Australians at War Film Archive

Leonard Opie - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 23rd January 2004

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1103

Tape 1

00:30 **Leonard, thanks very much for talking to the Archive. Perhaps we could start of with a summary of your life and we could start off with where you were born and when?**

I was born in Snowtown which is north of

01:00 Adelaide in 1923. My father was a bank manager and every six years we moved. So we moved to Minlaton, then we came to Adelaide, then I went to school at St. Peters. I left school at the end of 1940/41 and joined the Army in July '42 and I was 18 at the time. I couldn't join the AIF [Australian Imperial Forces] until I was

01:30 19, then when I became 19 I joined the AIF. Eventually I joined the 2/14th Battalion just before they went to New Guinea the second time and we served in the Markham Ramu Valley.

Which division was that?

7th Division, 21 Brigade. Then we came home in '43 and we had leave. Then we went up to the Atherton Tablelands

02:00 and we stayed there until we went to Borneo via Morotai. We landed at Balikpapan on the July 1st 1945 and at the end of the war our units were being declared redundant. The Brigadier was going over to accept the Japanese second army surrender in Makasar in what was then South West Celebes,

02:30 now Sulawesi. I went over with him as his interpreter. I was over there for five months and I came home in March 1946, was discharged. I joined up again in August 1950, for Korea. I served two tours in Korea. In between times I was an instructor back in Australia and then I got out in 1953. I joined the CMF [Citizen Military Forces] in 1958,

03:00 went full time in 1959, served two and a half years in Vietnam and then I went to Kashmir, with the United Nations as a military observer 1969/70; and I went back to Vietnam for another year. Then I was discharged and I went to the Jungle Training Centre at Canungra for two and a half years and Mr [Prime Minister] Whitlam gave me my birthday present, the sack [job dismissal]. I was sacked when I went to ordinary CMF and I had a

03:30 civilian life from then on. I was manager of a map company, selling maps for 15 years and I retired in 1989.

Just while we're on that summary, can you tell us which years you were in Vietnam, the tours of duty?

In 1966, in May of '66 until '68. Then I went to Kashmir 1968/69, went back to Vietnam

04:00 in 1970/71.

Can you also take us through your ranks during that service career?

I was a private in the army, in the AIF, then I joined the CMF. l I went to Korea as a Private. I enlisted in August as a Private, promoted Temporary Corporal in December, promoted temporary Sergeant in March, promoted temporary Warrant Officer in October, which was back-dated

04:30 to July and I stayed as a Temporary Warrant Officer until I was discharged. When I went to the CMF I was a Warrant Officer and then in '58 I was promoted to Lieutenant Second in 59, promoted to Captain in '65 and I was a Captain from '65 on until I retired in – well, I was promoted to Major in

05:00 '75, but I was a Captain all the time in Vietnam.

Just on your Vietnam service if you could take us through the major operations and the units you served with?

I joined the Australian Army Training Team. There was a special enlistment for CMF because they were short of officers and we were supposed to do 12 months in Australia training and then 12 months in

05:30 Vietnam. But we only signed up for 18 months, so I was due out of the Army before I was due out of Vietnam and they kept extending me. Although extensions weren't allowed, the Americans asked for me at various times so I just kept extending. And I initially went to what was called CSD [Combined Studies Division] which was a part of the American Embassy and I was working with indigenous people most of the

06:00 time.

Montagnards?.

Later on Montagnards, the first seven months I was on the lowlands at a place called Tam Ky, south of Da Nang. Then I went to train trail watch teams for the Ho Chi Minh trail in the Highlands in Ban-me-thuot and Pleiku. I was due to go home anyway and the CO [Commanding Officer] said, "What do you want to do?" I said, "As soon as I get home I'll apply to come back". And he said, "Well the Americans have asked for you for a special

06:30 job, I'll give you a month's leave so you won't lose your identity with the team. " So that's what I did and then I went back and I was with Special Activities.

What was that Special Activities?

Training the provincial reconnaissance, PRU [Provincial Reconnaissance Unit] , which were known sometimes as Saigon's Dirty Dozen. Indigenous people - Nungs and Chinese and a mixture of everybody. The Americans asked me once in front of our general,

07:00 who did we get to become members? And I said, "Well, draft dodgers, murderers, thieves" And he came to me afterwards and said, "I know you've got a sense of humour but do you want to take it a bit easy". And I said "Well, you know that's where we get them from". He said "Yes, but we don't publicise that fact". But then they initially were called the counter terror teams because the VC [Viet Cong] used to go around in the villages and they'd kill all the teachers and mayors and that sort of thing. The

07:30 government decided that they'd have a counter, well they called it counter-terror, but then it got a bit out of hand so they cleaned the image up and it became the Provincial Reconnaissance Unit.

Just to get us a little bit more familiar with your story – in Korea you served two tours of duty, particularly what were the two phases of the war that you went into and the times when you were there?

08:00 We were the first Australian 3rd Battalion and we became part of the 27th Commonwealth Brigade, which was the [British] Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and the Middlesex Regiment, so we became the 3rd Battalion in 27th Brigade. And just as we arrived the Pusan perimeter breakout had occurred so we arrived and it looked as if we weren't going to do anything. The Inchon landing had happened and the breakthrough, the two

08:30 crowds had joined together and it looked as though we were going home anyway. But then [General Douglas] Macarthur was ordered across the parallel, so we flew up from Taegu up to Kempo and Seoul and then we went across the 38th parallel and we were part of one of the American divisions.

What were the major activities that happened before you

09:00 **were on that tour of duty?**

On the way up, on the way north over the parallel you mean? Well, we were sent off on various patrols – one night particularly we arrived in this village which had been bombed by the Americans and we saw a vehicle coming along so we thought we'd ambush it. We got into an ambush position and it turned out to be Americans. And they said "What are you doing up

09:30 here because we're the furthest north of the allied forces?" We said, "Well, we patrolled up here anyway". So we spent the night there and then went back. But that's the sort of thing - we were sent out on patrols and we didn't have maps and we didn't have any information, we didn't know what was really happening.

And your second time there?

Well the second time was more or less trench warfare. We spent much of our time trying to get prisoners without much success – without any success really.

