said, "I always wore my cap myself in the last show." I thought, "Gee, what a brave fella! Ooooooh!" I thought, "My God! He's somebody!" I went away and I told my chums about this, and we muttered away as little boys will. Anyway, this fella was with us about a month and then

24:30 suddenly left us. He wasn't really up to it.

At this point would you describe yourself as a brave man?

No.

What were your thoughts of going into action?

When it happened it happened so suddenly. The first battle we had in Korea, if you like, was a chance

25:00 encounter in as much as we were told to link with the American Airborne.

Sure, but before you even went over, what were you thinking about action? What thought had you given it?

I don't know that I dwelt on it. I was more concerned about getting everything ready. We had a short time and we were chasing around. I don't know. I certainly wasn't preoccupied with the thought but when it happened, it happened very suddenly.

25:30 **I'm just wondering if you are contemplating a career in the services how much action is really the point of it. You were about to go into a war. How much were you considering your performance in action?**

In an infantry battalion one expected that we'd be in action and we'd be there for a while. I guess that's where it all begins. I didn't dwell on how it was going or how I was going to be.

26:00 **Would that be something you'd talk about as well?**

It's a personal thing. It's not a thing that you'd really mutter about. I think if you were to talk about it you would suggest that you were less than certain and you wouldn't want your friends to think that you were less than certain, would you?

Okay, well let's talk about getting to Korea. How was the trip there?

26:30 We left on the night of the 28th. It was raining. Our second in command had done a terrific job in loading the ship with his team of fellas. He was a remarkable man. Anyway, we embarked and we were wearing winter service dress, the webbing and so on, and

27:00 the ship was jam-packed. We had everything. You know, all the vehicles, the whole shooting match. The families and next of kin were down on the wharf seeing us off, which I suppose would be unusual for a battalion, and certainly didn't happen in the Second [World] War.

It wasn't a secret affair by any means then?

Not in BCOF it wasn't, no. Everyone knew when we were going. It wasn't in the papers but

27:30 I mean, it was so close. It was just a handful of people. We were at sea for - we got there the next afternoon. We docked at Pusan. We went across the Shimonoseki Straits. The ship was crowded, full up, and they laid mattresses across all the tops of one of the - in the bowels of the ship, on the tops of the vehicles.

28:00 Soldiers were in there too and we each had a duty. You had to spend an hour down there to make sure nobody smoked and all that sort of thing because the whole thing could have gone. That was a pretty uncomfortable hour. They fed us on the ship. We landed. The CO had gone on ahead. He was there to meet us and the Koreans,

28:30 some Koreans were there, and we watched this. Our band played and we disembarked, and got into a train, and we went from Pusan, which is a foul little, grubby little port. We could smell it out to sea it

was so – we went to Taegu on the train. By then

29:00 it was evening. We went on trucks and then late at night we landed, and we were taken to Waegwon, where we were pushed into the dry riverbed, where we camped. From there we started a series of operations, patrols, and so on. By then the North Koreans had been pushed back and we were just cleaning up, and we found a few arms dumps

29:30 and a few things like that. We spent two or three days, which was useful, actually. It settled everybody down and we got to doing our jobs again, and we were walking, and you felt exercised again because we had really gone hugger bugger through a whole series of things to get away quickly.

How well did you know the men in your platoon at this stage?

I was only getting to know

30:00 them because I'd really only gone to them after Green had done the allocation two weeks before. I had an outstanding group of people. I had a sergeant who was unbelievable and has just finished – at my suggestion has finished a biography that will be a best seller. He ended up getting quite badly wounded with us when we were right up near the Yalu.

30:30 He'd come from Moonee Ponds and he had joined the army just after the war. He was quite young and he ended up doing a Japanese course

31:00 and became a qualified interpreter. He'd done a spell in the Combined Services Interrogation Group that then interviewed – they interviewed the Japanese as they arrived back from all these places, and so he'd done his time then, and he'd just come back to the battalion. He'd started off as a private and become the intelligence sergeant very quickly, and then had gone on to the Japanese course,

31:30 and he'd come back, and so he was my platoon sergeant. He was a very capable fellow. He was the All-Japan Welterweight Champion to start with against the American 8th Army and everyone, all those big black fellas that can fight like thrashing machines and he was the All-Japan Mile Champion. He was a runner, this boy from Moonee Ponds, and Jack was something else. Anyway, he was wounded with me.

32:00 He lost his hand and he came back to Australia, and he was on convalescence, and he went into the Hotel Australia on Saturday morning to have a drink, a traditional meeting place in those days, and he saw a friend of his. He said, "What are you doing?" This bloke said, "Oh!" He was from the same Japanese course as him and he said, "I'm doing Mandarin Chinese at Point Cook!" He said, "It's a breeze.

32:30 You want to do that." And Jack said, "Why not?" To do Mandarin Chinese you had to have an oriental language or something like that, so he went and did Mandarin Chinese while he was convalescing. He then was sent to New Guinea with ASIO. He was seconded from the army to ASIO and they were tracking down to see who amongst the Chinese were communists in Papua New Guinea.

33:00 After six months he said, "It's boring as hell." He wrote back to the army and said, "This is not my cup of tea. Get me out of here and send me to Korea." They said, "All right." They sent him to Korea and he went to an interrogation team, one of whom was a native Chinese, and the other three were American Chinese, and they didn't have any prisoners to interrogate anyway! So he said, "This is no good." He wrote to the division and the division said, "Look, we've just got a

33:30 vacancy." The bloke that had established the line crosses, an Englishman who'd been brought out as a specialist in this thing, he had a DCM [Distinguished Conduct Medal], and an MM [Military Medal] from the Second World War in France, had established this group but he didn't speak the language, and so he had this tremendous problem with communication and trust. Who do you trust? It wore him down a bit and he said, "I've really established it and I've

34:00 done all I can. I want to go." He'd already done some crossings and so on. He must have been a very brave man. So Jack took this over.

I have to interrupt because his story sounds fascinating but we really have to get back to your story!

Oh, okay!

I'd like to know what you knew yourself of Korea the place, the people, the cause of the war, when you went there?

Nothing. We knew that North Korea had invaded South Korea. They'd lived through that terrible time in

34:30 the Pusan box, where the 8th Army just hung on by the skin of their teeth under General Walker and then MacArthur had landed this amphibious Force at Inchon, and we were sweeping up. We thought the war would be over before we got there. It was all dismembering so quickly. We were a bit apprehensive that we were going to miss the war altogether.

What did you know

35:00 **of the cause of the war, the ideological background to it?**

The fact was that it had been divided at the end of the war by the United Nations and they had established along the 38th Parallel this demarcation with the Communist state to the north, and the democratic one to the south.

Before a battalion goes into a war situation how much are you educated about that sort of background? Is that something you just pick up yourself?

I think we had briefings about that sort of thing and

35:30 people came and talked to us. We read a lot. I seem to recall that we all got together in the picture theatre and we were given a briefing too by the second in command about those sorts of things. We were pretty well informed on it, well enough, anyway.

What were your thoughts at the time on the threat of Communism?

We accepted the domino theory. I still do and we had no doubt that they were

36:00 contra to everything we stood for. We had no problem with digesting that and we were all very excited. I mean, a great thrill when you were young.

Who were you fighting for?

How do you mean?

Well what was your - ?

The good guys! Qualify it whichever way you like. We were with the allies and all those sorts of things. We didn't have any doubt about who was right and who was wrong.

36:30 **I'm just wondering about your immediate loyalty?**

My immediate loyalty was within the battalion and to my soldiers, and the good name of the battalion. We didn't have any fusses there.

Did you feel that you were fighting the war for Australia or for the UN [United Nations] Forces?

We were very conscious that we were Australian in the United Nations thing and the good name of the country was in a sense at stake by the way we behaved and performed. We had no doubt about that.

37:00 The interesting thing was this group of people that took us over. I mean, they were so confident. The battalion had always had this great feeling. One of my friends wrote an article about joining the battalion and he talked about the confidence that came from the battalion as being almost palpable. It was true and all of these reinforcements came up, "Oh, there's no problem, boy!" As I

37:30 say, if we thought that any battalion operated any other way, we were quickly dissuaded. This is alright, we'll get all our stuff together and get on with it, and they were supremely confident, and that battalion has remained the same way to this day, very confident, very lucky battalion, always falls on its feet, 3RAR [Royal Australian Regiment]. Battalions seem to have a personality each of their own. Each one of them is different, no matter who is there and that sort of spirit

38:00 or whatever it is pervades the battalion, carries it, and this group were supremely confident, so we as young fellas were quickly swept up. We've talked about it since as quite older senior people, how they ever got away with that. How did Green manage to do all that? We've talked a bit about him but now that we are older and wiser, we think, "My God!"

I guess

38:30 **in hindsight it's a good thing that you did have that confidence and morale. It's so important.**

There's no doubt about it. It was just there, just there.

Tape 5

00:31 **Where does a characteristic of a battalion emanate?**

Well I have this belief that it begins with the founders and they imbue a spirit, if you like, which somehow is carried on. I can't qualify it any more than that. I would never have believed it but each little group is different and whether you get new officers or new soldiers even, this quality continues on,

01:00 and it is always latent in the battalion. This is why it is so difficult for a commanding officer to come over, come in and change the battalion. Now he can be very efficient and he can be very direct, can be very capable, but he'll never eradicate, if that's the word. It's not quite that. The spirit will still go and so he's got to quietly do things so that the idea that

01:30 for a fella to come in and command a battalion with flair that somebody else has raised and trained would be exceedingly rare. It would be an extraordinary officer. It doesn't mean that it is not going to be efficient but it won't be as effective. Do you follow? It's a very interesting study. We better not - if we can't hear Jack Harris you're not going to hear any more of that!

It is very interesting but you're right, we will have to move on! Before

02:00 **you saw action with the Battle of the Apple Orchard, I don't mean to rush you through but was there anything of note in your activities before then?**

Yes, I think the drive north was interesting because as I said, MacArthur coming in at Inchon defeated the North Koreans and from then on it started where they were fighting their way back, and then it became a rout. We had not

02:30 led. We had been part of this column driving north on the axis that we were on, when we came to this town Sariwon, which was, if you like, the Aldershot of Korea, the army town where everybody trained. We expected all sorts of things because everyone knew the grounds. All the North Koreans knew it so well and they'd exercised over it for 100 years, and they would probably put up a pretty stiff go.

03:00 Our brigade led for the first time and leading the brigade were the Argylls, and they actually got in. They had a bit of a skirmish and then they broke into the town. Once they got in suddenly all the North Koreans started to come into the town, hundreds of them. They did an awfully good job and they managed to clear a path through all these people for us, the 3RAR to drive through, and go north.

03:30 It was going to be the first day we led the 8th Army and Green was red hot on this. He said, "Whatever we do, we want to go as far as we can in daylight, so we get a very good start tomorrow when we lead the army." You know, this was Charles Green. I remember it still. The town was full of these rough, frightening looking North Koreans with beards and brandishing rifles, oh God! We were literally edging our

04:00 vehicles through them. If there'd been just a spark it could have been a God awful mess because they outnumbered us enormously. So Sariwon was a very dodgy sort of thing and it didn't happen, and we got through, and we drove till about eight o'clock that night, which took us well outside of artillery range, and one of our tenets during the war, with anything we do,

04:30 is that you never get yourself outside of artillery range. No matter what happens you get the guns and the guns will fix it for you but we were outside of artillery range, and we bivouacked after dark, and we were just learning. I mean the last exercise we'd done in Japan was on the beginning of a tornado and it rained all the time, and it was a real balls up. The support company didn't get fed. I can't tell you what it was like. How

05:00 Green kept his equanimity I don't know. Anyway, it wasn't a giant success and so here we are. We'd been driving. We'd had a little bit of time at Waegwon. We'd driven north to Kimpo. We'd waited at Kimpo for four days and vehicles caught up, and then we'd started. We got to Sariwon and we bivouacked after dark, which is not easy when you're learning. Unbeknownst to me, Ferguson,

05:30 the second in command, had sent back a platoon to escort the ration vehicles up from Sariwon. We were not on American C rations then. We were on our quasi bully beef and biscuits. In fact we didn't get much to eat at all. This group didn't appear again and then suddenly there was a North Korean

06:00 regiment actually camped on our doorstep. They had been up in the hills hiding from the American aircraft and as soon as it was dark they'd come back onto the road, and formed up, and they were going north, and they ran slap bang into us because we'd come through them in the daylight, so to speak. Ferguson, to his everlasting memory, got in a tank with a searchlight and an interpreter, and convinced them to surrender. How he did it I

06:30 wouldn't know. These fellows were surrendering and there were a couple of thousand of them.

Were you present at that?

Yes, we were up in the - we were in the bivouac area and they'd come up to the bivouac area, and we were the reserve company in the bivouac, so it was right on where we were, so we were watching all this going on. Then I got sent for and he said, "Now I want you to take your platoon back

07:00 and bring up the rations." I didn't know that Larson had gone off and what had happened was Larson had gone back through all these fellows, and they'd got through, and then they'd come back again, and they had a terrible time to do with shooting up a jeep, and a Chinese officer, and a few other things. Anyway, while all that happened that I didn't know about Ferguson said to go back and get the rations. I said, "Now what about all these

07:30 Koreans?" He said, "Don't worry about that! They've all surrendered! Don't worry about them! These fellas? Don't worry about it!" So we got on our trucks. We must have had two or three trucks, GMCs [General Motors Corporation] and we're driving down. We had the lights on and it was terrifying, all these fellas on either side of the road saying, "Banzai! Banzai! ['hooray' in Japanese, used whilst charging the enemy] Ruski!" They thought we were Russians because we were coming from the north. Anyway, we all had eyes out like organ stops

- 08:00 watching all this and suddenly there's a figure silhouetted in the headlight, and it's an unusual sort of a thing. What it was is Lord Slim's son. John Slim was the adjutant of the Argylls and he's got a crook stick. You know those things that British carry sometimes, the shepherd's thing. That silhouette of his figure with the crook stick gave this unusual silhouette.
- 08:30 So I said, "Stop the vehicle." I said to Jack, "I'll go up with my batman and I'll see what this is all about." We stopped the truck and I get up, and I go in all fear and trepidation to talk to whatever it is. Suddenly there's a burst of Owen gun and one of our soldiers fired. God knows what he did. Anyway, we managed to shut him up and we continued on, and it's John Slim. He quickly - everything was all right.
- 09:00 They'd lost their CO and he said, "Have you seen the CO on the road down?" I said, "No!" It turned out that his jeep had gone forward on the reconnaissance and suddenly they'd run into this North Korean regiment, and he'd driven into a haystack where they hid until we caught up! [laughs] Anyway, we got there and we milled around. We got the vehicles and we went back again. By then it was old hat, we were accustomed to driving through North Koreans. Australian
- 09:30 soldiers are very good at that! We got back but that was a prolonged period of what might have been. What might have been if the North Koreans had turned around on us as we were driving through? Why did Green go outside of artillery range? That was a very brave thing to do. It was not the way he'd been trained, very advanced thinking actually to have done that.
- 10:00 As it was we started before first light the next morning and within 400 yards we came across three brand new Russian guns still wrapped in grease, and a big Russian truck, which is in the Royal Museum now. We turned it in and it became the battalion office truck for the rest of the Korean War but had that regiment of Koreans - there were 2300 of them I think, if they'd had a chance
- 10:30 to come back, and stabilise, and get themselves into a defence position, we could have had the devil's own job of advancing up the road. Anyway, that's the first thing - you said what did we do. Then we got to Kimpo. We sat at the side of the airstrip waiting for the vehicles to catch up. Then we went north and shortly after that, after Sariwon, we were directed
- 11:00 to go through and rescue the Airborne. What had actually happened was that MacArthur had dropped the 187 Airborne Brigade north on the southern side of the Chongchon River. We wanted them to capture or stop the North Koreans retreating and he put them in as a block. In truth the North Koreans had well escaped but they
- 11:30 had a brigade doing rear guard. The 2/39th Brigade was doing the rear guard and they were in front of or behind 187, whichever way you look at it. So 187 landed on their tail and they got very agitated, and they really turned on 187, and they had a very severe battle during the day.
- 12:00 We'd gone through Pyongyang but we'd been shunted off to the side and the 1st Cavalry had gone through to capture all the glory. We'd led up to Pyongyang and then we got shunted, and they went through and filled up the Stars and Stripes. Then we were pushed on again and we crossed the Taeryong River, and started to drive north. The Argylls were leading again to a place called Yongju. I think it was called Yongju.
- 12:30 Then we were to go through the Argylls and of course the Argylls were propped at Yongju, and Green wanted us to go through once they had penetrated the town, and before they'd cleared. In other words they'd still be fighting in the town as we were going to go through, and get an advantage. He had a very good head on his shoulders. Anyway, so we got our orders after dark of what
- 13:00 we were to do the next day and by then we could hear clearly the fighting between the Airborne and the 239 Brigade. There was no doubt that we were going to be in the battle the next day, quite clear because it was that close and we could see all the pyrotechnics and things. We then at first light the next morning we drove the Argylls. The Argylls had launched their attack early in the morning and we went through them, and
- 13:30 we actually got into the town while they were still clearing, and it was totally deserted. I remember there was a tram. It was quite a big town and there was a tram there with its conductor thing hanging down, and it was quite eerie and dark. Of course the bigger buildings had created the shadows. We took a long time working our way through, getting our way through the town, maybe
- 14:00 15 minutes. It might have been more. Then we came out of the town into the countryside again and it was like a new day. There was sunshine and everything. We drove north for about a couple of miles, I suppose. It might have been a mile, when suddenly we were fired on from the hill to our right and that's when the Apple Orchard started.