10:00 But the first was mobile all the time. We went up, we would have been first into Pyongyang but the Americans decided that the 1st Cav should do it; so they sidelined us off to the west coast and unfortunately for them the First Rock Division of the South Koreans beat the 1st Cav in anyway. But just after we got to Pyongyang, the 1st Cav were going home to a 'Welcome Home

10:30 Parade' in Tokyo and the 198th Airborne had done a drop to rescue a prisoner of war train and they were surrounded by the North Koreans and all of a sudden there were no Americans to help. So we

went up there and for a cost of, I think, 7 wounded, we killed about 150 or 250 North Koreans and captured about 150. Then from then on we went up to a place called Chong Ju and we had a battle there.

11:00 And then they said, well, you won't be doing any more fighting and we stayed there for a while and the Americans went on up to the Yalu [River] , but then the Chinese came in and they did a sort of a slashing attack and chopped the Rock Second Corps to pieces and also the American 8th Cavalry was almost wiped out. So we withdrew to a place called Pakchon, we'd gone through Pakchon on the way up.

11:30 On the way through we'd captured 250 North Koreans without a shot being fired; but prior to that we'd gone through a place called Sarawong and our Major Ferguson, who was 2IC [Second in Command] of the Battalion, borrowed a tank and ended up capturing 1650 North Koreans because they thought we were Russians. He rounded them up and handed them over to the Americans, again without a shot being

12:00 fired.

We might now go back and start at the beginning again. Can you take us back to your memories of Snowtown and growing up there?

Well I was only four when I left

12:30 Snowtown so I didn't know. I'd just started virtually kindergarten and we went to Minlaton and we left there when I was about 9 and came to Adelaide and stayed at a hotel, The Semaphore, while Dad found a place to live and we moved out to Prospect and I was there for several years. Then we moved to Medindie and I was there when the war started. I tried to enlist at the age of

13:00 seventeen but of course in those days everybody was registered anyway so they said, "Come back when you're 18". And then in July '42 I was virtually called up and I was medical A2 which was fit for sedentary duties only, and that was mainly because my height was too big for my chest measurement really.

13:30 But I went to a training camp at Sandy Creek just north of Adelaide and made a few enquiries and changed the A2 to A1. And then we moved to Woodside, the 3rd Infantry Training Battalion. From there we went over to Watsonia in Victoria, 23rd ITB and then we went up to Canungra for the jungle training.

Can you tell us a little bit about your family? What were the connections

14:00 **with the First World War?**

I had two uncles – one was in the 50th Battalion and the other was in the artillery. And my father was married so he didn't go to the war which he always regretted which is why I think he was keen on me being in the army – well, I wanted to go into the army anyway.

How do you mean he was keen, how did he encourage you?

Once I got into the army he tended to be proud of me, the fact that I didn't do anything

14:30 anyway, but I think he always regretted the fact that he hadn't gone himself. In those days, not so many married men went and that was the reason he didn't. Both died in 1963, after I came home from Korea, so from then on I s just lived with my

15:00 dogs, really.

Brothers and sisters?

I had two sisters. They were both older than I was, one was about 4 years older and the other was 7 years older. One was retarded and the other one got married and she married a chap who was in the 2/5th Field Regiment and he was actually with the fellow in Syria who got the VC, he was a signaller.

Cutler?

[Sir Roden] Cutler, yes.

15:30 And then I ran into him again in Borneo in Balikpapan. He was a Five by Two Plan – under the Five by Two Plan at the end of the war, those who had five years service and two years overseas service they had the required points to go home. And when the units were declared redundant the 2/14th Battalion went across to Makasar and up to a place called Parepare which was

16:00 about a hundred miles north of Makasar and I waylaid the Brigadier on the way home from the mess and said "You need an interpreter and I'm it". And he said, "I hadn't really thought about it. " So he arranged for me to go over and be his interpreter.

Can you take us through any memories of the depression and the 30s?

No, we didn't have much to do with it. Being a bank manager, Dad wasn't very popular because he

wouldn't

16:30 loan money and fellows came to him after the Depression and said to him, "I always thought you were a bastard because you wouldn't give me money, but now I'm glad you didn't". When I went to school, when I went to Saints, I joined the cadets and I became a Cadet Lieutenant there and our instructors were the old Australian Instructional Corps who were permanent soldiers and they were very good. Some of them went off to the war and others were retained in

17:00 Australia but there was a very small permanent force of instructors and they were the best of them.

What was your interest in becoming involved in military activities when you were growing up?

I was just keen on the army. I've got two loves in my life, war and railways. So if I'm not with the railways I liked to be in a war.

Where did the railway interest come from?

Since I was about five I got a Hornby

17:30 Tank Loco and a circle of track and I can remember that at Minlaton, just a 4 foot circle of track and I was always interested. Snowtown was a railway town, they had a round house there and what they call a wire where if a train, a whole train could turn on a wire rather than on a turntable which – I had a sort of a railway background there. We were always up watching trains go through.

18:00 **What was your involvement in Anzac Day ceremonies during the '30s?**

When I was at school we used to have a service out at the Memorial Hall and we'd get into buses and go into town with the cadets and we'd march in the Anzac parade so that was my main memory of those.

What did your uncles tell you of the First World War?

Nothing, they never mentioned it,

18:30 never mentioned it. It's one of those things that just didn't come up. You didn't ask them and they didn't tell you. It wasn't really a "no, no" it was just something that just didn't get mentioned.

What sort of student were you?

Terrible, I hated school. The only thing my sister and I both agreed on, they say the best days or your life are your schooldays and that's rubbish. They were the worst days of my life. I couldn't wait to get out of

19:00 school, terrible student, I hated school. The only thing I liked about school was being in the cadets.

What about sport, were you involved in any sport?

I played cricket and football , swimming and that, I didn't make a big thing of it. I was in the 3rd team which I think was the only one that anyone who couldn't get into the other two got into, that was in the football. I remember Max

19:30 Harris one of the local identities here said I was a pretty good player. I was in the third team at Saints and I thought, that's no recommendation. I was in the third team and you only got in it because that was all that was left.

Did you follow the career of Don Bradman?

No, not particularly. I once saw him throw a ball from the boundary and hit the wicket and I remember the whole crowd just waited for it to happen and that's the only memory I've got of him.

You did get along and see the cricket though?

20:00 Occasionally. And I remember we used to barrack for North Adelaide because we lived out North and there was a fellow called Farmer and he was the footballer in those days but I preferred football to cricket, I don't really like cricket.

Were you involved in reading comics or books when you were growing up?

No, no. I did a lot of reading but I never read comics. ' Boys Own Paper' and 'Triumph' were the things in those

20:30 days but they were sort of respectable rather than Superman comics. They were a sort of a lead-up – they were the English version of a lead-up to maturity I suppose – 'Biggles' [air force adventure hero] and people like that.

As you were at school what did you know of the rising hostilities in Germany?

Not very much. Just before '41 they were going to have a

21:00 tour of South East Asia – it was arranged and I remember asking Dad for the money for it, We were going to do a trip around, but then the war intervened and that never came to pass. We just read about

Hitler and Mussolini and the Japanese, but there was never a great deal. When the war started with the cadets we went down and dug coastal defences – I've still got the letter of

21:30 appreciation from the army for our digging of trenches on the coastline. They thought the Japs would come up the St Vincent's Gulf, that was one of the possibilities. I'd already left school but they asked for volunteers and we went down there and spent our Christmas holidays wiring and digging on the beach.

What are your vivid memories of before you joined the army in war-time Adelaide?

22:00 With the Russians particularly, I used to keep a notebook of where everything was. I used to follow it on maps, with pins on maps because I always wanted to go into the army and as I said I tried at 17, but you couldn't get in until you were 18 anyway, and then the AIF at 19. It was just a general interest in keeping

22:30 tag of what was going on.

What about in Adelaide specifically. Were there black-outs for instance?

Yes, I remember the Americans, they landed here, the 32nd Division, one of the worst of the American Divisions, it was a National Guard Division, but they landed in Adelaide and they did a march through the city and I can remember they picked up their pay at the Commonwealth Bank in King William Street. And they had armed guards with Tommy

23:00 guns and kept the street clear and that sort of thing. And when they did a march, they did a march through the city and then they went down to the Adelaide Oval and played grid iron. They had a grid iron match to show the population what they were like. They had the black-out and they had what they called the brown-out which was really worse because they had a few lights around the place. My sister was working at the Munitions out at Penfield in the

23:30 North of Adelaide and she went out one night by mistake and was followed home. She wasn't actually accosted but she reported it to the police so Mum and I used to trek down to the tram stop at 2 o clock in the morning to wait for her. The first morning we waited the police turned up and said, "What are you doing here?" And I said "I've come to pick my sister up". And he said "I've come here too, " so we had a liaison there, but that's the sort of thing that happened. And then when I was at

24:00 Woodside we used to have weekend leave and the train used to go to Woodside and so I'd have a couple of hours' sleep before we left at 10 at night to go back up to Woodside and then we'd walk from the railway siding up to the camp and so it was quite civilised there. But Sandy Creek was really what it was called, just sandy, 8 men in a tent and terrible.

What changes did the Americans bring to Adelaide when they were here?

24:30 Well, they spent a lot of money . The trouble was that by this time Singapore had fallen and we had some of the girls, with my sister, who were working in Munitions; and I remember one, she found out afterwards that her husband had died earlier in the piece but it didn't stop her from taking on all and sundry. You

25:00 get the odd one like that but most of them – once Singapore fell and the East Indies and all that sort of thing - it was a matter of waiting to see what was going to happen to us.

Can you talk about the social changes that happened during that time once war was declared, in Adelaide?

Well, there was austerity and other food, butter was short, and I remember I sent some

25:30 coffee home after the war to my mother. Unfortunately I sent it in a rubber package and I think she could smell it from Darwin, but that sort of thing was short. They used to say that they couldn't get rice because it all went to the troops, I don't ever remember eating rice in the army and our food, civilian food, was pretty much restricted, everybody had a ration card. Also I think they had

26:00 what I think were called National Service Officers and if you changed your location from one place to another you had to go and see the National Service Office and let them know and your card would be transferred to whatever suburb or wherever you were going. And the conscientious objectors [pacifists], they used to be tried and found wanting. The usual question was, "If your sister or mother was being raped by a

26:30 Japanese what would you do?" and they never really had a good answer for that so they said, "Right, your application's been rejected, you're into the army". I knew one or two. I knew one fellow who was up at Sandy Creek with us and he was a conscientious objector. He wouldn't carry weapons but he'd do anything else and of course they gave him every dirty job and he was a very nice fellow really.

How did you feel about conscientious objectors then?

Well, this particular fellow, you know, I was quite

27:00 friendly with him. He worked in the orderly room and they had an old World War I Orderly Room

Sergeant and that sort of thing and they treated him like dirt, but he didn't show any animosity at all. But most of them were Jehovah's Witnesses and of course their story was they weren't going to fight and it didn't matter what happened. The old story about sisters and mothers being raped, they didn't really have an answer to it. When

27:30 push came to shove, you wondered what would happen but I think they went off to either internment camps or they gave them 3 months' jail. But we weren't really interested in that; I was interested in going into the army not getting out of it.

You joined the CMF. Were the CMF viewed differently to the AIF?

Yes, the CMF were,

28:00 after the war they had what they called the Interim Army. Everybody got out of the AIF, the AIF finished with the end of the war, and they had to have certain people and they had an occupation force going up to Japan. We applied to go to that but I'd been away from home for nearly 2 years and I wanted to go home and they said, "If you go home first, that's it, you're not going". And you had to sign on for 2 years for the occupation and a chap I know he went up and he was only there for 9 months – if I'd known that I would have gone. But anyway,

28:30 we just wanted to get out anyway.

I was thinking particularly before you joined the army when you were younger, how were you treated as a 'chocco' [chocolate soldier - militia] ?