At this

- 14:30 **point how much knowledge did you have of what the 187s and the Argylls were doing?**

Very little and that was one of Green's problems. The American Airborne would not say, would not give their location for some reason and so we were not able to use any supporting weapons at all. We were just with what we were carrying and we didn't know where they were, except that we were going to link up. So it all happened quicker than we had expected.

- 15:00 I don't know what we'd expected but we'd run into the outskirts of this battle and there were people firing from this apple orchard on the hill, and Green arrived almost instantly. He was travelling behind the company and he said to the company commander, "Get on with it now." So our company commander, a lovely man, Arch Denness, launched this attack. Now that in itself
- 15:30 was extraordinary because as Green was giving his orders and you have a group to whom you give orders, the intelligence fella and the signaller and the gunners, and all the rest of it, so there's a little group there, the military police who protect the commanding officer were shooting at people all around the place. You see there were people hidden in the apple orchard and they store their apples in vast holes in the ground that are
- 16:00 concreted in, and of course it's so cold there that this creates a deep freeze situation. These fellas had hidden in the apple barrels or whatever they are. They were quite big, like a 1000 gallon tank. They were hidden there and suddenly they started to come forward, and they were shooting. So they've got all these people around and they were fighting a little battle on their way while Green is giving orders, and he's telling the company commander
- 16:30 to get on with it. Now he would have been professionally quite correct had he said, "Gee, there's more people here than I think. Really we should put more people into this thing. There's a lot of people." But he chose to get on with the company and try to bounce them out of it. This in itself was quite remarkable. I mean, if he'd waited for another company to come forward and then mounted a battalion attack with all that, it would have taken an hour or more to mount,
- 17:00 and we'd never done one before, so it would have taken a bit of time. The chances are we would have been at it all day and yet this fellow, this fellow Green, after all the experiences he'd had said, "Come on. Let's get going." It really was the reason we succeeded because we were on them before they realised it, before they were able to organise themselves and it saved a lot of casualties, and all the rest of it. It was really a terrific

- 17:30 coup, tactically. Anyway, so he said, "Let's get on with it."

When you were beginning to be fired upon what could you see from your point of view?

I couldn't see a damn thing because I was a new soldier. You look and you can't see. Now that sounds Irish! I couldn't see anything. Let me explain. We were coming up the road and they disembarked,

- 18:00 and the other two platoons were committed to the attack up the hill, and we were told to protect this flank. We sort of got into position alongside the road and my buddies went up the hill in the attack. They did it beautifully. There's this soldier of mine, a fella called Torgue, who had long service in the war. He's saying, "I see him. He's shooting everybody!" He's running around, you know,
- 18:30 nobody stays still when you get going. A good soldier never stays still. He was here, there. I could see him and I thought, "What the hell are you doing?" He said, "They're all there. Can't you see them?" I couldn't see a bloody one and here he is shooting at them, and all the rest of it. I was totally green. After a while you start to really concentrate and you see them
- 19:00 but to begin with I couldn't. That's how new I was but we fortunately had in the whole battalion these veterans, the reinforcements, the NCOs from the Second World War, and they were marvellous. They really took us right through it and they could move on the battlefield, and this was a pearl without price. My experience was not unusual. I couldn't see because I wasn't
- 19:30 looking. I was looking in the direction but I wasn't seeing and then you settle down to it, and you see these people, and you get on with it. That's a terrific lesson and we fortunately had these people that could lead at the face of battle, that could move on the battlefield, and if you can get soldiers that move on the battlefield, you win, all the time, and that takes a lot.
- 20:00 If you haven't got battle-worthy leaders - I mean corporals and sergeants, and lieutenants, and captains, it's very difficult to get things going, and you're very dependent on your training. That and a series of other things that have happened through my life suggest to me that we should devote more time to this very thing. The fact that our soldiers always do well
- 20:30 is first of all a testament to the training we do but they would do even better if we gave them more training. That's a very serious thing for me to say. I believe that we should do our utmost. When you've only got a handful of people, regular people, you should do your utmost to make them expert, not just adequate but expert, before they even go into battle. There are things you can do that
- 21:00 train people properly to move on the battlefield in the face of the enemy. Now we find time to do it for the special forces but we don't do it for the infantry.

What instincts clicked in for you when you were now in action?

The battle then took a life. I knew then after a while I could piece together what was going on. I saw what was

- 21:30 required of us and the two platoons that had actually gone up the hill had secured the hill. Then the

company commander said, "I want you to go down the road." Well, we went straight up the road and we were right into it, I mean the whole company. We were vastly outnumbered by this regiment. They had really deployed in strength. We had in fact come onto this brigade about to commit the coup de grace or the last attack onto the

- 22:00 Airborne. The Airborne were belted and we came off the slight rise where our battle began, and after we'd gone only about 20 yards we came into the vast open space, which was a series of paddy fields. You know the pattern of the paddy fields? Our road, like all roads going through paddy fields, was built up, so that the road was slightly higher than the paddy fields. This sea of paddy was just full of North Koreans, hundreds of them.
- 22:30 They were clearly about to finish off the Airborne and we'd come from the south into the back of them. We'd come so quickly that they couldn't connect it all up and they didn't have the levels of junior leadership that we had. Their people didn't have a grasp of the battle and they hadn't been well enough trained, and they couldn't shoot well enough.
- 23:00 That was fortunate because we were just fired at by everybody and most of them missed. So we then continued on up the road. So very quickly you get the pattern of what was required and essentially we had to keep moving. Why we were so fortunate is - and we were virtually unhurt, is that there were stormwater drains alongside their roads. They were about chest
- 23:30 high, vast things because they get flooding rains. We were able to go up the stormwater drains so that we were not exposed and they were, in a sense, and it took them a while to realise we were there, and it took them a long time to react. We were firing at them and they were only starting to turn around singularly to shoot back at us. Then they slowly started to come around but by then we were fairly
- 24:00 deep into them. In fact, what virtually slowed us was that there were just too many of them and we had just about run out of puff. We'd been going up, people on either side, when my company commander, Arch Denness, comes walking down the road like it was Bondi with his signaller! You know, there's stuff going everywhere. The signaller was very apprehensive. He was a lovely boy but he
- 24:30 kept thinking he could dodge them and he kept going up and down with his knees. He was going up and down with his set. My company commander walks up as I said, like it was Bondi, and he said - I was expecting him to say to me, "You've got a problem and this is what we'll do." Because that's what you do, you get orders. I'd been trained to get orders and I had it all waiting up there. They told me at the military college! He comes
- 25:00 down the road and I'm thinking, "God, look at the poor bloody signaller!" Then he made me stand up there too. I was happy in the - [points down]. He said, "Now David, where are we?" I said [that] we were at 123456, whatever the grid reference was. He turned to the signaller and he said, "Send that!" [salutes] And off he went! I thought, "Oh, that's a bit funny."
- 25:30 Anyway, shortly after that, all the good things came. So the tanks came down the road and we got the word, he gave his orders on the radio. We had four tanks with the battalion and they came down the road. They made the difference. They gave us the impetus to get through. Then about 12 o'clock we could just see the Airborne in the distance and the company commander came over, and he said, "Now we'll go up and report
- 26:00 to them." So, we walked down the road and he was chuffed that we'd got through and everything. He found the Americans and told them all about it. The Americans were in a very bad way. They'd really been belted and their RSM equivalent, top sergeant, who was obviously a man they revered greatly, he'd been shot in the jaw, and was lying in a stretcher.
- 26:30 One of their senior officers had broken down and they had to ship him out quickly. The poor devils, they thought we were about to do them over. In fact, what Arch did, he sent the platoon, the tanks down with us and he sent other platoons on right that had gone up the hill, he shifted them a bit further forward so that they could give us more support, and then they were brought forward, so as
- 27:00 we went down the road, they came across the field like this. This group, when they got to the Americans' position, the Americans surrendered to them. They thought they were Russians. They saw us in these big great coats. Anyway, that's not going to be recorded. So that was it and there were hundreds of people everywhere. There's a photograph we've got there of some of the prisoners but there were hundreds of them.
- 27:30 Then the press turned up, oh, came from everywhere. So we all went away quietly and ate our lunch, and they milled around.

What nationality were the press?

Everybody to begin with and then some Australians stayed on. I just forget who they were. It wasn't Harry Gordon. I know Harry quite well but there was a whole group of them.

Who were they able to talk to?

They talked to everybody.

28:00 **There was no - ?**

Well, you keep an ear out. We were all new. It was our first battle, so we were very excited, elated. They all had stories they wanted to tell one another, "Did you see that fella? Did you see that?" [laugh] So that was the Apple Orchard and what I was communicating was that the battle developed in a way I'd never have projected.

28:30 It's not the way I was taught. The incidents they give you for exercises are never quite like that. We never thought of going straight at the enemy straight up the road. Normally we would think of getting straight out into line, into an extended line so that we could use all our weapons, and go that way. Here we were going this way. So all that was new and

29:00 different.

Why do you think that worked then?

Well it surprised me so I expect it surprised them! [laughs] No, we were much too quick for them. We were through and the first attack with the two platoons was launched very quickly. We were a good company. You see we were all young regulars. We were the only company that wasn't reinforced, except for the three officers. The company was extant

29:30 as it had been during the training cycle and they had just finished a very good training cycle, and they were a very good company. The attack went in very quickly and they had brushed aside their defending posts and everything before they'd realised it. We were up the road before they expected that. They'd committed themselves in every way to the attack on the Americans in the north and everything was focussed north,

30:00 their thinking, their eyes, everything, and suddenly we were hitting them in the south, and that was too much. While they had lots of people they were obviously not very well trained. They couldn't shoot for toffee apples and their junior leadership was appalling. I mean, they didn't react quickly to our thrust. It's not enough for the general to know but it's enough for the soldiers to know and turn around to point in the right direction. So we

30:30 were fortunate with all of that.

In that situation where you are pushing forward, do you as the leader of your platoon take note of the damage you inflict on the enemy in terms of numbers or nature?

I suppose you do. We knew - after the battle we looked around and there were 69 enemy bodies just in the stormwater trenches on the way forward but that wasn't all us. It was the Americans from the night before. There were people everywhere

31:00 but we would have done more damage if we'd have been able to use some supporting fire, but the Americans wouldn't tell us where they were, so we just did it with small arms. That makes it very difficult.

What did you have? What gun?

I had an Owen I think. I think I had an Owen, yes.

How different is it to be shooting at a human target after all that training?

Remember they were shooting at us,

31:30 so there's no emotional hang up about anything like that. No, that's no different.

Did you suffer any casualties in your platoon?

I was wounded.

What happened?

I got shot!

I gathered that! Whereabouts?

Just here. [points to ribs] I saw the fella that did it. He was coming up like this and I was turning, and I could see him do it.

32:00 I think Don Parsons shot him. The fellow later became my sergeant after Jack was wounded, the corporal anyway. I had that lovely fella, Torgue, he got shot in the thigh, lost his leg.

Your wound - ?

Maybe another fella got wounded, I think.

Were you able to get around?

32:30 Mmm, I was ambulatory.

Can you describe going on and maintaining leadership when you've been wounded?

Well you know, it wasn't a very severe wound and it's a bit of a giggle but the fact is when my company commander found out I'd actually been shot, he instantly said, "Now you've got to be

- 33:00 recorded as wounded because if anything develops from this later in life, you've got to have that sort of cover." How did he know that? Because he got wounded in the desert and hadn't reported it and had trouble getting something fixed up but he insisted, so that's why I laughed when I said I'd been wounded. Well actually, the wound itself was of a very minor nature. It was just a sort of a flesh wound and
- 33:30 it caught up in my webbing belt, and the force of it threw me to the ground, and the shock, it's quite a whack and I then very gingerly felt it. I clenched my fist. I thought I'd feel how big the hole was but God, it wasn't there! [laughs] But there we are! No, it was a good operation for the young fellas
- 34:00 on our first attack and everyone was full of praise. It had all happened so quickly and they just unravelled for all those reasons, and the fact that the CO was able to react promptly, and the company commander. They were battle-worthy. Both of them could march to the sound of the guns and they were good at that. They were very experienced and they'd got us through.

You mentioned you took some prisoners also?

- 34:30 Oh yes! The battalion took a couple of hundred.

Who is in charge of that? Who takes them?

I've got a photo there but you gather them up. Well, they were coming to us all the time and this is very difficult because there are people doing this [arms up] and surrendering, and the bloke alongside him is shooting, and that's a real problem. You wouldn't shoot those fellas [arms up] but you've got to shoot that fella. They were only kids, terrified,

- 35:00 and they were eventually gathered together as close to the front as you can. You get them into some sort of a formed body to ship them back and they go back to just behind the battalion where the military police start to gather them, and then they move them to some holding place. Then eventually they are trucked out but first of all you've got to get them off from the battlefield through your people and get them to somewhere where they
- 35:30 can be properly treated because they were wounded, and all of that sort of thing too. You'd do that as quickly as you can but it's not the fighting bit of the battalion that looks after that. It's the people behind the battalion. So the battalion has just got to get them back to the point where the military police are suddenly turning up, and they look after them from there.

Once you'd linked up with the 187 what was required of your platoon in terms of securing the area?

- 36:00 We were sent back over the traverse we'd gone on. All the activity had happened largely along the road itself but more particularly to the east of the road. Lots of their bodies, we'd seen them fleeing and they fled to the west of the road, and we were sent on another patrol, and we had to sweep the whole western side of the road.
- 36:30 We were going from about ten in the morning. We were fired on about nine and I suppose we started up the road at about ten. Then we started on the patrol at about four and we went back, and of course there were people hidden in the haystacks and everywhere, and they were shooting at us, and all that stuff. So we cleaned them out and we got back to where we started, and then we marched back. We
- 37:00 got to our company deployment area at about six or six thirty. It must have been six because it was still just light. It was just getting dark and of course all the company had moved our gear, so we didn't have much gear left, and we then put our sentries out, and settled for the night. We were on the go for a long time that day, a long time.

Was that patrol a bit hairy when you were clearing out

- 37:30 **that area?**

It was not hairy. It was just one of those things. Some of them would surrender and some would shoot and so on, but the brigadier saw it, and wrote it up in the history. There's a bit in the history about this platoon of Australian infantry, it was a marvellous sight, driving the enemy like snipe, he called it. God! [laughs] A lovely bloke called Lenny Lenoy, he was a dear friend of the whole battalion. He was

- 38:00 the halfback of our - we had a great rugby league team in the battalion and he was the halfback. He was a machine gunner and he came up. He said, "I want to go on your patrol. I think the war is nearly over. Can I come?" We said, "Okay." So, he went with us and he was actually killed in Kap'yong, Lenny Lenoy, a lovely fella, half Chinese, lovely bloke.

Really? How well was he received with that sort of heritage?

We had

38:30 some full Chinese, Wing Kee, one of the bravest men in the battalion, and Alfie Lum Wan. They were all cane farmers from north Queensland, lovely fellas, loved their football but very good soldiers. They'd all be in the AIF.

Were they useful in terms of language or anything like that?

Oh no, we didn't think about that! Wing Kee used to reckon he could talk to them but we didn't have trouble telling him.

39:00 He was a very experienced soldier. He'd gone away in the first convoy in 1940 and here it was 1950, and he was still in an infantry battalion, so he had knocked about a bit.

Tape 6

00:33 **To start with the fact that yourself and Arch Denness were both decorated, if that's the correct term, was that for the Apple Orchard or was it less specific?**

No, I think they were both the Apple Orchard. Mine was in a sense an immediate thing and then Arch Denness and a fella called

01:00 MacMurray, Gunner MacMurray, got a Military Medal. Arch got an MC several months later. My thing was announced in early November with Jack Cousins, one of my soldiers. He got a Bronze Star too, I think. Yes, he got a Bronze Star.

01:30 **Is that an unusual thing for a young fellow to end up with a medal after his first battle?**

I don't know.

What specifically did you do in the Apple Orchard that you felt warranted that recognition?

I think we were the platoon that linked up. I think it was the physical act of linking up. I don't know and I guess that was it.

Do you think getting wounded had

02:00 **something to do with it as well?**

I don't know. I don't know what flavoured Arch Denness's mind. It was his decision.

Off camera you mentioned why it was a Silver Star, for example, as opposed to an Australian medal. Can you explain that on camera?

I think simply we didn't have an allocation of honours and awards clarified at that point. There had been so much to do getting the

02:30 battalion away that all the administrative detail and the follow up hadn't been arranged. So I don't think there were any available and suddenly we were in a battle.

Why the Silver Star though as opposed to - ?

A Bronze Star?

Or anything else for that matter?

You'd have to ask the Americans. I don't know.

Really? You don't have some inkling as to why?

I've got no idea why it was a Silver Star.

03:00 **But it is a fairly prestigious honour?**

Yes it is. It is a singular one considering that it is foreign, yes.

The story that you've told me makes sense as to why you would receive a medal, not all soldiers do after - ?

No. I've got the citation there somewhere. [technical break] - the physical impediment that we were able to get clear and then get clear of the road, and move forward.

03:30 **What was that like, receiving that honour so soon after entering your official first bit of action?**

I think it was a bit of a thrill and all that sort of thing but it quickly passed, and we got on with it. There wasn't a lot of publicity at all within the battalion in that sense and we got involved with other things. It wasn't

04:00 as if we had daily newspapers or radio. We were just told about it and people spoke from time to time, and then we really got on. I'm not playing it down or anything. There were other things happening. We just didn't have the means of communication about things like that.

I'm sure that the army has its own way of letting you know that you've done well and also letting you know not to get a big head about it.

Well, my company commander told me. I think that was all.

04:30 I think that was all.

Why did they take you out of Korea not long after that and send you back to Japan for awhile?

Because the C in C asked for an ADC. I saw the correspondence and the battalion said, "Will you take him?" And Robbie said, "Yes."

05:00 So there we are.

Was that something appealing to you at the time?

Well I hadn't contemplated it and by the time December came it was a prospect. An ADC is a personal appointment and if

05:30 you're asked for, I guess that's got to be some justification. The fellow I took over from was a fellow called John Church, a classmate of mine, and he'd been ill. He'd got a spot on the lung and was taken back, became the ADC while he recuperated. He hadn't come away with us. He'd

06:00 been away from the battalion for 12 months and I think his 12 months was up, and he was very keen to get back to the battalion, and I guess he persisted with his pleas, and that's how it happened.

Leaving your platoon in Korea to go back to Japan, was that any difficulty for you?

Oh yes! I mean, you don't want to leave them but there was nothing I could do about it. You wouldn't get very far if you said, "No, no, a thousand times no, General - "

I'm not suggesting you would

06:30 **have. I'm sure it was a great position.**

" - I refuse to leave!"

No, I'm sure it was a great position but you've got your mates there.

Yes, they were fine soldiers but they had an equally good officer coming in and we see one another still.

So a fairly decent position to receive at that point?

An ADC? It was. It was interesting to me because

07:00 you get a view at another level, in addition to meeting all the notable people like General Ridgway and MacArthur, all those people, and literally it was only meeting. I made no contribution to anything but just to be at that level as a fringe dweller watching, going to all the briefings that the generals got, where you'd sit down the back and shut up, listening to them talk,

07:30 and assisting from time to time, it was a great experience. For example, after the battles on Anzac Day across the front - you'll remember that 3RAR fought in Kapyong. In

08:00 the valley across from there - there were two invasion routes to Seoul. One was down through Kapyong and the others more directly from the north, so that in the next valley the northern approach was where the British Brigade was sitting, and the Gloucesters, and the rest of 29th Brigade, stopped the Chinese too. We had been to

08:30 29 the day before it all happened because the next day, the 24th, was St George's Day and all the British regiments were wearing their white cockades to get ready for the celebration. We'd had a splendid day and we were to go back the next day. Robbie said, "I'll come and see you on St George's Day." Then we were going across to

09:00 three the day after that. Just as we were leaving they started to get reports of the Chinese moving. This was about three or four in the afternoon and they were starting to move from the area, which we later occupied several months later, 355 and that high mass of mountains just north of the Imjin [River]. So that's when the battle began and we couldn't get through. He tried to get through

09:30 the next day. We drove up and we ran into the Filipino battalion, and couldn't get through thank goodness because I thought I was leading Robbie to his death the way we were going. He was determined to get through. Anyway, to cut matters short, the battle went on and there was little or nothing we could do, obviously, so we went back to Japan. Robbie had his own aeroplane and we flew back.

- 10:00 It would be a day or two days later when the personnel man in Kure called and said, "We now have the final figures of the casualties in 29 Brigade and have an accurate indication of the state of 29 Brigade." He read out the strength of each battalion and how many had been killed, and how many were missing, and how many were
- 10:30 wounded. So we knew exactly how many people 29 Brigade had to receive and by rank, and the general was away. They got all these figures and he came back at about six in the evening, and I said, "Here's 29 Brigade's figures." He said, "Oh, that's interesting. Thank you for that." He's reading them and he picked up the phone, and he called his chief of staff, who was an Australian air vice marshal, Charlesworth,
- 11:00 who was the chief of staff. He said that he wanted the air vice marshal or - he was an air commodore then, to have a train standing by at Kure Station ready to leave at midnight for Iwakuni and the train had to be big enough to carry x number of people. He then rang the brigadier who was in charge
- 11:30 of the administration of the Kure area and he said, "I have the figures for 29 Brigade. This is the requirement by rank and numbers of the people we'll need to reinforce 29 Brigade. I want them to be up to strength by noon tomorrow and there's a train waiting at Kure Station leaving at midnight, and there will be aircraft available at Iwakuni departing at first
- 12:00 light to reinforce 29 Brigade. I've informed 29 Brigade that these people are coming in." They just closed the town and the fellow had told us where all the reinforcements were, what the reinforcement holding was, what the number of people on the staff was who could be spared by rank and so on, and they just set about rallying all these people.
- 12:30 There were signs up in the picture theatre, "Everybody return to camp." They'd worked out who it was. The train was filled at midnight. The planes took off at six. 29 Brigade was at strength at noon the next day. Now that fascinated me as a young fella, to see this man that up here had the ability to think it through
- 13:00 quickly and promptly, and did it. As he put down the phone to this brigadier, a lovely man called Roy King, who was as tough as an old boot, commanded a battalion in Greece, he said, "I hope Roy is not too tough about this." [laughs] So there's that sort of experience and there was the experience of actually going around, and we used to see most of the units on
- 13:30 visits to Korea, and hear them brief him, and you know, see your own friends communicating, and telling him what it was all about, and watching him form his assessments of what was transpiring, and then from that he would come back, and he would then dictate once a month a report to the military board.
- 14:00 He'd literally dictate the whole of the thing, talking about the state and he'd have projections, and where he expected the battles to develop, and what the threat was, and so on. Then he'd reflect on all the bits of information he'd accumulated on those trips where he'd spoken to Americans, and American intelligence people, and he'd spoken to the Koreans, and he'd spoken to all these fellas.
- 14:30 So that was the report the government was getting back. It's interesting to sort of piece all that together and see his formulation.

Is an ADC more about training you or are you very instrumental and effective?

Oh no, you're the personal staff officer to the general, so you're there to sort of do his bidding as a sort of personal assistant. You do whatever, whenever.

What else would that include, for example?

15:00 Does he ever talk you through some of his own ideas and strategies?

He talked all the time about all sorts of things. I don't know that he talked about things but he'd ask what your view is of x, y and z, of the things we'd just seen. You know,

- 15:30 "Is that really so? Are things like that in Korea?" Those sorts of things. But more particularly you'd be getting notes for him or he'd get you to go and do an errand to talk to somebody or do something, or get his car ready, and guide the car to wherever it's supposed to go. You'd have to do the map reading and in a sense you'd provide a bit of protection if needed, all

- 16:00 sorts of things like that.

Was it also a grooming position?

I don't know, don't know, maybe but not necessarily. You just want somebody that can look after your needs. I mean, I've had ADCs and I don't know that it was grooming but you do need somebody to sort of get things going, and all sorts of things that turn up from time to time

- 16:30 that you can't really as a three star knighted man, go chasing after.

But you were selected personally?

By him, yes. You see, we lived in his house. We had all our meals together and we lived in Prince Konoye's house in Tokyo. There was Mavis, the girl I've told you about and Robbie, and there was another English ADC as well.

17:00 So we were there 24 hours a day, so to speak, in the household.

Were you on duty 24 hours a day?

Oh yes, but it was pretty easy duty, sometimes it was very busy and hard but I did all the Korean trips, and the Englishman did the diplomatic parties and so on in Tokyo. It seemed to work out that way.

I was wondering if you got a chance to observe some of the

17:30 **two and three star generals interacting with each other?**

Mmm. [nods]

Does their status get reduced to a kind of level amongst themselves?

Yes, they just talk like human beings. They don't measure. They don't say, you know, "I have two divisions, you only have one," or anything like that. They're all human beings. Some are show-offs. Some are

18:00 quiet. Some don't talk much. Some are rude. Some are very pleasant. It's like everything else. Some are like John Harding, not all are like John Harding that I told you about, where this thing shines out but some of them are extraordinary. No, they are just like human beings.

18:30 **Were you privy to some fairly rip-roaring arguments between them from time to time?**

No, but I was present when a very senior officer was dismissed. Twice I was present when people were dismissed, once with Robbie and once elsewhere. That's a bit shattering.

19:00 Robbie just spoke very quietly to this fellow and he didn't swear or anything like that. He didn't yell. He didn't shout. He just quietly covered all the areas and then said, "And now be gone. Get yourself and get your

19:30 unit out of my theatre." He had the fellow's actual commander flown in from Britain. He was standing there behind to effect all that. He was very quiet but boy oh boy, this fella was very highly decorated and I'd had to meet him at the door, and bring him into the house where Robbie's office was, and I made to then leave the room,

20:00 and Robbie said, "Stay there!" So I was standing behind this fella and he was shaking, poor devil! [laughs]

That sounds very similar to the November 11, 1975 aide de camp, who had to switch over the Prime Minister and the Opposition Leader!

Oh yes, I remember! What was his name?

I'm trying to remember as well.

I remember him. I knew him. Anyway, there we go. They were only human beings, after

20:30 all, and their behaviour was just the same. I suppose the more senior they are the more aware they are of the consequences of everything they do and therefore they are probably more guarded, just as the CEO [chief executive officer] of Coles Myer would be very guarded with the CEO of Woolworths but they would meet on a lot of common bits of ground, wouldn't they?

I guess, but I get the feeling that the military has a different sort of cachet to it

21:00 **with regard to that, that it isn't just like a CEO losing their job. This is someone who has come up through the ranks in a very serious business.**

No, I'm not talking about necessarily about losing the job. I'm talking more about their interactions, one to the other.

Right.

Whatever you've seen in life is what you see there, except that they're probably more senior. They probably operate on another level and tend to be a bit guarded but they'd be guarded with

21:30 anyone. They don't necessarily slap one another on the back and say, "How are ya, mate?" But they react very pleasantly usually and they certainly don't yell. Sometimes people can get cross and yell but they're usually lesser people. I'm sure that's your experience, too.

Yes, although the older I get the less I feel I know with regard to people, if you know what I mean?

22:00 **So you must have been the ADC when orders came through from Truman regarding replacing**

MacArthur with Ridgway?

Mmm.

I wouldn't mind knowing what that was like in terms of scuttlebutt?

I thought it was all very exciting. I got this word that MacArthur had been replaced and the general was away, and I thought, "God, this is shattering stuff!"

22:30 I called him wherever he was, I forget now, and said I'd heard this. He said, "Oh have you? Oh good! Yes, thank you for that. Now, about these other things." He talked very quietly and I asked him. I said, "Had you expected that?" He said, "I think I had probably anticipated that." He was on top of it and he was in a

23:00 sense a confident, as much as a foreigner can be, of MacArthur, and he was totally unfazed by it. I thought, "Gee whiz, he's a cool dude!" I thought it was very exciting.

It kind of was! It was scandalous, wasn't it?

No, I wouldn't say that. I wouldn't say it was scandalous but it was very interesting because Ridgway then came in and Ridgway was

23:30 different. He was a pretty backed fella, although he had all this pretence. He had grenades strapped to his shoulders and all that stuff but he was very dour. He always reminded me of being a Red Indian. He had a somewhat swarthy face and much of the time his face in repose was almost as if it had been carved.

24:00 He was pretty - but then he was unlike MacArthur wherever he went. He'd go into a unit and he'd hand out cigars, and his ADC would hand out cigars, very sort of running for office stuff but then he put into motion all the things that MacArthur said had to happen.

I think history has seen that

24:30 **occur on a number of scales. What did you learn particularly from Red Robbie?**

What did I learn? Oh gee! What did I learn? He was very bright and he was studied bright.

25:00 In addition to sort of being warlike, you also had funny things, particularly when you're in the Commonwealth. We had a professor from one of the Commonwealth countries coming through Japan and he was an expert on tropical fish, and we had him to lunch. When I say 'we', that's the Imperial 'we'. Old Robbie would get out his Encyclopaedia Britannica and by the luncheon arrived

25:30 he was an expert on tropical fish and he peppered this fellow with questions and interest and so on but he was like that. He didn't ever take on a fight he couldn't win. He was never unprepared. He was a very capable soldier. He was a great trainer. He had the ability to bring the best out in people, a very good

26:00 trainer and he really had the BCOF on its toes all the time. We used to do guards of honour for him. He had a house in Japan, in Kure, and one in Tokyo, and he'd go between the two before the war, and then when the war started he still went back to Kure a lot to see all the base people, and he had a lot to do with the logistics side of things, so he used the houses. Every time he moved he'd have a guard of honour at

26:30 Kure Station and he'd have a guard of honour at Tokyo to receive him. He would inspect those guards meticulously. He used to give us heaps! The last guard we did before we went to Korea I was on and we had worked and worked and worked on this thing, and he could finally find nothing wrong, and he stood in front of this soldier. He turned to the guard commander and he said, "This man has a beery looking face." [laughs] Old bugger!

27:00 But he was a good trainer and he kept people on their toes, and he was inquisitive. He was literate and he was the soul of discretion. You know, you'd never hear anything from him. If there had been a contretemps between two senior people, never a word from him. He wouldn't bring back headquarters gossip

27:30 but he was imperious. He demanded. He understood he was the commander and chief, and he preserved his position well, and he was on a busted flush all the time because the Commonwealth force was so small, and yet he was up there, and the Americans knew they were there. I learned a lot from him.

You would have also learned, I guess in that time, that things in Korea weren't going

28:00 **so well, not from when the Chinese entered the picture anyway?**

I don't think they went badly from then on, did they?

I would have thought the stalemate was an indication that things were not very good.

Oh, hell no. It wasn't bad. I mean, from the time that the North Koreans were

28:30 beaten and the Chinese came in, we went north and we came back, and we then held them on the 38th Parallel. We were then just going to hold them while we attempted to come to this truce arrangement. I think all that was tidy. We had a very well organised arrangement. All the equipment was there. The artillery was properly organised. The Chinese weren't going to make any headway there but there was no sense of

29:00 defeat about it.

Would you not say that - ?

We had Red Fort [?UNCLEAR] in '52 and really established the line, and there had been peace talks threatening then for at least six or nine months from, say, midway '52 to when they eventually happened a year later in June '53. We were never in a situation where we were second to them at all

29:30 and we didn't feel we were being beaten.

Excruciatingly long peace talks, though.

I suppose they were but that didn't sort of bother us. We were pretty busy. It wasn't like Vietnam in that sense at all.

From Australia's point of view then, do loss of lives - do they

30:00 **factor at all or is that simply just one of the deficits of trying to win a war?**

I think that's the cost of it but we weren't in any way suffering a heavy loss of life and we were always in a situation where because of the positions we held, we were negotiating at least from equivalents, maybe in most cases from strength. So you can't

30:30 look on it as a stalemate in the sense that they had got on top of us. They lost over a million men, the Chinese. That's what brought them to the table.

How did the decision come about to send you back to Korea with 2RAR?

Robbie thought that I'd be good for General Cassells. I expect he thought he'd trained me and

31:00 we'd spent a lot of time in Korea, so that I was either to go back as the PA [personal assistant] or originally I was to be the liaison man as a major, G2 [Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence] liaison. Now a PA, that's an unusual appointment. Usually military people have military assistants. Now the reason I was the personal assistant was that Cassells was the commander of the -

31:30 in addition to commanding the division, he was the commander of the Commonwealth troops in Korea, so that he had a whole host of tactical and warlike responsibilities as the divisional commander, and then he had to look after all the other Commonwealth interests as well. So rather than fix me as the military fellow only responsible for the division, they called me the personal assistant

32:00 and that covered all the range of duties incidental to his duties commanding the division. We had an ADC actually to begin with and he got killed, and we didn't replace him.

Quite apart from the professional world that you were taking on in Korea, did you have a chance to take in the experience of the people there, the villagers?