Chocolate soldiers who can't fight and that sort of thing. That was of course dispelled over the Owen Stanleys [mountains in New Guinea] by the 39th Battalion particularly, but prior to that you had the PMF, the permanent military force, which was only a cadre [training force] and

29:00 the militia, the people who'd been in World War I. Blamey [Australian Military Commander in Chief] and these other people, well he'd been a regular actually, but a lot of them stayed on in the army with the militia which was quite respected because there was really no regular army. I remember, we had a contest down at Wayville for the

29:30 showground, and we beat the ASC cadets, our cadet unit. So that was the sort of thing that happened. They were part time. When the war started and they volunteered for the AIF, those who didn't want to go in the AIF when conscription started in '41, when [Prime Minister] Curtin decided on conscription, if you didn't want to go in the AIF, you were in the

30:00 CMF, Citizens Military Forces, and that's when you became the so-called term 'chocco'. And a lot of them - we had instructors over at Watsonia from 7 Battalion and the 2/4th Pioneers – now they'd been up at Darwin and they - the 2/4th Pioneers - had actually been on a ship to go to Timor. They'd just got out of Darwin and they were bombed and they came back so they never got

30:30 away and they eventually came down and became our instructors. On a matter of principle a lot of those refused to join the AIF because they said, "we're doing the same sort of thing, the only difference is that you've got a shoulder point [badge] with Australia on it, " which is AIF you see. And then in New Guinea, the 55 or 53rd Battalion, were people dragged out of all the reinforcement units

31:00 around the cities, pushed into a unit and sent up to [Port] Moresby. They didn't have tents, they didn't have food, they didn't have anything. They were wharf labourers. Then of course the Japanese landed at Buna and started pushing through. So they sent those troops - the 39th Battalion which was a full battalion - they were the ones that initially kept the Japs back. But the 53rd had no training, they'd never been taught to fire rifles, they'd never been taught any

31:30 tactics or anything, so they were the ones who had the bad reputation. And of course the AIF in those days had all been over in the Middle East and they came home and they saw all these people wandering around Adelaide in the cities and that's where the term 'Chocco' came about.

Do you remember the first time you saw some, some of the AIF?

Yes, they landed here and they were billeted in various homes around the place and people I knew were billeting them.

32:00 They had white puggarees and white webbing and anybody who hadn't been away, what we used to call mug lairs, they'd put blanko [whitener] on there or they'd buy gaiters or anklets, web they were called, and blanko those and wear a white webbed belt. When I first went in we were issued with

32:30 1907 patented equipment and then later on we got the '37 patent which we wore right through into Korea. And they would strut around wearing these puggarees – but then of course they all wore colour patches on their hats so it didn't take long before people found out what they were.

They were people masquerading?

Yes, and when we were at Watsonia, when people went up to Canungra, we were issued with greens [uniforms]. Everybody had

33:00 khaki before that and you were also issued with a lanyard , one of the most useless tools, an army knife, which you had to wear. Anyway, these people started coming down into Melbourne and we wondered who they were – they had gaiters and web belts and that sort of thing and puggarees and, what are they? And it turned out they were rejects from Canungra. Because if you did the course at Canungra and you didn't pass they didn't know what to

33:30 do with them so they sent them back to Melbourne and after a while they woke up and said, well the criteria for Canungra is - would a CO [commanding officer] accept somebody from Canungra? So if you failed the test you just went back and back and back until you finally passed it. So we started off with 48 on our course and we ended up with 24. One fellow shot himself in the foot, he was a Spaniard actually.

34:00 **What happened there in that incident?**

He didn't want to go so he shot himself in the foot, in the ankle I think.

Were you there when that happened?

Well, we were in the area .

What happened, did you know he was going to do it?

No, no, a crowd of 48, we lived 8 in a tent which just empty palliasses, no straw in them and two blankets. And you ran down to the river for a

34:30 wash in the morning and you worked about 16 hours a day. So nobody every really got very friendly with anybody, so when this fellow shot himself he was jut one of the mob we didn't know who he was, didn't want to know, we just heard he had done this.

What happened to him?

Well, he was charged with SIW [self-inflicted wound], and when they patched him up they probably put him in jail for a little while. But the odd person did this, it wasn't very often.

35:00 It was better taking your chances in action than doing it deliberately before you ever got into action. The chances of getting killed are very slight in the war anyway, especially being shot, nobody ever gets shot in the war so it would be a bit of a fool to shoot yourself beforehand. We had a fellow in Korea who tried to do it - he was fed up with everything. And this night we were bedding down and he was in a little one man tent by himself and we heard this

35:30 bang and we went over and he'd shot himself. It went in between the big toe and little toe and all it did was graze the skin so it was a wasted effort anyway.

Can you tell us about hearing the news of the Fall of Singapore?

We couldn't understand that. The thing is that a lot of people who arrived in Singapore had only been in the army a couple of months.

36:00 The whole thing about Singapore was really a giant bluff because Yamashita [Japanese commander] said they had a cease fire at 5 o clock when Percival [British commander] came down to the forward company and surrendered to Yamashita.

What did you personally hear of that at the time?

Well, we just heard that they'd surrendered you know we didn't really know. We couldn't believe that it had happened and I still find it hard to believe

36:30 because as I said at 5 o clock Yamashita said "Right, if you don't stop by 8 o clock I'll turn the artillery on you". Well, he didn't have any artillery, he'd run out of shells, it was just a giant bluff. So at 8 o clock the following morning, the Japs started rounding our people up. Between 8 o'clock the previous night and 8' o clock in the morning they were not prisoners of war and this is the business about [Australian General] Bennett getting away. Now it's the

37:00 duty of everybody to try to escape and the few people who did escape, they got back to Australia and they were Court Martialled; but Bennett escaped with a couple of his off-siders ostensibly to pass the word back on what was going on. Well he could have sent staff officers back over the previous couple of months, but he ordered that nobody should attempt to escape.

37:30 That's the big bone of contention, the fact that it's everybody's duty to escape, but he had ordered them.

What was the feeling in Adelaide at that time, can you recall of the fear of Japanese invasion?

Well, it was pretty scary. I worked in town at the Adelaide Steamship, when it was respectable. We had, in the basement, foot square timbers and every time there was an air raid alert, a practice

38:00 alert, we would zoom all down there and get under these. They had virtually a bunker, I suppose you would call it, in the basement. And then people were rostered every night to go out and be on fire alert and they'd stand up on the roof and do an 8 hour shift for incendiaries [bombs] really. Nothing ever happened but the only time, the only

38:30 bombing that ever happened here was when Colonel Light Gardens was bombed by a plane that came over and the bomb bay opened and all the goodies that were destined for Darwin fell out and bombed the suburb with tins of fruit and all sorts of things. This friend of mine who died a couple of months ago, six months ago, she was in the searchlights and they had searchlights down around the

39:00 coast and out to the north of Adelaide. She manned the radar headquarters in the command post. And then they took over, when the men went off to New Guinea, the women in the unit, they took over the whole battery and went over to Western Australia and Garden Island and Fremantle, Kings Park.

Were you in a relationship at the time?

No, no. We knew each

39:30 other in the army and then I had a shop in town and she used to come in after delivering her husband out to weapons' research and before her business opened, so she'd browse around in my shop.

I was thinking around in the 1940s; were you interested in girls at the time?

No, no. all I wanted to do was get to the war. I didn't worry about girls.

Tape 2

00:43 **What would people do for leisure in these tight times – was there anything that you particularly enjoyed doing?**

No, there wasn't a great deal of travel because of course

01:00 petrol was restricted and a lot of people had gas producer cars which were fairly hard to organise anyway. So people didn't really go out much, but the trains and trams still ran so people went into town and there was a certain amount of sport played, football and cricket and that sort of thing. In those days you had radio and it was a simpler form of life really.

01:30 The ice man would deliver a block of ice to the ice box, you didn't have refrigerators and the fruiterer would deliver fruit to you. There were no supermarkets, there was the local shop, deli, I suppose you'd call them these days, but it was all fairly simple and restricted. The men's suits, Mr Denholm I think was the Minister for Production, and he produced a suit that didn't have

02:00 lapels and it didn't have cuffs and this sort of thing and everybody was encouraged to not spend a lot of money and to wait, because we were really waiting for the invasion and they thought that there probably would be an invasion. And we didn't have anybody here to do it because the AIF were just on the verge of – Mr Churchill tried to divert them into Burma actually, and Curtin kicked up such a fuss that they

02:30 eventually came back here. But prior to that, when General MacArthur came down, we were here when he came through Adelaide on his way to Melbourne and he had no idea really that he didn't have anybody here, until the Americans the 32nd and the 41st Divisions arrived and they were really the two worst divisions in the American army anyway – they didn't do any good in New Guinea. So things were

03:00 fairly scary and with the black-out and the brown-out. I don't remember going to the pictures very much – I suppose they had pictures in those days. You know, people just listened to the radio or read and enjoyed themselves as best they could.

What did you think of these Americans that had turned up in your town?

Well, they were fairly brash, they got around in much better clothes than our people and they were much better paid and they had

03:30 khaki, khaki drill I suppose and they strolled around. They always had a few girls on their sleeves because they were the people who had money and also at that stage there were none of our troops about anyway. There were a few militia but we were up at camp at Sandy Creek and we didn't get any leave there. When we got to Woodside

04:00 we used to get weekend leave so we could come down on a Saturday, I think we came down on Saturday afternoon and went back Sunday night. But most of the time when we were seen was actually at night, when we were going to catch the train to go back to Woodside. We didn't have much to do and then when I got to Melbourne I remember Joe E. Brown was a famous comedian and he put on a show once at a soccer ground or football ground or somewhere and everybody

04:30 flocked to see him because he was famous. But apart from the odd concert and things – in Adelaide they had what they called the Cheer-Up Hut - and all servicemen were entitled to go there. I looked in once and got so embarrassed I came out because I thought, I live here you know, it's for out-of-towners but they used to provide snacks and tea and dances and that sort of thing for the troops so there was a lot

of that that went on. The troops were reasonably well

05:00 catered for when they were on leave, when there were troops here, and then of course the AIF came they were billeted initially around in the various sports ovals and private homes but they weren't here for very long. They went over to northern New South Wales and southern Queensland prior to going to New Guinea.

These American chaps who'd not terribly impressed you with their

05:30 **brashness – would your sister ever go out with one of those kind of men?**

No, she wouldn't, but several girls used to stay with us and one in particular she would take anybody on, it didn't matter what they were. She found out later that her husband had died in about '42 anyway. She was the only one I knew and she had a reputation for doing that. It didn't matter if they were Australians or Americans what they were as long as they had

06:00 pants. I was fairly quiet, sort of laid back, I suppose you'd call it these days – a certain amount of sport but apart from that there wasn't a great deal of activity around the place and everybody was waiting to see what was going to happen.

These gas-producing cars can you tell me a bit more about them?

Well, most of them had a big sort of balloon, square sort of balloon on either the back or behind what's now the boot, or they had them on the roof. And they were called producer-gas and they didn't work very well but they were an alternative to petrol because petrol was very short. We weren't producing any, it was all coming from overseas anyway and once the Japs took South East Asia

07:00 any stuff we got was from America and that was pretty few and far between.

So public transport was much more used?

Yes, we had trams in those days, trams and trains.

You said one of the entertainments for a young person at that time might be a radio. Did you have a radio in your household?

Yes, we had a radio -

07:30 there was a thing [serial] called Blue Hills, it went for years and years and years and everybody knew Blue Hills. It was what they call a soapie these days and everybody knew the characters in it. And then on Friday they'd have what they called "A Pleasant Friday Afternoon" and that would start about 11 o clock in the morning and my sister who was retarded that was her main entertainment just listening to this. You had the

08:00 usual people who went on and on with it so you got to know the people there and then they did have films.

What was Adelaide like for a young girl with an intellectual disability at that point in time? Was she well looked after?

She was at home but we didn't go out very much at all. If she went out she went out with my parents, she didn't go out by herself ever.

Was there any sort of public facility to

08:30 **help your parents?**

No, somebody said it was a cross my mother had to bear all her life really, until she died. She had a stroke and her main concern was what was going to happen to Pat my sister. She eventually went into a home and died after my parents died, but you never knew really how

09:00 intellectually disabled she was. It's one of those things that you never know, you wonder.

You're a young man at St Peter's College and you aren't really enjoying academic work but you are enjoying some of your cadets work. Can you tell me about joining up, that day and what happened, the Militia?

09:30 Well actually I was at Adelaide Steamship, and Mum came in with a note from the call-up people and I had to report down to Keswick. They had what they call GDD [General Details Depot], and that was at Wayville at the showgrounds. You went there and there was an old fellow, a sergeant in World War I, and we went down on the tram and he actually lined the 8 of us up and marched us into the thing.