32:30 We didn't see much of the Koreans at all, even less than we ever saw of the Japanese in the occupation. We saw little or nothing of the Koreans at all. We just drove through the villages and indeed there weren't many villagers where we were because the fighting had become static, and they kept well out of it, so they didn't impede us at all. We had been with them in the retreat. That was awful, coming back from the Yalu, poor

33:00 devils.

It's interesting that you say that.

They were walking and, you know, there were frozen babies alongside the road, and all this sort of thing. It was a horrid time for Korea, horrid time.

You call it a retreat. I've heard other men react quite strongly to that word and say, "No, it was a withdrawal."

Well it probably was but that's splitting hairs.

That's what I was going to ask. Is it splitting hairs?

I'm not being that pedantic.

33:30 We were never driven back. The soldiers, we would withdraw almost as soon as contact was made. Sometimes the soldiers would cry and say, "Oh but we haven't been pushed back," and all this sort of thing. The retreat more properly describes it because it was freezing. It was so cold and we were sitting on the tops of any vehicle you could get onto, and these poor people were just walking there, and they

had no hope,

34:00 no hope at all.

Would they try to approach you personally for help?

No. We were never that near them. We just seemed to drive through them, long lines of them poor devils. It was awful.

I can imagine. So when you were sent back to what has since been known as the Hook - ?

The Hook? Oh, that's 1953, yes. Yes, we went to the Hook.

This was an unusual situation,

34:30 **because it seems that the Chinese knew there would be a truce and they moved on in anyway.**

They had from intercept nine battalions operating in front of us. What they were up to I don't know. Had they moved us of course the - sitting on the Hook you would hold the whole of the valley behind it, that's to the south enthal. You would dominate all of

35:00 that area. It would be necessary for the line that was established on the line of the Hook probably to withdraw back another couple of miles at least, so they would have therefore had a much better position on the bend of the Imjin, on the Samichon area. The thing we were involved in when we went to the Hook was that

35:30 the Duke of Wellington's [Regiment] had had a very severe battle against them and they had actually penetrated the Hook positions, and the Dukes had brought down artillery fire on themselves, and had eventually just held them. Then they were replaced almost immediately by the King's Battalion, the King's Regiment, the 1st Battalion of the King's, who had been there a week and then the whole brigade was pulled out, and our brigade

36:00 was put in, and 2nd Battalion got the Hook. When we got to the Hook nothing had been fixed. Everything was just as it was. The King's had been too busy to be able to do much. They were stabilising. The whole area was like France of 1917 with all that awful grey look and the terrible smell of the explosives. One of their communication trenches, which had been

36:30 ten feet deep, was ankle deep from the shellfire. The Chinese had really shelled and shelled it and the whole thing was in a hell of a mess, the whole of the defensive position. In addition to that the Chinese were right up on where the wire had been. They were right there. When the war finished we discovered that there was a platoon of Chinese dug in about 35 metres in front

37:00 of us on the reverse slope, just down on the other side of the slope. They had been given orders to hold to the last man and all this but what it meant was that our patrols going out - we couldn't patrol by day, obviously, because the people were too close, and any movement would draw fire. To get out the soldiers had to literally get out of these high trenches and these fellas were waiting 30 yards

37:30 away. In addition to rebuilding the whole of the position we had to force them off the wire, so we were fighting this quite fierce battle but with only a few people. It wasn't a big knock down, drag out. It was a patrol battle. We were forcing these Chinese back off this ridge, which was only 70 or 80 yards wide, I suppose, and that was really occupying us because we couldn't

38:00 use lots of artillery or anything. We just had to force them off and we had probably undue casualties, and we rebuilt the whole of the position. I was the signal officer and we had to replace the whole of the line. It had all been blown out. We laid by hand 250 miles of wire in ten days. All the signal parties were out and the last party was myself and the line corporal. We used to go out and do our bit, and

38:30 the Chinese had the ability to really fire lots of artillery but so did we. They told us when we got there that the Chinese had run out of ammunition and they couldn't replace it. Well gee, when it started - on the tenth day we had rebuilt everything. We'd worked night and day, and we'd forced a lot of them back, and we had three standing patrols out or two standing patrols, and another position. That is that

39:00 on the edge of the ridge called the Green Finger, we had a standing patrol there and we had another one in a contact bunker, and we maintained those right through the battle. Then on the Marine position, we were the left battalion of our division. The right battalion of the US [United States] Marines, we had a machine gun section. That's two Vickers machine guns and about ten or fifteen men. They used to fire right across

39:30 our front, so you'd have people on the other side firing across. We were able to hold those and when the Marines were overrun because they got the real weight of the attack, this young sergeant, eighteen year old sergeant, he was, we had a lot of young NCOs in 2RAR, he stayed with his section, and they held, and kept the Chinese off, not only that but they kept the machine guns firing.

40:00 The standing patrols actually stayed there with the Chinese all around them firing the artillery, so that the Chinese did not ever get to our wire. We were the only unit that had ever been on the Hook that didn't have our wire penetrated simply because these brave young kids stayed out and fired the

artillery.

Tape 7

00:31 **I wonder if you could put yourself back in either the trench or whatever you would call that on the Hook, in your little foxhole or your dugout and just - you mentioned before the smell of the cordite and so on, the conditions there - ?**

The cordite, yes, awful. The ground gets sour, being wet all the time, and the services have been broken. It's all

01:00 full of ponds and so on. It was a smelly, awful place.

And it was the height of summer?

Yes.

And what is a Korean summer like then at that time?

Terribly humid, more uncomfortable even than Japan. Korea is a beautiful country but it is a country of the spring and the autumn. The winters are beastly and the summers are as hot as hell but the spring is beautiful, and the mountains, they call it the land of the

01:30 morning calm. It really is quite lovely and even from the early days we all thought that. We were right out away from the cities. The cities are smelly, awful places.

I wonder if you could give me a visual description of what it was like to look out over no man's land?

There, there's the Hook. [points off camera]

For the camera could you describe it?

02:00 Well, everything that's out there has been knocked down or broken. The trees have branches broken off and there are no leaves. There's this grey dust that covers everything and it's filthy, dirty. In the case of the Hook, the face of the Hook was so much fought over that the front of it when we got out and the war finished and actually walked on it, your were almost walking on a weapon every step. There were weapons and

02:30 grenades that hadn't blown up, and it was an awful mess. That was sort of the no man's land there but further out of course you'd get into paddy fields that weren't under cultivation any more and they'd have the tussocks of the rice that had grown wild, and some of them would be morasses, some of them wouldn't be. Then into the mountains themselves, once you got on the slopes things would be a lot easier and they've

03:00 got lovely forests there, which you can get out and have a look at but where we'd been fighting it was an awful mess.

And you were so close to the Chinese there, could you regularly hear them?

The battalion was close. I wasn't. I was in the battalion headquarters. I suppose we were about a quarter of a mile from it. I don't know that they heard them much, although in the valleys the Chinese are

03:30 interesting. We make a practice of patrolling all the time. The idea is to deny the enemy information about our positions and to keep the enemy away, and to keep him on edge. We make a constant practice of patrolling. It is one of the great Australian strengths and we have two man patrols, sometimes, on reconnaissance. Sometimes we'd have fifteen man fighting patrols or we'd have standing patrols of,

04:00 say, seven men, something like that. So they'd all be out. The standing patrols would literally go out and position themselves, and stay on observation, and they all had the ability to bring down artillery or any fire instantly, and they were able to do that very well. The Chinese didn't do it quite that way, and there would be long periods, a week or ten days or more, and there wouldn't be a Chinaman in the valley.

04:30 Then one night they'd be there and they would be there in hundreds, seemingly. They didn't fuss. They had old NCOs that literally yelled at the soldiers and kicked them and all this sort of thing to get them going, all these tough old roosters, and they made no pretence. We were very quiet and we wouldn't go out until we had our night vision adjusted, all this sort of thing, and we'd creep and crawl but the Chinese just moved. The problem

05:00 is that patrols would get caught out there when the Chinese were in strength, as careful as you like, as suddenly you could be surprised or you could fire on seemingly one man and suddenly it turns out to be a hundred, and it's like World War III. The thing that complicated it all was there were lots of minefields, unattended and had been down for years out and about from there, and that was what made it difficult.

05:30 **Did you ever go out on patrols?**

By day, yes, in the beginning of the war, but as the signals officer I think I only went out once, but it was not my job!

No and in all honesty I wanted to ask, once you start to ascend the ranks there's evidently less and less chance of being in the firing line?

Oh no, captains and so on don't necessarily

06:00 go on patrol. They go on raids. A patrol is essentially a small number of men. You just take out - we found that about fifteen was as many as one man can control in the darkness but then again if you want to really do something, you might take a platoon out or a company out, that's say 30 or 40 men, or 120 men, well that's then a raid. That's an actual clear and distinct operation that's planned in

06:30 even more detail than a patrol because you don't have the ability to react instantly. You've got to control the situation a bit. So the more senior people tend to go out on raids. Now, if you want to go out and do some reconnaissance on your own, maybe, but it's extremely unlikely. So that senior people do go out in battalions and there is always a chance, and there were a number of

07:00 very successful company raids in Korea.

Did you operate any with 2RAR?

No, no I didn't, no.

Well my question was leading to the fact that do you get to a position where it is simply unacceptable to show fear?

To get to a position? I think you're in that all the time if you are in any authority.

But a foot

07:30 **soldier can fear, can't he, without being busted for it?**

No, you don't bust people. It's a matter of - I don't know. You've got your own little cocoon and I guess you've got to preserve your own dignity, and then there is a role you've got to play, all these things but no, soldiers don't go around necessarily showing

08:00 fear. Some of them can get excited and you'll pick it up with them but once they've settled down they're usually alright. It's very difficult for people. Showing fear is not the problem. The difficulties are a lot of shelling for instance. That has quite a deleterious effect on people if it keeps coming down and the people just get stunned.

Well it did on the Hook. It just kept

08:30 **raining down.**

It just kept raining down and people get stunned, and you've almost got to physically get them started.

What about you? Did you ever fail to preserve dignity?

Oh no, when you've got responsibility you don't think about those things but the kids are just sitting there taking it and you get instances where suddenly it stops, and the fellas are just sitting there, and you say, "I think we should have a smoke."

09:00 Well, take your cigarettes out. Take out a cigarette. Light the cigarette." And then they'll start to talk and sometimes you have to physically get them up and get them moving. It doesn't mean that they are less than brave or anything like that. It's just a stunning awful thing and the important thing is to move all the time. I've mentioned that a couple of

09:30 times. You've got to keep your soldiers moving on the battlefield. That's the big thing because it's the only way you'll ever dominate.

I've also heard that it is sort of standard practice for officers to keep an emotional distance from their men for lots of reasons. How did you maintain that?

Well you don't have mates, you know, "Come on, do this for me, mate," in that

10:00 sense. No, you're in charge but you can't become an authoritarian. You work quietly and there are times when it's very serious and you're very serious but you're never in the stage where you exchange confidences to any sort of marked degree. You talk about family and so on.

That would get a bit lonely, wouldn't it?

That's what they call the loneliness of command, isn't it?

10:30 You get that wherever you go and in any life. There are things that as a senior psychologist you preserve for yourself.

Well that's true but not every job, not every lonely position, puts you face to face with your mortality on a regular basis.

Well that's the interesting thing about it, isn't it? I was going to say

11:00 something. I was going to quote something from Barbara Tuchman and I didn't clutch it immediately but she thought that being a general, for instance, was the only one job that demands the total and instant use of almost every sense, physical and mental and intellectual and so on. She thought that made it quite unique. I accept that

11:30 and in part it's true of service on the battlefield. I mean, you're communicating in all sorts of ways, verbally and emotionally and intellectually and everything. So it is in a sense lonely but you can't have - you can't exchange - you can't treat things as being equal.

Well in a situation like the Hook did you ever find

12:00 **yourself wishing that you were some place else?**

You don't think like that, at least I didn't. I don't think people do. You think more immediately. I did a silly thing on the Hook. I just kept going and the biggest lesson I learned was that I was mortal, that I did get tired and of course in addition to

12:30 doing your job, which was to keep the communications going, and we had fearful troubles because we put all this wire in over ten days, night and day, and the bloody Chinese blew the lot out in one go that night, and we were back to where we'd started. We put in temporary wire, salt cable they call it and we had sort of a tenuous link and then we got to the stage where I had to use another -

13:00 we had a very high frequency radio link, frequency modulated, and we had an amplitude-modulated link, which is the long wave thing - short wave thing, I'm sorry. That was just used in emergencies and largely for administrative traffic. Well, I had to use that as one of the command nets. We'd run out of stuff and so we were

13:30 using Morse code as well, and really all of this plus the fact that I had to do duty in the command post too as one of the battalion's staff officers - so you'd do two hours in the command post and then I'd be back to this communication. I just went and went and I didn't go to bed, and I'd always prided myself on my ability to hang in. After about - into the third day I

14:00 realised that I was saying things that were just bloody irrational and you just don't realise that. I don't know what twigged. Somebody probably told me. Some soldier must have punched me on the nose and said, "You stupid arse! What are you talking about?" because that's the only way I would have known. I got stupid and had gone too long, and so the importance in all of this thing is no matter how bad things are, whether you're being shelled, you've got to have rest as well.

14:30 I think that's the point I've tried to make in a roundabout way. On the Hook I went without rest and I was stupid. I learned a big lesson there, a big lesson, because I was making silly decisions about little routine things that were wrong, nothing that would alter the course of the world but they were wrong. That's one of the problems, is to keep yourself rested.

Soldiers that

15:00 **gave you a difficult time, how did you handle them?**

I don't know that I - we had trouble once we were away. The normal process took account of people while you were preparing in Australia and

15:30 the normal disciplinary and administrative process would take care of things.

Well in a situation like the Hook where it is fairly intense?

I had a boy - we had so much cable wire that we had a switchboard. A battalion doesn't normally have a switchboard in operation and we had a switchboard, a forty line switchboard, which was four

16:00 ten-line switchboards joined together, and a manual thing that would drive you mad. Once one 159 we were in very heavy contact and so on, and the young switchboard operator, a hell of a nice boy, he was going and going and going, and of course you operate on memory. You remember where the last key was that you've got to service and where the next key is, and this kid just got totally exhausted, and fortunately I

16:30 just walked in. He just broke down and started to cry. He said, "I can't do it, I can't do it!" The corporal was there. I grabbed him and pushed him in, and we got the boy off to bed, and he was alright. The next day he was a bit sheepish but they were the only sorts of things you get. You don't get people who'll say, "I'll soldier no more," or, "It's all too much for me."

So in lots of ways I find it hard to believe that men didn't look to

17:00 **you as an avuncular figure to some degree.**

To a degree, yes, they have to.

And I know that you're not much older than them in real a sense but those increments are rather large.

That's right. That's the thing but you've already said that officers feel they've got to keep a gap. The gap is created anyway.

But wouldn't they turn to you from time to time for a sort of a bit of avuncular advice?

Oh yes, you know, they'd have a quiet word about something or other,

17:30 talk about it.

And would you listen or send them off to the chaplain?

Oh, hell no! The chaplain is busy enough! Most of these things you've got to fix yourself. You keep a book called the platoon commander's notebook. This was the basic thing and you write down all the fella's particulars; date of birth, place of birth, family, all the rest of it, education, all the information you get out of him. You encourage him to

18:00 commence a dialogue with you by giving you this information and then you're obliged to make entries into it on a regular basis as a result of a – not a formal interview but a sort of a conversation, and you make an observation about how the boy is developing; his shooting has improved, where he had 100 last week, this week he's now got 200 or something like that or these little disconnected things. Slowly you accumulate the picture

18:30 of this fellow but what you're really doing is establishing some sort of a regular rapport where he is accustomed to talking to you about himself, and you're accustomed to listening. This is the formal way you really get to know people and that platoon commander's notebook is then looked at by the company commander from time to time, largely to see that the lazy young platoon commanders are keeping up with it but it sort of formalises the thing, and that's the

19:00 basic beginning of it all, where you establish this dialogue.

When the truce came through on the Hook, I wonder if you could talk a little about that? It just strikes me as very -

I've got to tell you a bit about the battle first. Because those standing patrols were there we were able to bring down a massive well directed artillery. In the field artillery

19:30 there were three regiments of artillery in range, that's three regiments of 24 guns. That's 72 guns, 25 pounders. In addition we had an American battery, eight guns, which gave the artillery an opportunity to get rest. They used to bring their guns out of the line but they would lay them within range and they could then stand down, and play sport and drink beer and so on, but the guns were there within range, so if things were very dire, they could instantly start to shoot

20:00 again. So we had 80 field guns. The division had an American medium battery – I think there were two batteries, probably sixteen medium guns and they had a battery of heavy guns, that's eight inch guns plus a whole range of mortars that would fire so that in fact we had the ability to project 200

20:30 guns almost instantly. When you get troops in the open you have a thing called – we used to call it a variable time fuse, a VT Fuse, which was a fuse that had a radar in its nose, so that it would fire and it would send pulses out to strike the ground, and receive the pulses back. It was so arranged that when it got to about 50 feet off the ground it would then detonate. Now if you can imagine the whole of the

21:00 area just with all this – well what did they fire? They fired about five rounds a minute, about 400 rounds a minute arriving in an area where the stuff just was spraying down like this. When the war finished there were 3000 Chinese bodies in front of our position. We were there to see them and they were in these rows, poor devils.