Now we were civilians, you know, we could have told him to go and chase himself but these were the way things were in those days - lined us and marched us in to be medically examined and that sort of thing. And they said, "Welcome back here" and we arrived there and the next thing we're on a train to Sandy Creek which is up near Goolwa and it was

10:30 just a big sand pit really and there were 8 of us in a tent. And I remember one fellow whose name was

Prince, his mother was Madam Prince who had performing monkeys, and she was an old bat and the poor little monkeys had a hard time. And I said to him, “You know, what’s it like?” He said, “It’s all right, we go round these towns and you know we pinch a bit here and we pinch a bit there” and we get by. And that was his life

11:00 being the son of Madam Prince and the performing monkeys. I got a bit fed up with that so I went into the Orderly Room and then they decided to march to Woodside which is 20 or 30 miles and they said, “Well, you can’t march because you’ve been in the Orderly Room” and I said “No” - and the job instead of marching was to clean out the grease traps. If you’ve ever seen an army grease trap you’d volunteer to march. So we

11:30 marched and on the way a lot of people fell out and they were ferried on to Woodside and eventually we got to Woodside and they said, “Right, those who’ve done the march fall out and those who got picked up line up”. So the following day they made them do a march around the camp to make up for it, you know they thought they were getting out of doing the march. But again we had World War I fellows – an old chap

12:00 Smithy who turned up, a friend of mine, he was an unarmed combat expert and he’d won a Military Medal at Gallipoli and fit as a fiddle. He used to teach unarmed combat and I remember he twisted my leg one day and I went with it and he twisted it back again - I was crippled for about three days. We were there for a couple of months and then we went over to Watsonia which was another infantry training battalion and I think we used to get

12:30 weekend leave there. But the only time I remember – one Saturday night I wasn’t feeling very well and I was in the tent and the sergeant came along and he said, “Right, you’ve got to take somebody in to the Melbourne Jail”. And I said, “I’ve got a leave pass”. He said, “Forget that, you’re going in”. This fellow had started to climb a tree, he was handcuffed to the tree, and the only way he could get out was to climb the tree; but he forgot that the branches would have stopped him anyway, so they dragged him down and we took him into the

13:00 Melbourne Jail and handed him over and they didn’t know what to do. You know, anybody that played up, they weren’t too sure, they didn’t have a local brig for putting people in jail so it was all a bit ad hoc in those days. And then we marched to the local train station to get on the rain and in typical army fashion they said, “We made a mistake, the train is actually tomorrow”. So we marched back to camp, having

13:30 handed all our gear in, and spent the night down there. Then we went to Canungra and the Canungra camp was about 3 miles uphill from the railway station so we marched up there and, as I said, we had two blankets and an empty palliasse and again 8 in a tent. The only washing facility was the local creek. It was normally a 4-week

14:00 course and when we’d finished they said, “Well, they’re not ready to take you up on the Tablelands where the 7th Division are, so you’ll start the course again”. So we started the course and we did it all over again. And we thought we were going to Burma when we arrived at Brisbane but of course we ended up on the Tablelands. But a few things I learned – we did one march, we spent the whole afternoon going through this creek amongst the lantana and they said,

14:30 “Well, you can have a fire at night. ” I made the mistake of taking my boots off. Never take your boots off and try to dry them in front of the fire, because the following morning I couldn’t get them on and we were about 6 miles from camp. So I hacked them about with my bayonet until I could get them on and hobbled into camp and I eventually was given a new pair of boots without having to pay for them, I think. The other thing I can remember, we were on

15:00 leave in Melbourne and I went to the YMCA and I went to have a shower and when I came out of the shower, somebody had stolen my boots. And I thought how low can you get? You know, what do you do in Melbourne without boots. I just couldn’t believe it. I went back to the shower and somebody was having a shower and there was a pair of boots there and so I got them and hid them under a pillow and waited for the screams and yelling - I never heard any,

15:30 but I thought, “That’s about the lowest thing I can imagine, stealing somebody’s boots. ”

And then you did it?

Well, I recovered a pair that I’d found. You know, weekend leave, if you had weekend leave from Watsonia there wasn’t much to do anyway – you just went into Melbourne and caught the train back out to camp. There were no amenities in camp. They might have had a YMCA hut or a Salvation Army hut

16:00 or something, but there was nothing in those except something to read or perhaps a couple of games of Ludo and they might have had a pool table or something. Anyway, Canungra was just go, go, go all the time and then we ended up in the Tablelands. And when we got up there we wanted to go to the 2/27th Battalion which was the South Australian Battalion, but they said no, no, everybody’s mixed up after Buna and Gona, there’s very few

16:30 people left anyway and all the reinforcements had gone from everywhere, so that’s why I ended up in a Victorian Battalion, the 2/14th.

Could you tell me a little about the men, it seems to me that meeting this chap from the First World War, Smith, and the monkey-trainer's son, Prince, that you were mixing with people that probably in civilian life you may not have ever met?

17:00 No, that's right, yes.

What was the feeling amongst the men and how was this period of time shaping you, meeting this variety of people?

In all of World War II, I only had one friend, who ended up in the 2/14th but I didn't really mix with anybody. Later on they said, "Well you don't make friends because they're going to be dead tomorrow, " which isn't right anyway but you

17:30 tend not to pal up with anybody. I mean they smoke and they drink and I don't smoke and I don't drink and I've got nothing in common with them really. There was no leave from Canungra - there was nothing, there was no amenities there at all and when you went to have a meal they had not even any cover over the meal facility so, you know, you just went on by yourself

18:00 really. It was just a group, but there was no cohesion in the unit. There's supposed to be cohesion but in a training unit like that everybody really goes their own way.

Is this because you know you'll be separated later?

No, you just don't – I've always been considered a loner which doesn't worry me but it's the way it is.

Were the people providing you with any entertainment?

No,

18:30 we didn't have any concert parties or anything like that. In Melbourne, as I said, we had this Joe E. Brown who was a famous international fellow but that was in a civilian environment and there were no shows like the English have, we didn't have any of that. We didn't expect it – we didn't miss it because we didn't expect it.