21:30 You know, sometimes the rows would be three high. Sir John Wilton was our brigade commander. He wasn't knighted then. He said it was the most awful thing he'd seen in war. Now just think about that. Usually the casualty ratios are about – for every man killed you usually have about three wounded. That's about the average. So there would be in excess of ten thousand wounded in the Chinese lines, all caused by this

22:00 raining of artillery, which would – really, it just mangles the body. The consequences of the thing to them must have been absolutely horrid! Can you imagine any one of our local hospitals that would suddenly get ten thousand wounded projected on them? I mean the enormity of it was breathtaking. That's in fact what happened. You see, we were all dug in. We had bunkers and so on,

22:30 and even the bunkers were smashed. A lot of wounded were in bunkers. So that was the consequence of the battle and then it stopped. Well the first thing we did was – we had a lovely CO, George Larkin, a very genial fellow, very capable man and he was pretty whacked because he'd been at it – we all had for four or five days. He said,

- 23:00 "Let's go across and we'll see this 3rd Battalion of the 7th Marine Regiment," the adjoining battalion. So he, the 2IC [second in command] and the adjutant and myself, the four of us got in a jeep, and we went over, and the Marines hadn't stood down. They were very sombre. They were still plotting stuff and they had an unfortunate coincidence then. Morgue, the headquarters was the same
- 23:30 area then and they had their bodies there. That's a bit unsettling for young soldiers and they had four water trucks, big water trucks, all of them empty, and they had no water, which we found passing strange. Anyway, we came in all full of heart and prepared to give them a drink of whiskey! [laughs] This lovely American CO with a crew cut and a very earnest face,
- 24:00 he had a big lectern. It was made like a pulpit and the whole of the command post are beaver away very serious and ashen-faced. George said, "I just thought we'd just have a drink to celebrate the end of the war." He had the bottle and this American marine, can you imagine, lifted his lectern and he pulled out a box of O'Henry Bars [confectionery], and he offered us an O'Henry Bar for gosh sake! Anyway,
- 24:30 so we gave him a drink and we came home. That was the immediate reaction. We were just so - we were spent. Anyway, we then watched from the hill for the next five days. It took the Chinese that long to carry the bodies away, five days, stretcher parties coming up. It was awful.

You talk very objectively about that experience but 3000 bodies, it must have taken its toll

- 25:00 **on you emotionally at some stage in your life?**

The Chinese bodies? Only to be appalled at it. I don't look on it as being any cost to me. I haven't dwelt on it any more than that.

How is that not upsetting though?

Yes but that's what we were supposed to do.

I appreciate that and I'm not being some sort of naïve bleeding heart liberal but I

- 25:30 **just - I mean just the sight of that many bodies in one hit over a period of a few days, I mean - ?**

It's awful, isn't it?

Did it not give you nightmares at any stage?

No. It's not a thing to dwell on, really. It's just awful, awful.

What about losing your own men? How did you respond to that?

Well it's not a thing you can really stop yourself about is it?

- 26:00 That's not just being totally heartless. You get very upset but you've still got to go on and you've still got to serve those that are alive. All of those things are pretty - there's a cost in all of that.

Is there some private space though that you go and deal with that so that you can carry on being professional?

- 26:30 I don't think so. I think you realise in the end you're going to have to make a decision about that one way or the other, so that when it comes you are in a sense prepared. It doesn't mean you are heartless. There's still a cost there but you can't become so involved in that that you're not looking after the living. The living are the important thing and beating them is the most important thing. You know, you have your times and

- 27:00 you keep account of the casualties. You're aware of what's going on and you're aware of the people that are challenged. You try and help where you can.

At that time I also understand that there was a release of a large number of North Korean POWs [prisoners of war] heading back? Were you instrumental at all in facilitating that?

- 27:30 After the war finished they had the releases of prisoners each day and they would come back to Kimpo, back to the airport, and a number of us were detailed to go up and receive the group each day, and I went up one day and there was only one boy. He was a boy from the 3rd Battalion. I can't even remember his name. He was

- 28:00 just so pleased to come back. We just sort of sat quietly with them and talked, and gave them something to eat. I forget what we did with them. I think we sort of - we must have - I can't remember. Did we? They'd

- 28:30 all been clothed and cleaned. I don't think we did much more than move them across and spent time with them while they were waiting for the plane to take them back to Japan, and on to Iwakuni. I think that's all it was but they were all welcomed by their countrymen. That was the important thing. The kid was very young and I think he was more than too glad to be back.

We talked much earlier today about your appreciation of war when you were a schoolboy,

29:00 **I'm wondering what your appreciation of war was after being in one for three years?**

I don't know. [laughs] I guess it ended up as the job I'd chosen. I did learn a lot from Korea. I realised what the - why I was serving. I told you about the occupation and I was bored to

29:30 sobs with the occupation. I just found the whole thing so limiting and we just weren't - you know? If we were training it would have been fine but we were just playing at it. It was only very limited level training and it had no purpose other than doing training, as it were. I think I may have told you on the phone, had the Korean War not come I would have left the service, I think.

30:00 It all seemed to be pointless but after Korea I had a clear idea of what it was all about and what we were trying to achieve, and what I thought had to be done, and so that I was able to really apply myself to my profession in a worthwhile way. I knew why all these things happened and so that in itself was useful.

30:30 If that's what's you call an appreciation of war I guess that's what it is but I knew what the purpose was.

They sent you back home for a while after that?

Yes, I went back home to Perth. That's right, yes.

That's right and then they sent you over here to Portsea for a period of time, all of which I would like to ask questions about but given the time frame I think I need to move on to

31:00 **your post at New Guinea. You did talk a little bit about how that came about but you said earlier that you'd been worried that you'd end up with a South Pacific posting and it wasn't really what you wanted.**

Only because it was in a sense a backwater in many ways. It was very exciting in a real sense and I had a great

31:30 **association with the Pacific Islanders, and I enjoyed every minute I was there but, oh hell, it's a tough place to live in. We didn't have the troubles they have there now but when we were there a lettuce cost a pound and we didn't get allowances. They got allowances later. It was very hard on Anne and the children. I saw my three little kiddies, just when I'd done**

32:00 **two years they had a plague of boils, poor little kids. It was tough soldiering and all that sort of thing, and that was good but it wasn't soldiering with my own, and it seemed to me that it was very limiting professionally too because we all had a name, we were all called Black Handers. We all spoke pidgin to one another and all this sort of stuff.**

What was the

32:30 **purpose of Australia sending you there?**

We were establishing their army. We started with a battalion and we worked up to a point where we had two battalions, and we'd created the elements of some other corps, and that's really what it was about. They had the framework on which they could build and we got to the stage where we had

33:00 officers commissioned. Things were moving. We just left too soon. Leaving in 1975 was tragic.

Did ANGAU [Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit - World War II] still exist?

No.

Of course, I've missed the most important part of your story which is that you met and got married.

In Perth? Yes!

That wasn't long after Korea?

33:30 I've got to get my years right. We went home in -

You told me before.

- '53 and we married in the December of '55.

Not to cast aspersions on the institution of marriage but for a woman to marry a soldier at that point, I guess there are a few things that she has to put up with?

Mmm, very tough, very tough.

34:00 Actually, down here at OCS was fine. We didn't get a married quarters and people wouldn't rent houses. I had a little house on the corner of the back beach road called The Lodge and you couldn't swing a cat in it but we were happy there, and we had our first child, the boy that came home from

- 34:30 East Timor yesterday. He was born at the Dromana Hospital. It was then called the Dromana Bush Nursing Hospital and his next sister was born there too, and then we went from here to London, to the Staff College, and then to London. So we had Portsea and the UK [United Kingdom] is not too bad. When we went to Papua New Guinea I've got to tell you
- 35:00 that was different and that was pretty tough because I was on outstation for six months, and Anne was in Port Moresby with two little kiddies. I got her a Gasmata houseboy. They are the ones with the tattooed faces and the big ear lobes that come down that they wrap around here. God and he couldn't speak English! I was allowed a day to meet her and set her up in the house,
- 35:30 and then I was returned to the outstation, and I'd made a big fuss about that to even get a day back. The man that sent me was a very famous man and the only way I got back to Port Moresby even to meet Anne was to threaten to resign.
- That's interesting because the army has its mysterious ways and here you are,**
- 36:00 **a decorated returned soldier from Korea, who held this rather important ADC position.**
- Oh, not really.
- I'm insisting on this for the purpose of - and then they go and sling you into the backwaters.**
- This general chose a number of people because they'd had a riot in the Pacific Islands regiment and he said, "It's got to be fixed."
- 36:30 A lady you met today saw him years later and she said, "General so and so." He said, "All these years I don't think you've liked me much." She said, "General, I think you're a bastard." He said, "Why is that?" And she said, "For this bringing us back and sending us." He said, "Well frankly, my dear, he was the one I was after, not the two of you."
- 37:00 But no, it was regarded as important and we had a whole group, quite an outstanding group of people there actually.
- Was there a fear from Australia's point of view that New Guinea or the people of Papua New Guinea would be infected, to use that term, in a similar way to, say, the fears of Communism in Malaya and Indonesia?**
- No, this was different. This was just getting them established.
- A totally different kettle of fish?**
- The whole thing had gone awry and
- 37:30 it wasn't very well founded, and the army was going to get it right no matter what, and that was his approach, and he was probably the finest chief we ever had.
- The other thing I wanted to talk about at the end of this tape if we've got time, I'm curious to know your views on the differences between staff officer roles and field officer roles? There are some obvious ones**
- 38:00 **but I bet there are some much more subtle ones?**
- Oh yes. What's the difference? Both have got to be well done and the field one you really need to have experienced commanders. There's a competence that only comes from serving in the field and we should devote even more
- 38:30 time to training and developing and selecting those leaders, and there are a lot of things that could be done more than we are doing. With regard to the staff, you know, it's all been said. If you get real duffers there you're in trouble. You want really bright, bright people who are capable. When I went to the Staff College the British army is different to us. The British army have a handful of fellas,
- 39:00 just a handful who are absolute stars and they have a lot of ordinary blokes, who are good but not stars, and they rely on the very bright. These fellas can get the back of an old envelope and a bit of a pencil, and they can run the world, and they are the people you need. The people with the genius and the inventiveness, and the ability to accumulate information and to use it promptly, and to use it
- 39:30 definitely and properly, they are the people we need as staff officers. You can get all sorts of acolytes and people who are punctilious and all the rest of it, and who are disciples of people or they can proselytise anything but they don't necessarily do the job you want. You want straight shooters who are prompt and precise, who are literate,
- 40:00 and who can think outside the nine dots. That's all we want and I mean, tell me any profession that's different. There are any number of people who can catch a tram but you want something better than that.

Tape 8

00:32 **On a technical level, when you are in action how were you identified as an officer?**

We never did take down our badges of rank in either campaign, either in Korea or in Vietnam, to my knowledge. They were camouflaged in as much as in Vietnam they were green and on camouflaged things, and they were little black things. They didn't

01:00 show much, but no, we didn't have a need to take the badges of rank off the way they did against the Japanese.

Did that affect being saluted?

You don't do that. Once you're in an operational area you don't fuss about that. You just want the right answers.

Can you describe the recognition or the response you got when you came back from

01:30 **Korea?**

When I came back from Korea? God, I don't know! I just went home. I was sent on a court martial in Tokyo and I was there for a month. A bloke had stolen a lot of money, a cash office fellow, and I was on that, and then I was moved directly from Tokyo back to Perth.

02:00 I just went to the 11/44th, a normal posting, but I've never been formally received, down the main street that is. We had a terrific send off in Townsville, I've got to tell you.

I'm looking forward to talking about that but did you see your family and friends back in Perth?

Oh yes, sure.

What did they know about Korea at that stage? What did they think of what you'd done?

I think they were just glad to see me home. We didn't talk about the war much.

02:30 My father had passed away when I was in the Second Battalion. I was on leave in Tokyo when we got the word. I was with George Larkin. We were on R & R [rest and recreation] together and Dad died, so I missed him, and when I said I better go home my mother said, "No. You've got a job to do and you better do it." So I didn't go home and she seemed to manage her affairs. I don't know how.

03:00 Then I went home shortly after.

Was there any question of making it home in time for the funeral?

No, oh no. No, I missed all that.

That's one of the prices of serving, I suppose.

You get a bit of that.

Admittedly some of the Korean veterans we've talked to have had issue with the fact that Australia at large didn't really know much about what was going on.

Nobody did,

03:30 but that's a fact of life. This, you know, the forgotten business about Vietnam, that's all been so overdone now that it really makes your heart sick. I'm sick of it. We weren't received after Korea. Nobody could care when we went. The wharfies were on strike and wouldn't load the 77 Squadron's spare engines. The Qantas staff had to load those. The wharfies wouldn't load our

04:00 17 pounders that came up in the September of 1950. They had to get people in to do that. Nobody really supported it. I think that's a fact of life. In Vietnam, I think a lot of the vets overstate it.

But you lived through the Second World War where all of Australia rallied together?

Yes, well that's it, the whole of the country was at war.

Sure, but didn't that gall a bit

04:30 **that you'd served and risked your life?**

We always thought the Korean War was 'the Forgotten War'. That's what we used to call it, but nobody ever knew anything about it to begin with, so it wasn't forgotten! [laughs]

I'm glad you can laugh about it!

Well, what's the fuss? I mean, you can't do anything. People suggested moves and there was a massive anger and all the rest of it,

05:00 and it's the cause for their post-traumatic stress syndrome. What a load of codswallop! Honestly! The fact that they came home was good enough, in one piece, and the fact is they saw their loved one. What more could you want?

I suppose some recognition? I don't know.

What should they do? They've got a campaign ribbon.

05:30 They've been paid. What more can they really be given sensibly? You can't have people saying, "Oh, you're a great chap! You're a great chap! Well done, lad," and build your life on that. They should be quietly proud of what they've done or what they've achieved and that's good, and they were then in a good unit, and they've made the utmost of their contribution

06:00 to it, and they've tried their hardest. There's the satisfaction of a job well done. I don't know. I'm probably an old stick in the mud.

Okay then, so how did you become attached to the 6RAR?

How did I get to 6RAR? God only knows! It was my time. I was the - what was I before I went there? I was the manpower planner. I was

06:30 busy, interestedly busy, desperately keen to get to a battalion and my time came. The fellas just a year ahead of me had all got battalions and my little infantry group was ready. That's how it happened.

If you're desperately keen is there any room for lobbying? Do you make it known that you're interested and you want to be considered?

Of course you make it known and people are well aware but you don't go

07:00 around cap in hand, and saying, "General, let me buy you a bottle of Veuve Clicquot. I'm desperately seeking a command of this battalion." You don't do that but people know and there you are, but you can't go around campaigning for it. You would be laughed out of court!

You were now in a position I suppose you had seen with Green coming into a battalion. How would you describe your integration?

07:30 I think I took a little time. They were a very singular battalion. They had been through this hard tour and they had a hard tour, the first tour in Vietnam. They not only had Long Tan but we were trying to economise and they didn't send enough people, so that they didn't send enough engineers, so the infantry had to build their own barracks or their own accommodations as well as do their job, and all those sorts of things.

08:00 So that in addition to being tired emotionally as a result of the war and all the rest of it, they were absolutely whacked physically by the time they came home, and they were very close together, and so I went up, and I didn't exactly appeal to them as the man that walked across the water to get to them. I was a new CO and I was the

08:30 beginning of the new battalion. My RSM was there. He was new. Then slowly we started to get new people in and it became apparent that, okay, "The King is dead. Long live the King." I didn't overwhelm them and I didn't make the singular impression that Charles Green made on us, I remember. Indeed, I think if I had attempted that I would have really ended up with egg over my face. That's not my style and

09:00 you do the best you can.

I'm not really sure how it works. With Vietnam they did one year tours, if a battalion comes back how many of them remain?

It varies. Very few of the private soldiers stay because if they've proved themselves they are usually on promotion. They stay on promotion or they go off on promotion. The more senior NCOs

09:30 probably will get changed and go off to some high flung thing. Most of the corporals and sergeants tend to stay a bit and the same with the officers. The Q type officers tend to stay on. The operational officers tend to rotate. Some of them may stay as captains, so you tend to get a whole batch of new officers and you will get some new NCOs, and you will keep most of your junior

10:00 NCOs, and you will probably have to take onboard new soldiers. Now in addition to that we then had the National Service drafts coming in every three months and once you got on stream, you would get them regularly every three months, one group marching out, and the other group marching in but when you are not on stream, you didn't get them necessarily.

On stream? Is that ready for - ?

Worn for service and on service,

10:30 so to speak.