19:00 **So how long were you at each camp?**

Well, Sandy Creek I was about a month I suppose, Woodside I was probably 2 months, Watsonia 2 months and then Canungra 2 months. And then we got up to the tablelands in about June and just after we got there we went out on an exercise and we were at a place called Ravenshoe up in the

19:30 Atherton Tablelands. We went out on this exercise and there was a tropical storm and for some reason we only stayed – in the middle of the night they pulled us out and marched us back to camp which was very unusual. And the most unusual thing, when we woke up in the morning there was a dixie of tea for us. This was the first time– after six months in the army. Anyway, somewhere along the line I damaged my elbow

20:00 and I found out I was getting unsightly blotches all over me. So they sent me down to the Australian General Hospital at Rocky Creek and they said "You've got psoriasis, you're unfit for tropical service". We were just on the verge of going to New Guinea - in between times when I got tired of running around the bush I'd go to the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] and work as a medical orderly

20:30 and I was friendly with the doctor and I said "What's going to happen?" He said, "You can't go to New Guinea" and I said "It sounds like gang plank fever to me". It's a complaint that comes upon people who don't want to go away, you see. He said, "Well what about it? And I said "What about filing these papers?" I said "At least give me the chance to get there. If I'm worse then I can come back; but if I'm not worse I'll stay". He filed them all right, I found out 40 years later he

21:00 filed them in the waste bin. Anyway, going over on the Duntroon, which was a passenger ship, we went to [Port] Moresby and the first day out I stripped down to my singlet which was all I was prepared to do and there were these blotches everywhere and it started to get better and a week in New Guinea cleared it up.

So the tropical weather helped your psoriasis?

First of all I was [medical condition] A2 and that was "Sedentary Duties Only" and "Unfit for tropical service. " I should never have gone to

21:30 New Guinea, so then I realised that there was somebody looking after me.

You were very determined?

That's right.

Throughout these periods of months at different camps, what had your training been and your drills been during the day?

Mainly rifle drill and with a Thomson for example, a Thomson was a

22:00 sub machine gun, they were automatic in repetition, they'd give you two rounds; you fired one on automatic and one on repetition, but I didn't even get to fire those. That's how short the ammunition was. And we used to go to the range and fire and, dependent on whether you passed and I don't think they worried anyway – everybody passed unless they were completely hopeless. We did rifle drill and bayonet drill. That's how I hurt my elbow, I banged it because I was doing it left-handed to

22:30 see how it would work and it just brought this thing up, which later on they told me was incurable. It wasn't but I found that out 40 years later. But there were no tactics or anything like that, you didn't learn anything of that and jungle was just bush-bashing, you know. The last exercise was a six-day exercise and we had a commando sergeant who thought he could do everything and the first day he packed up and couldn't take it.

23:00 We were pretty fit when we got up to the tableland -that was the criteria that you had to be suitable. Colonel McDonald was the head of it, 'Bandy' McDonald he was called. I met him at Canungra 40 years later and he was just the same, rough and tough, and if you didn't meet the standard you juts went back and did it over and over again.

Could the men tell when you had a weak

23:30 **leader come in that he wouldn't last?**

In New Guinea we had a weak leader and we sacked him. I don't know what happened to him, he was a platoon commander.

I was thinking on the Tablelands, you mentioned that you'd been sent someone who ended up leaving after a day?

No, we moved into the unit that had been in the Middle East, they were in Syria and then they'd come home, they'd been over the Kokoda Trail, they'd been to Gona and over the trail at Gona,

24:00 so we had the survivors of those. But then we had reinforcements who would come up and they weren't much ahead of us really, they hadn't been there that much longer, but having been there that much longer they tried to stand over us and pretend that they were it and a bit [better than us] . But one of those had gangplank fever, you know a big tough fellow, but every time we went away he seemed to be missing.

So gangplank fever is the

24:30 **army equivalent of lacking moral fibre [cowardice] ?**

Yes, LMF, yes, what Mr Whitlam's got, his papers have disappeared from the archives. Somebody asked to find them and they're not there.

Like your medical records?

Like me my medical records.

So during your time in the cadets you'd obviously been familiar with some

25:00 **weaponry. Was this an exciting new set of weapons or was it more impressive what you were training with or did you find that actually the cadets had prepared you pretty well for this transition?**

I actually got exemption for recruit training for cadets, I was a cadet lieutenant, but the instructors we had, we had a Major who'd been in the Boer War and World War I and

25:30 I learned more about tactics and strategy from him than I ever did in the army. I remember we came down to town one Saturday night on leave and there was this special newspaper edition and that was the May 10th [German] invasion of the Low Countries, so that sort of puts it in a date context. But the instructors as I said were from the AIC [Australian Instructional Corps], and they were the

26:00 people who instructed the permanent army, so they were really good. And when the war came a lot of those weren't allowed to go overseas – some of them did, they all volunteered. We did a course on the Hotchkiss gun for example, which is a French light machine-gun which is useless anyway, we never saw it anywhere. But we also do the Vickers machine gun, we did 3 inch

26:30 mortar. I did a course out at Woodside with the 3 inch mortar, so I never was taught that in the army, but I learned it in the cadets; so I learned more in the cadets than I ever did in the army. Four years I had, well 3 years, with the 2/14th and it was just wasted. That's why I went to Korea really. I did a couple of campaigns but in between times all we did was run around up in the Tablelands.

27:00 **It's exceptional that you felt you'd had better training in the cadets than the men had had in the army?**

Yes, before we went to Borneo we had a section, platoon, company, battalion and brigade and eventually a divisional exercise - but you were only a small part of that anyway. You were just following whatever you were told to do. But in the cadets, you know,

27:30 you're taught to be a junior leader. I stood, or sat, for Duntroon [military college] and the best thing that ever happened to me was that I didn't get in. My impression of Duntroon - they take a lad and teach him to be an infant, a lot of them don't need much instruction so I was never sorry that I didn't go to Duntroon.

You went

28:00 **to the Atherton Tablelands and were doing exercises on different levels. How do you feel that actually panned out later on, do you feel that these exercises were useful for you?**

Only for fitness, purely for fitness, we didn't learn any new tactics. There's nothing really new, you know, you just do the same thing.

28:30 **Do you remember the first time you went home in uniform, how your father was about that?**

Yes, we had the old service dress in those days and nothing really fitted, the collar was baggy and the great coat didn't fit and you wore cloth, instead of what they called 'Anklets Web', which were web, you wore cloth with three

29:00 buttons on them and they looked pretty tatty and your uniform hung on you.

Were these World War I relics?