There is a lot of movement in a battalion, isn't there?

Yes, a lot of turnover of the battalion and National Service doesn't necessarily make it very easy. If I had my druthers, I'd have National Service ideally entering once a year. That would be the very best. Now that's hard to manage. At least they should make it every six months but every quarter is crazy. That's my view. Having set that in place and lived with it, I think

11:00 we weren't right.

You were talking about battalion identity before. How does that remain when there is so much transition?

God knows, but it does. It's one of the divine mysteries, believe me, but the first 6RAR stamped the battalion and it hasn't changed much. It's very difficult as a new incomer to get a look in but slowly you get there

11:30 and you get it established. It was pretty much my battalion by the time we went to Vietnam, I reckon.

How would you describe the characteristics of 6RAR?

6RAR is very quiet. 6 is a very nice battalion, one to the other. There's a great feeling, great family association. In Townsville, for instance, we didn't have

12:00 social workers at all and all that work was done by my wife, and wives, the army wives. They got to and they sorted things out, and they would be the ones that went around when the terrible telegrams came, and all that sort of thing. They did a great job and they were nice women too. Mark you, there were some funny happenings but by and large the biggest problem was

12:30 one of the management of the economy, the economics of family spending, the debt problem, and just keeping a tab on that, and they did need a good hand. In this way Anne had enlisted a whole lot of the local bank people used to come and help. The wives did a marvellous job but 6 is a nice battalion, very efficient, very efficient at every level, very

13:00 dogged, and very, very competent, very competent. Both tours were very smooth in that regard. They fought very well. In fact, with the two of us combined we were the top scoring battalion for the war and we didn't really suffer by any comparison with the Long Tan'ers.

That was interesting, what you said, about the social aspect being picked up by the wives.

13:30 **Was that usual for them to be so active?**

Well it used to be so in the days of the cantonments in India and the CO, if he wished to discipline the wives, he'd take away the laundry contract because they used to do the washing! Traditionally it has always been the wives that did it. Now they've got teams of social workers and they counsel people, and they do all that stuff! Everyone has to be counselled now. If you miss the tram you've got to be counselled.

14:00 It wasn't always so.

Don't worry, we'll offer you counselling at the end of today!

I'll offer you a drink!

At this stage, how aware or how much notice were you paying to Australia's attitude, varying attitude to the involvement in Vietnam?

What, when I went to the battalion?

Mmm - this was '68?

Yes, well, we'd been - I was

14:30 a bit unusual because I'd been in this planning business and we'd had a bit to do with the development of the - if you like, the propaganda that went with it. We had seen cause to produce a lot of the documentation that went out about our participation and the rightness of our participation. We were involved in that and we were aware that we had to do something. Actually, the people were not

15:00 as vehement as made out. When we left Townsville people said to me, senior people said, "Look, we're very concerned about what may happen to you in your farewell march." They offered to give us a march through Townsville and one of my friends had paint thrown over him in Sydney when he led his battalion through on the way back. We

15:30 had a funny association. First of all I went to the bishop and said, "We're going to Vietnam and we're in a situation here where the church we are most close to is St Matthew's, Mundingburra. May we have a service for the battalion in St Matthew's, Mundingburra before we leave?" He said, "No!" I thought, "Oh my God!" Then he said,

- 16:00 "Look, we'll do it in the cathedral. What's more, I'm going to get in touch with - " his Roman Catholic oppo [equivalent]. He said, "Well have a service for you in the RC [Roman Catholic] cathedral as well." That was the beginning of it. I got this inkling and we had just the most magnificent service that the bishop himself did in the cathedral but then these people from Canberra were saying, "Hey look, we're a bit concerned.
- 16:30 You've got to watch your security and you'll have to do things for your march." They said, "We're particularly concerned about the university." Anyway, we did what we could, which was nothing, I don't think. On the day of the march there was an enormous sign about 30 yards long and it had, "6RAR, James Cook University is with you all the way!" Then of course, so were the people of Townsville. We had the most marvellous

- 17:00 send off from Townsville. It really was very moving and we really got the clear idea that the people of Australia were behind us as we went out to do what they had bidden us do. I mean, they are the ones that sent us to Vietnam, not the politicians. The people of Australia sent us to do their duty and the fact that they rallied around that way was just marvellous.

Were you surprised at that support?

- 17:30 I don't know. I was so elated. I suppose I was surprised but I didn't really expect that there would be anything other than that, you know? Really, Australians aren't those sorts of people, are they? Do you think?

I don't know.

I don't know either. Anyway, we had a marvellous send off.

What sort of security measures were they recommending or did you take?

I don't know. I suppose you have a few people around.

- 18:00 You have a means of interrupting them or doing something. I don't know. We didn't do anything.

I'm intrigued about the propaganda aspect before you entered 6RAR, just to go back a second. What exactly were you sending out and what was your role?

We attempted to articulate or had people articulate why we were in Vietnam, what the war was about, what the background of it all was and why we were there, that sort of simple stuff.

Through what media?

- 18:30 Through the military itself. I mean, we had qualified the thing in a series of newsletters and so on, so that people had words to express what they were really doing and why we were there. That's fairly normal. It's like briefing them about Korea. Why did we go to Korea? Because North Korea invaded South Korea, blah, blah, blah, you know? That's all it was.

It wasn't intended for the general population?

- 19:00 It wouldn't have done any harm. It wasn't secret. No, we had problems enough just doing the army, well not problems, but our function was only for the army, not for the community. It was all fully explained.

Was there some suggestion that there might be dissent among the rank about Vietnam?

No. No, it wasn't that at all. It was just to give them the line, I suppose.

- 19:30 It's not the thought police or anything like that. It's just to put comfortably on one piece of paper the simple reasons for all of these things.

I wasn't suggesting that you were anything like the thought police. I was trying to gauge perhaps the mood - ?

No, but the idea came to me that perhaps people could see it that way!

Sure. I was just wondering about the social climate, the emotion towards the war and then the emotion towards the war among the ranks? How would you describe that?

- 20:00 Everyone that was in Townsville wanted to be there. They had said that they wanted to go to the war. Nobody was being pressed in to go to Vietnam. They had elected to go and they wanted to go in the best way they could, with a good unit that was properly trained, and properly equipped, and we were all of those things. We really were properly equipped and I think we had some absolutely splendid training. It was a good

- 20:30 area in that regard. We had a nice time in Townsville too in as much as we were the first battalion to go to Townsville, the first since the war and the people in Townsville had had some pretty horrid experiences. They'd had upwards of a quarter of a million soldiers there at one time, so they had seen the best and the worst of everything, and so there was fear and trepidation when the army came back. You know, the army!

- 21:00 But we ended up – Anne organised with one of their ladies, a marvellous lady, a meeting of all the women's groups in Townsville, every women's group, the YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association] and the Young League of Catholic Women, and the Red Cross, and the Meals on Wheels, and all the rest of it. They had to bring a plate out to the central hall in the showgrounds and each lady
- 21:30 would stand up and say, "I represent the Red Cross. This is what we do. This is when we meet and any of you would be very welcome to join us on these things. Here are the contact names," and so on. So we ended up with the wives in all of these groups. They all found the one that suited them and they were happy. We had young men in all of the
- 22:00 churches and youth groups. We didn't do it consciously but they ended up there. We had two very fine rugby teams and we won the premiership the second year. We had a [Australian] Rules team and a soccer team, and all the rest of it. Then we had these young kids, young jackaroos, and they were all off in the pony club. I said, "What are you going to the pony club for?" They said, "Oh sir, that's where the girls are!" [laughs]
- 22:30 So we had this lovely spread right across all of Townsville. We really had a lovely time and they loved the 6RAR fellas. The taxi companies put on when we left, put on 36 gallons of beer for the battalion and any next of kin that was there for our final parade didn't have to pay a fare.
- 23:00 That was the taxi groups and this was true of all – we had a lovely time in Townsville, and there was no rancour about the war or anything. We just had a nice time and we came back to there, and they were glad to see us back.

I'm always intrigued by the amount of social change that wars in Australia have effected. Movement for one thing back in the Second World War when people wouldn't have left their own towns but Townsville must have been

- 23:30 **much changed by your presence.**

I don't know that we, on our own – It is certainly much changed now. I was there two months ago for 2RAR's celebration and they were very conscious of the army's part in the town with the brigade there and the input into the local community in terms of money and wherewithal. It's a significant part of the town.

- 24:00 I must say, Townsville is really lovely. The government have put money into the development of The Strand and all these things. It's a beautiful place, lovely to see.

What Vietnam-specific training did 6RAR have?

What was specific?

What lessons had been learned from – ?

The lessons that had been learned?

- 24:30 They were many and varied. We had a highly developed program of counter-revolutionary warfare training in place in the army in the early '60s and we used that, and it proved to be very effective. I guess they still do much the same. We had things they did a little differently from the Second World War. We did a thing called 'Cordon and Search', where we'd cordon off a village so you were able to interview all the
- 25:00 people and check for baddies and so on. You had ways and means of getting that into place. We had experience from Malaya in the time of confrontation. We had an army that could move with great stealth through the countryside. We were very conscious of tracks and things like that, and people could mask tracks, and they knew how to do it. So we were skilled in that sense.
- 25:30 We had a whole body of experienced officers and NCOs. Korea and then confrontation had enabled us to really develop a leadership group in the army which was pretty outstanding, and it was all ready for Vietnam if you like. When the increases of National Service came in they were ready to receive them. So we operated very professionally in Vietnam
- 26:00 because the '50s were not great. They were not great years in the army. We were under-funded and forgotten. Anyway, that's by the by. That's behind us. Now, what did we learn from Vietnam? I think first of all if you are going to do anything, you've got to have –
- 26:30 how will I put it – total say. You've got to have the political say. You've got to have some form of control outside of a purely military control. Why do I say that? Because the Vietnamese didn't necessarily do what we wanted done. They didn't place complete
- 27:00 trust and attention into what we sought. Their self-interests in the case of the individual quite often overtook what had to be done in terms of the national interest. We had a clear idea, I suppose, of their national interests, where they should be to succeed.
- 27:30 They didn't necessarily see it that way. How did this show itself? We didn't control, for example, their appointments and promotions. That's a small thing, you would say. How does this demonstrate itself? We did a cordon and search of a village called Dat Do, which

- 28:00 was a farming centre, prosperous, and like all farming centres, very independent, very independently, and strong minded people, had been so for 300 or 400 years, had resisted, for instance, the Cambodians in the 16th century, and continued to resist everything, including the VC [Viet Cong]. We were to do this cordon and search because the VC
- 28:30 were infiltrating it and were getting a lot of food out of it, and all the rest of it. It was the centre of this district where all the mines were and we did six or nine months in the mine area. My company, which was part of it and was in charge of the whole of the cordon, was commanded by this lovely fellow, a lovely company commander. He'd come out under the Dr Barnardo Scheme to Western Australia. He was a Scot
- 29:00 and he was just a terrific fella. He was a very good soldier and he'd taken his company and all night they had moved themselves into position. They had taken all of the night to move with the utmost stealth in to form this cordon, where they had to link up so that nobody could get out, you see. It was a meticulous thing. They marched carefully in the most indirect routes and crawled, and did all sorts of things, and got themselves into
- 29:30 position. Come first light when it was supposed to have been closed, it wasn't closed. I said, "Are you closed?" He said, "No." I said, "Why not?" He said, "Our friends aren't here." He said, "Wait out." I waited about 20 or 30 minutes and then he said, "I've found him." I said, "What do you mean?" The Vietnamese
- 30:00 company commander was sitting in a garden and he's got this girl in a hammock and he's swinging the hammock gently and reading her poetry, and he was supposed to have had his people into this cordon. That's what I mean. I mean, they just went about things in their way and they didn't heed us. They took the money and the Americans were very good and they gave them plenty of money and plenty of materials but you didn't get the
- 30:30 return in kind that you wanted. They proceeded in their way and their way wasn't always the right way. That's what I mean. If you're going to commit yourself to a war, you really commit yourself, everything and that's a silly little story but it's symptomatic that at every level they were more often than not pursuing their own goals at their own expense, certainly at the expense of the common goal,
- 31:00 which would have been to have cleared their country of the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong. That's the first and major lesson. The success of the British in Malaysia was that they established military control of the whole of Malaya and with that they were able to close down on the Chinese communists. That's the first - that's the major lesson. You've got to
- 31:30 have a real handle on things otherwise you're just wasting your time.
- In a situation like that how much power did you have over that commander?**
- We had no power at all. For a start, he was responsible to the American Corps commander, who commanded the district but he was responsible to him through his own commander. We, the Australians, had no say much at all. I mean, we could protest, but that's about all.
- 32:00 That's a very significant thing to say and it demonstrates itself in a million ways. The Prime Minister we had at that time was Malcolm Fraser and he, being a farmer, was intensely interested in the whole of the agricultural arrangement and he wanted all the National Servicemen with agricultural science degrees committed to agricultural programs
- 32:30 in Vietnam, and certainly in Phuoc Tuy Province. In that there was this - if you like, this understanding, this feeling we'd gathered that we owned Phuoc Tuy Province. We didn't! We didn't have a handle on Phuoc Tuy at all. We were based there but we had nothing to do. We didn't control them politically or economically. We made little or no contribution to their economy. We had no
- 33:00 handle on their agricultural property. We didn't own it. We didn't own their educational system or anything like that. We were just there. We were just parked on them but we approached it as if Phuoc Tuy was our responsibility and it wasn't, and the Vietnamese knew it wasn't, so they paid little or no attention to us. The Americans provided the money but nothing else changed. It was just that the Americans funded them. They didn't change their ways. You know, so we did some strange things. We put windmills
- 33:30 up in Phuoc Tuy Province in a country that has lived by hydraulic power for 5000 years! You know, it's a real stroke and then they sealed it up and it didn't work. The misfortune is that we didn't understand. If you were going to go in you had to - you've got to go in to win. You're not going in to sort of stanch the blood flow. You've got to go in to win and we didn't quite do that. We just
- 34:00 took things over. We think we owned Phuoc Tuy. We didn't do anything of the sort and the Americans didn't do anything of the sort either. I mean terrible things were done and we couldn't act against it. We had this terrible area where all the mines were and in one of the villages there, they were always attacking the leadership and you couldn't get a handle on it.
- 34:30 They killed people and as far as I can see we didn't do anything about it. They killed a village chief, a

young man that had just been appointed, the VC. They didn't just kill him. They broke every bone in his body and then threw his body out on the road, just outside the village at first light in the morning. Now I think the perpetrators of that should be hunted down really and we knew where everyone lived. Every VC, we knew where their house was and all

35:00 the rest of it but nothing was done, and yet we had all these intelligence agencies. There was a widow of an ARVN soldier, that's the [Army of the] Republic of Vietnam, South Vietnam soldier, who was working in the American organization that has to do with the promulgation of information. She was a typist, that's all. She had to catch a bus out some distance out of Dat Do each day

35:30 and she was kidnapped from the bus. Her body was thrown onto the road three days later and they had torn her tongue out. Now all of those are horrible stories but I suggest that we should have just chased all those people down.

What was preventing you?

I don't know. We didn't have a handle on things. I guess it was all left to the Vietnamese to follow up. I would have - like

36:00 in the bring them back alive days, I would have hunted them down. This is what I mean. We were always seemingly responsible. Now if we were responsible for Phuoc Tuy as we thought we were and we talked about it but we didn't pay for it, and we didn't contribute to it, except base ourselves there, and I suppose we contributed to their economy thereby, we should have taken care of all of that. So it was a very difficult war and there were lessons

36:30 to learn. One lesson is that you don't pick one you can't win and you go in really to win, and that means you lay your ears back, and do everything you have to do.

How would you describe your objective going into Vietnam, the 6RAR particularly?

What we were doing? We joined the brigade and we were there to engage the enemy soldiers, and that's what we did,

37:00 and we could have done that from any base in Vietnam, and flown in every day if need be. It just so happened that we put this permanent base in at Nui Dat and that was the difference but otherwise we were just fighting to clear the - we were virtually fighting the main force, the North Vietnamese who were in the

37:30 south, and they were there in regular unit size. We also engaged the VC. The local force battalions were administered by Ba Long Province and they were really the people we fought. We didn't go about anything else and we fought largely main force formed bodies the whole time.

Again I suppose the question I asked about the Korean War; who you were fighting for, what you were fighting for? Was that a problem when you were

38:00 **fighting with the Americans and the Vietnamese?**

I don't think it was a problem about who we were fighting or what we were fighting for, it was just the way we went about it. I mean ideally, I suppose, in the best case, what we should have done is we should have cordoned off South Vietnam. We should have used the western armies, the Americans and ourselves, just to cordon off the whole thing, and not allowed anybody in, no North Vietnamese at all,

38:30 and let the South Vietnamese in, and kill off the VC. That would be the ideal thing. That's what we should have done but instead we got partly involved in a little bit of this and a little bit of that, and the effort was projected into all sorts of things. Actually on the ground we had a great deal of success and we did have a lot of success in Phuoc Tuy, and we drove the enemy out, firstly at Long Tan, and then they

39:00 came back, and they arrived back just when 6RAR arrived again. They put two regiments in and we saw them off on our very first operation. They were chased off and we kept them out, so that in itself was successful. Every time we took them on, we beat them comfortably and severely, and some of them fought very well but there was no sense of freeing up the people because

39:30 the VC were always there. In the villages from Dat Do to the sea is where the D445 [a Viet Cong battalion] fellas lived. The intelligence people knew every house which was owned by these people and nothing was done.

Tape 9

00:32 **In terms of the nitty gritty can you tell us about getting to Vietnam?**

We mounted from Townsville. The Sydney came up and the battalion went. I'd gone off with an advanced party. We went up by air and we were up there for ten days waiting for them, getting ourselves ready. We actually did an operation there, the advanced party, while we were waiting.

What was that?

01:00 George Patton's regiment. George Patton Junior, the fellow that introduced my wife. This is where I first - I didn't meet him but I lived in his caravan for a little while. He commanded the 11th Armoured Cavalry Regiment and they'd gone off to Cambodia, and they left a base just north of us, just outside of our province, called Black Horse, and Black Horse got threatened by the VC.

01:30 The fella that had been left in command was very charry about it and asked for support, and we were flown in, two companies of 4RAR, which was the battalion we were taking over from, were sent, and the CO, a good friend of mine said, "Look, you better come over. Why don't you command the thing? I mean, you've got your gunner and you've got all of your key people here. I'm happy for you to command two of

02:00 my companies. I'll sit here and I'll mark you as the schoolteacher." So we went up and did our thing, and defended Black Horse while the battalion was coming up. In fact, I was commanding what was to be one of my companies anyway. It was the Anzac Battalion and we had two New Zealand rifle companies. They changed every six months and so there was one that had already been in for six months, and came to us for six months.

02:30 What did you go into in Vietnam? What was the set up there?

We went into Nui Dat, which was the brigade base where the three battalions lived and we had our artillery there, transport and all that stuff. We maintained that base and from there we operated in and around,

03:00 not necessarily in Phuoc Tuy Province only, but in other places. In my time we were largely in Phuoc Tuy, although the task force had been out into Binh Bah and those places just before we got there. So you'd go out and you'd go and do a tour of operations for about six weeks in a particular area, based on the intelligence they had. You go out and establish a series of fire support bases wherever you were. You'd

03:30 drop in by helicopter and put some guns down, and you'd go through the operations there. That's what we did.

What is the procedure for taking over from another battalion? Is that just a whole lot of debriefing and exchanging information?

Oh yes, they brief you to bring you up to speed on what's going on and how they've done things. We had been in exchange of correspondence all the time they were there. We got all their after action reports. I'd been up

04:00 halfway through their tour and spent a week, maybe two weeks, I forget, one week I think and been indoctrinated and went around with the CO, and watched just to see if there were any things missing in our training about what would crop up. I got a general orientation of the province and the way things looked, and how we were going about it, so that I was better able to finish the training of my battalion. Then we went ahead in the advance party just to be there and to complete

04:30 the changeover of the weapons and the stores and the money, all that stuff, and the exchange of the intelligence information, and generally fit out so there was a seamless transition. As they moved out we were there, so to speak, and then my lads arrived from the Sydney, and were flown from the direction carrier to where we were. Our advance party guided them off to their new homes and

05:00 we got on with it and went about our business.

From your perspective, you got a good look at everything?

It was excellent. There was nothing I could say but to praise what had happened and all my key people had been in correspondence with them. We knew just about everything. I'd run a series of what we call tactical exercises without tutes. I'd get each company commander in turn to take us through the latest of the series of operations

05:30 in the task force and we'd run it as an exercise. We'd not know. We'd give them the tasks and then we'd say how we'd do it, then we'd look at what they'd done, and feel our way through the problems, so that we first of all got to know ourselves, one with the other, and got to know the way we would operate. After we'd done that we used to meet about once a fortnight for

06:00 well over a year. We really were accustomed to the way everybody - they were accustomed to the way I was going to act and I was accustomed to their reaction to things, and that's important when you're tasking people. You know what to expect from them and what jobs they can do well.

Quite a different story from when you went into Korea, then?

Oh yes, Korea was pretty disgraceful really! You know, for a nation five years after the end of such a

06:30 war, we had nothing and nobody cared! We had nothing, couldn't even put a battalion in the field.

How important was it for you, for your men, to know about the Vietnamese or about the country they were going into?

Oh well, for all of the reasons it's important to know. Remember that quite a proportion of my fellas were there

07:00 on their second tour and they had the experience of the first tour to draw on and to take the young men through, and so it was important we knew these things but we didn't have a lot to do with the Vietnamese, I must say. You know, we'd talk to the district chief and people like that but we didn't have much to do except that from about month three,

07:30 we took over training the Vietnamese battalion. 18 Division would send a battalion every six weeks to us to be trained and we would allocate a battalion - sorry, a company. It used to be from each battalion but when we got there of course we had five rifle companies. We had five months training Vietnamese battalions down in a place called the Horseshoe and they'd do a quick indoctrination and then my company

08:00 would take them on operations in the light greens and the Nui Dinhs. Each company in turn trained a Vietnamese battalion, so my men had that sort of contact with them and as I say, that was with us all the time. It was a tremendous drain on me because it was like running two battalion operations. I had to find, in addition to the company, the people who could control the fire, the mortar

08:30 controllers, the artillery controllers. I had to find the extra Q staff. I had to find the additional intelligence duty men and clerks, and the drivers and so on, so that we were really strapped doing all of these things, and all the wives really gave it to me when I got the battalion home. They were all so skinny, poor kids. They really hooked into me.

"Didn't you feed him?"

Yes! "You worked them too hard, didn't

09:00 feed them," all this stuff, all in good humour, of course.

How do you deal with that sort of responsibility? I mean, the buck stops with you with wives. How did you respond to them?

We were friends. They were just going to get up my nose, that was all.

Sure, but I was just wondering how you - well, felt is the wrong word, but how you responded to leading a battalion into action or into a war?

09:30 I was very conscious of the great responsibility. I tried to make them as well trained as I could do it and I guess that's what they call responsibility. I don't know how I reacted. I was pretty enthusiastic about it all and they were very good at it by the time we'd finished.

How did you overcome the attitudinal differences between the Vietnamese you were having to train and yourselves?

10:00 I didn't really have much to do with it. I just put the company in and I must confess I was too busy running the battalion that was in operations, and I'd go down, and if they had particular problems, they seemed to work them out. I can't recall that there was anything that really fussed us. There may have been a couple of things but I forget them now, but they didn't enjoy it.

The men training the Vietnamese?

No! The

10:30 Vietnamese were pretty hopeless.

Can you give us a sense of, not an average day, but the run of things from your point of view in terms of sending out operations?

You'd get particular information about where the enemy were or something and you would go to react to that. You'd fly your people in

11:00 and then you'd start searching. You'd pick areas and you'd search each area meticulously.

Did you always fly them in?

A couple of times they went by APC [armoured personnel carrier] straight up route two. I can't remember an occasion where we walked in but we would have if necessary, if you wanted a particular brand of

11:30 stealth. We had a number of interesting jobs. Our first operation was called Laverack and the whole of the task force, when we got there, was concentrated down in the south, and they were hunting in these hills, these Nui Dinh hills, and they were preoccupied with them, so that all in the north was open. Traditionally you'd come in

12:00 and you'd do a sort of a pipe opening. You do a little bit of a practice exercise if you like or do an operation where you're not expected really to get too much knocked down. My lovely brigade commander, Sandy Pearson, went like that on the map [circles a wide area] and said, "Look, just nip in

there, Dave, and bang about a bit." That's literally what he said and of course it was all along route two.

- 12:30 They then got some maps and one of the maps was a sketch map, and it was presumed to be of Vietnamese routes. It had a number of junction points with circles connecting these lines. They were all in the area that I wanted to go into and had to do with the particular movement, the Vietnamese hospital was presumed to be in the May Tao Mountains right to the
- 13:00 east of the province, and that was where the enemy had formed up when they had gone to Long Tan, and that's where they went to when Long Tan was over and it was the big secret base. The area I was particularly interested in was in the Courtney Rubber Plantation and around there, between Binh Bah and the hospital, and their resupply and everything. We got this thing and the circles to me represented sort of
- 13:30 junction points. That's fairly obvious but it seemed to me that they were also the junction of the movement, so to speak. So we sat astride. We just flew straight in and we were more widely dispersed than battalions normally were. We were operating slightly differently because we were so widely dispersed. We sat on these junction points. Well, God!
- 14:00 It was like being in Bourke Street! They were coming from everywhere. Everyone thought that they were down in the Nui Dinhs but they'd moved in two regiments and they were up there and we'd lobbed right in the middle of it, and we were sitting right in the middle of all their movement patterns, like sitting on the corner of Bourke Street. We had a terrific time. We banged away for a month, made some changes but we still basically stayed where we were. We had a terrific operation.

When you say "banged away,"

- 14:30 **what are you sending in?**

We just sat in ambush and they just kept coming in to our ambush all the time. We changed them a bit. They realised we were in the Courtney Rubber [Plantation] and so they literally made a course like this, and then went at right angles, and then went at right angles, went like that, right around the Courtney, and went on again. Of course, our kids picked all this up from the patrols we were doing and the company commander, old Jock the Scot, he said, "Look, they've come here and

- 15:00 there's where they've turned at 90 degrees. Come with me." We walked down and he said, "There's where they've turned 90 degrees again." You could see their footprints and so we just went out a bit ahead of where they were, and started again! You know, it was a terrific operation. It was good for the battalion. Of course, we had been advised by the first tourers how good they were and really the inference was, "You fellas aren't going to be much chop!" You could see this
- 15:30 and so we were very conscious that we had to prove ourselves to this mob, and we did, and we may have even got a few rungs for ourselves, it was so good. Then the next one we went into the mines and we had a fearful mine battle, really. It took a long time. It was nasty.

Could you get a sense of

- 16:00 **the run of that?**

What had happened - you've read about it. The task force laid a minefield because they didn't have enough soldiers and they said they'd create this barrier. The thing about minefields is that it is only a barrier as long as it's defended. As soon as people walk away from it in your own time you can pick the mines up and the Vietnamese had agreed when the minefield was laid that they would defend the minefield.

- 16:30 Well, within less than a month they'd left and so they just - it cost them about 30 killed while they learnt and then they just picked the mines up at will. They were then using these mines against us in the form of ambushes and things like that. We were the last battalion to go into the mine group ground thrust and we were there for quite some time, and we stayed on in that area
- 17:00 training these Vietnamese battalions, so we had a long spell. We had a number of casualties but eventually we saw them off. I think now people have credited us with having sort of won the mine war, so to speak, but it
- 17:30 was a very tough operation for us and it cost us. One of the great things about it was, and the most visual thing to tell you is that there was a monastery outside of Dat Do on a very severe steep prominence, stuck up like a sore thumb, and right on top of this was this temple. There were about 200 or 300 steps up to it.
- 18:00 Some attempts had been made to clear the area but it had been heavily mined and one of our battalions had 50 casualties clearing the steps. Eventually we set to and we cleared the area right around it. We drove the enemy away and one of the New Zealand companies actually did it. We cleared off everybody and we killed amongst them the big debt collector, and he was
- 18:30 the scourge of the district. Then these lads went about clearing the area of mines. They did it by hand meticulously, every step, and it really was a brilliant operation. We lifted all of these mines and cleared the whole area, and then the people from Dat Do for the first time in years and years and years were

allowed back into their temple. It was just lovely to see! It really

- 19:00 was. I think we made a real contribution. That was one thing in the mine war but there were others and eventually – we are just in the process of writing the battalion history, and the historian is glowing. He said, “Gee, they’ve said nice things about your battalion about the mine war,” all the people he had spoken to. So there, but it was nasty.

In terms of something like the operation at

- 19:30 **Laverack, the rubber plantation, you’ve worked out where the action is going to be and you’ve got ambushes there, where exactly are you in terms of command?**

Oh, me? I was at a fire support base called Peggy, just near there, and so we watched it all, and it was situated so that the artillery could support most of the area in which the operation was. The fire support base was

- 20:00 really a base where your artillery was and you put sir in with his wireless sets and so on and sir stayed there, and went out each day in his helicopter. We also interrupted the enemy’s foray into Binh Bah and the Battle of Binh Bahh was part of Laverack, actually. I just didn’t have enough soldiers. We have five companies in contact and then they turned up in Bin Bah, so we got another company from the brigade, and they fought that battle.

- 20:30 **What sort of air support would you have had at that stage?**

Look, any amount, brilliant, the Americans. The US AF [Air Force] I can’t speak highly enough of. They are just brilliant, brave, capable, oh gee, they’re good.

And that was available whenever you needed it?

Whenever you needed it, yes. Whenever we needed it. It was – in theory we should never have got into trouble. We had so much air that there’s no

- 21:00 way you could really get into a nonsense. There were a number of interesting things we did. One was that we were selected then to go in, towards the end of our tour into a big secret base into the May Tao Mountains and we went into that, and that was very demanding. First of all, we had to get to the top of the hill and that was all covered with these

- 21:30 big Chinese Communist mines. We got in and then we had to get some fire support into all of the valleys. So we put a mortar section right up on the very top of the prominence and built a timber base for it to make it big enough, and they fired over 23 contact missions into each of these re-entrances as we’d run into people. It took us a long time. We found the hospital and

- 22:00 then 20 odd or more of these people elected to fight on. They left the hospital and had legs off, and gangrenous wounds. They were awful. They smelled awful and maggots were dropping out of their wounds, all this sort of stuff, couldn’t have seen anything more awful. I’ve got to tell you that my trackers – unbelievable! Unbelievably they did not kill one of them. They forced

- 22:30 each of them to surrender and they weren’t just in a group of 23. Most of them were individually fighting. So can you imagine the pressure and it could have been solved so much more simply just by shooting them but we forced them to surrender. Then they carried these people to the pad, these trackers, with these awful smelly wounds. They had legs off and arms off, and oh God! They weren’t properly looked after. They took them back. Gee, I was proud of my

- 23:00 soldiers. What great humanity! Gee whiz!

Was that your command?

My trackers, yes! The tracker platoon.

Had that been your express command to not kill those men?

We had this understanding. I didn’t make an express command but we were better than that. These are fine young fellas, good leaders, good NCOs, good young officers but they

- 23:30 were particularly good there, particularly good. We can be well proud of those fellas. The other thing we did was a funny thing. We’d just finished the May Tao and we really were pretty much at the top of our form. We were operating as well as we ever had. We’d had an opportunity to

- 24:00 finish off some training. I’d arranged with the SAS. We got on well with them. They took my trackers and they had done joint training, and they did a joint operation in which the SAS-experienced NCOs led these little five man patrols. We’d done a little bit of that before we left Townsville but we didn’t have time to do it for everyone. I’d done a bit for the trackers and we sent them off, and they did

- 24:30 about a week with the SAS. Then they went on a joint operation and went into this garden area, this farm area where the VC were getting a lot of their food. They had a series of contacts there and they all did very well but the thing was that they were then accustomed to move in this pattern, and could fight this way. When we went to the May Tao, the hill itself was much too big for my battalion. It was an

enormous monolith almost,

- 25:00 a vast thing. We came in really from the southern side. I couldn't cover the northern side and it would have cost me another two companies but instead I put the five tracker patrols out with just five men, with their radios, so they all had intimate communication, instant communication, and they could very quickly multiply themselves by
- 25:30 combining themselves, and they covered the whole of the northern face. That's how they got onto these wounded roosters. Anyway, we went then and the brigadier called me up one day and said, "Look, there is a wireless set operating in your area." It was the headquarters of Ba Long Province. We had this intercept thing going very well. He said, "You better go in and get them."
- 26:00 We went in very quickly and quietly with just two companies, and we had other companies around blocking off but the two immediate ones, we went in with an Australian company and a New Zealand company, into this area of dense bush, where the wireless was said to be working. The idea was we'd put a company down. We had the other company work against it in the close country, which is very
- 26:30 dangerous. We'd inflict casualties on ourselves. It was very hard to control and you really needed capable, very capable people because if anyone panicked you'd be in real trouble, and you're only getting fleeting targets. So it was a real problem. Anyway, we spent the whole of this first day and the first thing that happened was the people that
- 27:00 guarded the headquarters at Ba Long Province, which was an administrative organization of the VC, they were the administrative or political controllers of two Vietnamese provinces, Phuoc Tuy and another one. They owned these two battalions, D445 and D440, and were responsible for all of the VC activity, and they replenished them and armed them and so on. They, by this
- 27:30 time in the war, were a very capable, hard-headed group of people. They were guarded by this group of very capable people, North Vietnamese obviously, who were very skilled, being at war for 20 years. They wore these tiger suits, this camouflage. We called them tiger suits. They now call them cam-clothing or something. These fellas came in and had a look at me! I'd
- 28:00 pocked a little headquarters down with a couple of mortars, I think, was all we took, don't think we took the guns and I had the trackers just protecting our little handful of people. These roosters came in and had a look at us, cheeky fellas, and the trackers were really incensed. They got all shook up and went after them, and that was the beginning. We thought we were pretty nifty getting in but they were onto us.

Your euphemism 'had a look' -

- 28:30 **they took shots at you?**

They fired some shots, yes, but the trackers chased them, but whenever you'd fire at these fellas they'd just disappear, and this was the pattern of the whole thing, and then no sooner had that happened than the searching company reported its first contact. It went on all day. There'd be these fleeting targets and these kids, you can imagine how tense these kids would have been!

- 29:00 We were pretty good but they'd force the tracking company to deploy and they'd be off, and all the time they were doing this, and the company commander was getting as sore as a boil! After he'd done it three or four times you could hear it in his voice. He didn't say much but he was as cross as hell! So we were at it all day and I called up the task force. We had a secret
- 29:30 telephone thing that couldn't be tapped. I said, "Look, we've hunted all day and I guess they've gone by now. These fellas have created this delay and we couldn't get past it, and we tried but I reckon they've gone." The brigadier said, "Oh no! They're still working the wireless set." I said, "You've got to be joking!" So we did it the next day. We reversed. The blocking company became the tracking company. We went at it for four days.
- 30:00 For four days we had continuous contacts, these fleeting glimpses of these elusive fellas and neither side had really scored on the other. Then finally one of the New Zealand companies stumbled into this area. The scout didn't see it but the Maori machine gunner did. He was the big bloke behind him and he literally
- 30:30 stopped, put his foot in the middle of the scout's back, and went straight in, and all that was there was the wireless aerial swinging, and they had got their wireless set out but they left behind their one time pads, the secret code, and we were the third or fourth battalion to ever capture a set of their one time pads in the whole of the war.
- 31:00 There had been two occasions where one of the US Airborne divisions had captured it and one of the Marines had, and we captured their one time pads! But we didn't catch anybody! All the fellas were blocking and behind, and there was a kid there. It was his first operation and he had a claymore, a set of claymore mines, which
- 31:30 you detonate with a handheld thing, and he saw these four fellas in green coming up the track but he just wasn't sure. It could have been our fellas, so rightly he didn't fire, but it was the headquarters of the outfit, and they got away! You know, it was that close! Anyway, but we got the one time pads and got

them straight away back to Saigon, and didn't say a word. There

32:00 was no publicity at all. They continued to operate on those pads for about two months and the Americans got a whole lot of stuff, and this thought was expressed to me that it had a lot to do with them going into Cambodia later but everyone was very pleased. When we finished our tour we got a nice letter saying, "You've been good chaps, you've captured the one time pads," but that was an interesting operation, a bit different to what we normally do.

32:30 The mountains were different and then there were the mines, and then there was the nip in there and bang it out in Laverack. No two operations were ever the same.

You must have been thrilled when you got their codebook? I guess as a bonus to an operation?

Yes it was. We couldn't talk much about it. The Americans had publicised it on the other three occasions, so they got no benefit from it and so we knew we had to be very quiet, and

33:00 they were able to build on it and they continued to use the damn things. They didn't know it had gone because they had the ability to change their code within 24 hours across the whole of Vietnam and they were supposed to be rice chewers. They were very capable.

In a situation like that, how do you hunt down the knowledge? Do you go to the people who knew, in your battalion, who know that you've got the codebook and tell them to keep mum [silent]?

We didn't tell. Well, there were not a whole lot of people involved. It is easy

33:30 in operations. Outside of the operation they had no one to talk to, so they were able to shut up and the thing was flown straight out. A special helicopter came in and the thing was whisked away.

I was wondering if that was an explicit command?

It evolved immediately on the spot and we got it away and the letter didn't come. We were back in Australia and my intelligence officer stayed on with the rear party and he got the letter. That's the only way we knew about it.

34:00 The brigadier was going to tell us about it and then felt he better not in view of the security of it all.

You mentioned a couple of times now that you were very proud of the actions of your men?

Oh yes, they were very good!

At the time, how do you express that pride to them?

We did it on a final parade because we were always on operations. There was always somebody out, so more often than not I was

34:30 out of the thing on operations. There was always somebody being reacted or something. We did a final parade and the brigadier spoke to them, and he said some quite remarkable things to them, which he has now substantiated in a more formal letter which is going in the book, and I was able to say to them what I thought, and I didn't say enough. Then at one of our reunions, we'd been very quiet and reticent for a number of years and

35:00 things were said, and nothing derogatory was said at all but how am I going to put this? We'd heard a lot about the first tour on all of our reunions and finally I must confess, I thought I better just tell them, so I told them of what they'd done, and they all thought that was nice. Most of them were on the first tour anyway and then I wrote a piece for a newsletter,

35:30 so over the years we've slowly got the message over. They were all very proud of themselves and they know about it. You can never really tell people what is in your heart but they were terrific fellas, they really were. Pretty nearly the whole battalion went intact to Singapore after that and operated in a Commonwealth

36:00 context in a Commonwealth brigade. The British brigadier and I had been at staff college together and he just said, "I couldn't believe it, that a battalion could operate like that." They were just so far in front of the New Zealand battalion and the British battalion, streets ahead. You know, it was embarrassing!

During the tour, in terms of wanting to improve morale or keep morale,

36:30 **would you have it passed down that you were pleased with an operation?**

Oh yes. We'd talk whenever we could and I used to go and see them on operations, and whenever there had been a bit of a to-do I'd get in pretty quickly. Ideally you should be there whenever there has been an upset, in fact, you should be involved if it is possible. When your soldiers are challenged you've got to be there and so I saw them in their real

37:00 moments, when they were quietly proud of themselves. That's what you're about actually, very critical.

You mentioned before that something happened at the three month mark, when you're doing

a one year tour, is that how you measure time? Is it all relative to

37:30 **the one year?**

I'm trying to think of the instance.

Maybe I misunderstood the context of it. You did mention that something had happened at three months. An open ended question then. When you are doing a one year tour?

You have a series of benchmarks and you watch for fatigue and things like that and you try to dispel them, and I tried to keep them fresh all the time. You'd know

38:00 how hard each company had worked. You'd talk to the company commanders about this, so we tried to balance things out. What else? The three month mark? I can't think.

What sort of influence does it have on you the fact that you'll only be there for a year?

Well it gets to be a real problem towards the end,

38:30 when the fact that it is finite is clear and you get a bit shattered. On our very last operation we had a nasty mine incident and a couple of our very popular fellas were killed. That shot us rigid, you know? To go through all of it and get it at the end, that was very hard. You can understand? Who'd want to go charging around on his

39:00 last day? God!

What sort of discretion did you have towards the end of it?

It was all sort of phased out a bit I think, come to think of it. You were all well aware of these things but to their credit, the battalion kept at it all the way. They were very good that way.

Tape 10

00:32 **We were talking about the nature of a one year tour. Towards the end of that one year do superstitions start to play a part?**

I don't know, not to my knowledge. There are no ladders to go on. No, I suppose that's a personal thing. I can't think of -

01:00 the soldiers were pretty fine by then. My second tourers were paper thin by the time we finished, you know? Their skin had that parchment look and they had really gone very hard. Physically and emotionally in every way it had been very demanding, and they were quite outstanding. They really were in need of a rest.

01:30 With five companies we didn't get the breaks. We kept at it all the time. I thought it was very unfair.

Really, you weren't able to? Did you have leave?

Oh yes, we got leave and everything but we didn't get enough. We were at it all the time one way or another. I can't remember - I didn't have more than - I got wounded but I had two weeks

02:00 off, three weeks maybe. I can't remember now but the soldiers were very skinny when we finished. People had been there, all my senior NCOs and my officers but oh gosh, they were an outstanding bunch of fellas really, they were an outstanding bunch of fellas, really.

With the nature of your objective in Vietnam is there some degree of getting rungs on the board or getting numbers?

02:30 **You mentioned before about the - ?**

The body count?

Yes.

You're not supposed to talk about that but the soldiers are intensely interested in how many people had been killed and we did pretty well. In the second tour we got 300 or something and that's better than most. The first tour had Long Tan, so 6 Battalion was a very high scoring battalion.

03:00 **What sort of role did rivalry play between battalions in that score keeping?**

They all kept an eye on the body count. Everyone did but no, we were all - the battalions were pretty well trained. My thought would be actually to make them even better trained. Obviously there is a need for special forces but there are things that they do that are really things that

03:30 should be done by a well trained battalion. There are special things that they should do and some of

their tasks are tasks that battalions can do if we give them the training.

What like?

There are a whole series of patrolling things, reconnaissance missions and the things that they now call commando missions. Well a commando is only a well trained – a battalion has been trained to repel and

04:00 to use watercraft, and so on. Well I don't see why any battalion shouldn't do that, so that every soldier is taken up to the expert level or he's taken through his shooting to the level where he's become a sniper, where he's doing his navigation, where he's doing advanced first aid, where he's capable of doing close reconnaissance techniques, rappelling and abseiling,

04:30 and all those sorts of things. It would mean about another year of training but we only have six battalions. We've spent 250 million dollars making six submarine propellers a bit quieter and what I'm advocating costs a good deal less than 250 million dollars but it does mean that your soldiers can do things on the battlefield. See, we were always

05:00 dependent on just a basic level of training and then we were dependent on the level, and the competence of our leaders to get them going on the battlefield. I think that with proper and thorough training they are there and they are able to do it from day one. You would reduce your casualty levels. You would operate far more effectively. You would have the ability to operate in smaller groups if need be without any hassle and do all the things we are doing now plus all sorts of things.

05:30 I feel very strongly about that, that if we could be more thoroughgoing with our training, if we are going to have fewer numbers.

Did you have much to do with special forces in Vietnam?

We were very friendly with the SAS. I knew them all pretty well and we worked pretty well, and to the point that we were the only ones they did a joint operation with. We were really blessed and it was good,

06:00 worked quite well, and so the little bit of extra training I did, I was able to put five patrols in to do something that two companies would have been required for. These are matter of fact things that I feel very strongly about.

I was wondering about the line of demarcation in command, where yours began and ended?

06:30 **So you were given, say, an area to go into with certain information. It is quite a vague question but - ?**

Well, it had to be my area because on one occasion a fella made a mistake and gave me an area of operations, and we were about to kill an SAS patrol that had been in there, and they were lying up. Somehow or other this group had not told us and we near as damn it, and we had the drop on them, and everything.

07:00 Gee whiz that would have made great reading and that was an oversight by some individual and that's the only time it happened but that's the sort of thing you've got to watch for. You've got to have complete control of an AO [area of operations]. You can't just go in piecemeal and have people all over the place. I presume it is very difficult in Iraq, for instance. I'm glad I'm not there, really.

07:30 Yeah, that's about all there is about AOs.

And so quite a room for initiative on your part?

Oh yes, but it's not only initiative. You've got to plan your artillery missions and you have a certain amount of harassing fire that you can play, and you're doing a calculated study of the area you own, and you think, "Gee whiz, if I were the enemy, where would I go?" Then you put some

08:00 shells in and that's where the SAS are going or another battalion is lying up or something. That would be awful really. These things are so finite, I guess.

Going into Vietnam, what were your thoughts about the success of the Australian/American effort?

That didn't worry me. I thought everything was going well. When I went in

08:30 and we saw very little of the Americans really. Occasionally we would. They were a bit different to us but we got along well enough.

Did you think the objectives would be achieved when you were going into Vietnam?

I don't know. I can't remember. I don't know that I thought about it. It was really getting close to the point where something was going to happen. We were

09:00 a bit concerned that we may – again like we had been in Korea, we might miss out, after all the training we'd done. I didn't really dwell too much on the fact that they may not achieve their objectives or not. I suppose I should have but I didn't at the time. I was more concerned with doing what we had to do and

making a success of that,

09:30 and finishing the tour successfully, getting as many home as I could.

Can you describe to us the end of tour? What happens then?

We just went through the thing in reverse. We were dealing with the advance parties of the new battalion. We were tizzying up the area as much as we could. In fact, we didn't do that very well, I've got to tell you. I'm not very proud of that. We should have replaced a lot of the tents

10:00 and being away I hadn't paid attention to it, and I should have but we should have made everything welcome for them. We gave them all our after action stuff and they corresponded with us as we had with the 4th. I don't think we did anything differently from that. I can't think of anything really special we did. Anything they wanted we sent them.

10:30 I can't think of any particular thing I did in addition. A dear friend of mine, John Church, took over from us and they did pretty well, 2RAR, but you know, it's a pretty matter of fact thing, getting the people home. I think

11:00 we then - I'm trying to think. Did we fly home? I think we flew home. Yes, the Sydney was in dry dock, so we flew home, so we were a bit different but other than that I don't think there was any change.

Whereabouts

11:30 **did you have that final parade you mentioned?**

Oh, this was in Nui Dat itself. The last time everyone was together, we had a parade. We used to have a parade after every operation. Traditionally the RSM would form them up in a hollow square and we had pipes and drums, and we'd read the list of the fallen in the operation and so on. Then the pipe major would play the lament.

12:00 The RSM would always put the New Zealand company right in front of me and they always had a high percentage of Maoris, and that raw savage music would go straight to their hearts, and there would be these big Maoris with the tears streaming down, and you're trying so hard not to cry yourself! [laughs] I couldn't say directly, "Don't put any Maoris in front of me!" I mean, that would be racist and terrible but it was very hard! Is that it

12:30 do you think? Have we done a good honest day?

I had a couple more questions.

Oh, okay! I was going to offer you a drink! [technical break] Then a couple of months later went to Singapore as an entity and they had a great time there, and they really did very well.

You mentioned before there has been a lot made of post-traumatic stress disorder with the return of Vietnam veterans. How much have you had to do with the discussion involving that with your men particularly?

13:00 I haven't really talked specifically or publicly with anyone. I don't know what to make of it but a lot of my very good soldiers are getting it now, 25, 30 years after the event, and this shatters me! Fellas that were the people that I could totally rely on and they were good in their contact situations. Some of it is pretty tough, really tough.

13:30 **Have bodies such as the Vietnam Vets Association approached you in terms of - ?**

I can't remember them talking specifically to me. They may have. I can't remember because we didn't seem to have it after Korea but I suppose we did. I don't know. I can't remember people waking up with nightmares and things like that or that talked about it, or did it tough.

14:00 I can't really remember it happening after World War II but it probably did, I don't know. If it hadn't been identified people probably suffered in silence, the wives I suppose, poor dears, and kids. I don't know what to make of it. I was once diametrically opposed. I've never had nightmares or things like that, so I didn't think anyone else would have and now when the good chaps are getting it?

14:30 Oh gee, I don't know. So I've gone no further than that. That's the extent of my wisdom on that topic!

Finally, what did you make of the moratorium back in Australia regarding the Vietnam War?

Not much. I'll tell you what, I find it impossible to believe

15:00 the way these people carry on about how they grew up during the Vietnam War through the moratorium and they grew, and they became great chaps because they objected, and you hear Beazley and people like this talking about how they grew, and some of these stupid women. Oh gee whiz! What can you say?

15:30 How they grew?

Did you pay much attention during the moratorium itself?

No, I didn't.

Did it cause a ripple amongst the army?

A lot of people talk about it. I see them now in the papers talking about how upset they were, they weren't received coming home and all this sort of thing. I don't really think that's what it is all about. I can't

16:00 believe that they are mightily shattered by that experience, the fact that they didn't get to march through Sydney or somewhere. God almighty! To have people yell at you, cheer and all the rest of it, so I don't see that as being a great experience. I'm not condemning it out of hand but I don't think I've lost anything from my life, and I don't expect people to go around saying, "You hero. You lovely thing, you."

16:30 **What about the opposite though, the sense that they might have come back to a society, which if it didn't overtly jeer them or cheer them, perhaps disapproved?**

Well the people that absolutely took action against them and spat on them and so on, I have just utter contempt, and will continue to have that, and believe that they don't even belong because they are the people that sent us. See, we didn't elect to go to Vietnam. We didn't volunteer, as such, to go to Vietnam. We were

17:00 sent by the people of Australia and they forget that. They are the people of Australia. That was the democratic vote that sent us there and we have no control. That's the thing that offends me of all, that we were there because the people of Australia said we should be there and we did our duty and a lot of good men died, and I'm offended by these people that parade. They're not concerned about that at all. They're only concerned about themselves and their own glorification. I grew in

17:30 Vietnam! What a lot of - if they had guts they would have stood up and said, "All right. I don't agree with it but the majority say yes, so all right, I'll go with it. I don't like it but I'll go with it." That's what they should have said but they didn't. As for physically spitting on Australian soldiers, I'm just disgusted and would tell them so but nobody ever does it when I'm around! [laughs]

18:00 **INTERVIEW ENDS**