Well we went to Korea in them, the same service dress, they were dressed up a bit but virtually they were the same as World War I except they didn't have a cloth belt. We didn't wear a belt when we went on leave, the mug lairs [show-offs] wore the white webbing belt but

29:30 the others, we just went on leave without them. They were always fairly baggy; you never really felt very comfortable in them, but you wore them anyway.

So you didn't feel smart heading home?

You couldn't do much about it, you know, no matter how smart you tried to look. They had mug lair bashes in the hats; you're supposed to have a fore and aft bash [front and back impression] in the hat and that was it but you always had the

30:00 mug lairs who used to roll them over and do things with them. But nowadays people wear their hats – it used to be four fingers above the left eye and 1 finger above the right eye tilted - but now they wear them square on the head or the other way around, especially the girls, and that's something that's been introduced over the last few years. But in those days everybody wore their hat the right way and some of them had a bit more tilt than they

30:30 should have, but everybody was the same. Uniform was uniform really, that's the whole meaning of the word isn't it?.

What was your food like compared to the food back at home when you'd go home on leave, was it similar, the

31:00 **food?**

Well, pretty similar, you didn't get meat very often. The army had stuff called M & V which was meat and vegetables which I didn't mind, but most people hated it and apart from that it was bully beef, which on active service out in the bush, that's all you ever had. You had a third of a tin of bully and three biscuits, dog biscuits, a meal. And that was all you ever had, you know, you just got used to it, you didn't like it but there was no

31:30 alternative.

No choice?

No.

Did you feel that you wanted to go to Burma or were you worried about the Japanese, were you worried about Singapore? How did you feel about leaving Australia?

No, we just thought we were going to Burma, it didn't mean anything to us and then we knew we were going to New Guinea and that was it. I mean we were going to end

32:00 up in the war somewhere anyway, so it didn't really matter where it is.

Even with the Americans back in Adelaide, you didn't feel that it should have been them?

No, they'd gone by then. They went up to a place called Camp Cable which was between where we were at Canungra and Brisbane. We used to pass them on the way if we ever went - while we were on the train going from Canungra to Brisbane we'd pass their place, Camp Cable, but we didn't have anything to do with them anyway. On the train

32:30 going up to Townsville they used to have the odd brawl if they ran into Americans at Townsville. I remember one time the Provos [provosts - militia] came through looking for a barrel of beer which had

been stolen off another train. The Queensland trains are pretty small and narrow, anyway, and everybody jammed the toilet door shut and shut the compartments and everything with about 6 inches under the seats. But the Provos came from front to back of the

33:00 train, still looking for this barrel. Of course by the time they got it, it had been thrown over the back of the train empty anyway. But there was one big brawl in Townsville, a few people were killed, but that was a one off really.

And that was Australian and American? Do you know what had kicked that off?

Oh, mutual dislike I suppose.

33:30 You know, we just didn't like the Americans, we didn't have much to do with them anyway.

What didn't you like about them apart from their brashness?

Well that was it. Their reputation really, you know, that they had lots of money, they were over sexed over here and overpaid, that was what they always said overseas. We always thought we were a cut above them anyway but until you're actually in combat you don't really

34:00 know; it's all easy to say what it is, but until the first shot's fired you don't really know.

Tell me about your last few weeks in the Tablelands, about the big exercise?

No, before we went to New Guinea, we were packing up to go anyway so all we did was go by train down to Townsville and get on the

34:30 Duntroon which was a passenger liner and we just went across. When we went to Borneo in '45 they had to have somebody to finish the camp off or to clean it up; we'd been there for 18 months anyway so one of our jobs was to take the blankets back to the store. We had this truck-load of blankets and when we got to the store they said,

35:00 "We can't take that, we haven't got the paperwork". So we tossed up whether we'd dump them all in front of the store so they couldn't get out, or we'd give them to the farmers. We decided to give them to the farmers; so on the way back to camp, every time we passed a farmer we'd toss over a bundle of 10 blankets and we got back to camp without any blankets. Every farm is probably still using them up there on the tablelands – you know, it's typical of the army, if you haven't got the paperwork nothing works. We could have

35:30 dumped them at the store but we thought well, the farmers will get more use out of them than the army anyway. But the reason we were kept back is that there were 40 seats available on the Sunlander Express which went from Cairns to Townsville – poor civilians couldn't get seats on the train but because there were 40 seats for the army, the army's got to have them. So we were kept back for 4 days

36:00 to go down to Redlands, which was the staging camp just outside of Cairns. Got there at 2 o clock in the morning, got up at 5 o clock, went down to the Cairns Railway Station, got on the train about 8 o clock and went to Townsville. Got down there about 10 o clock at night and nobody knew we were coming; so we were blundering around there about a mile from the camp until we finally found it.

They didn't have the paperwork?

No, they didn't have the paperwork. They

36:30 even gave us a meal on the train, two meals I think. But anyway, then we went on this troopship, the General A.E. Anderson which had five thousand troops on it. We went to Morotai en route to Balikpapan.

What sort of medical preparations had you had before you left other than your physical fitness?

We were on atabrin tablets once we got over there and everybody was yellow - back in Australia everybody was really yellow from atabrin

37:00 tablets and a lot of people thought that wasn't any good so they tried not to take them which was a bit pointless anyway. But the atabrin was only a suppressive and I had, when I was in New Guinea, I got malaria and then following that I had hepatitis which was a respectable disease in those days, no like it is now, and it followed on from malaria. No, we got a

37:30 series of inoculations and things, typhus and typhoid, para-typhoid, tetanus – I think they were the ones we had.

So how long were you on the ship to get over?

Oh, about 36 hours. We had a mixture of nursing sisters and army and we were sleeping 4 to a cabin, two on the bunks and two on the floor so it was quite civilised. And then the

38:00 navy, you went down in the mess and they'd bring out a jug of ostensibly orange juice or something like that, more people kindly put more water in it and you paid sixpence and got a mug of orange juice. Then

we just offloaded and we went out to a place called Bootless Inlet at Port Moresby. We used to start training at 6 o clock in the morning and knock off at lunch time and rest in the afternoon. Then at nights

38:30 you went to the movies and of course there were movies all over the place so you hitched rides where there were outdoor movies. And then the last night that we were there we got back at midnight and everybody was up and we said “What’s going on?’ They said “At two o clock we’re flying out to go up to Nadzab” the paratroopers had landed at Nadzab on the other side of the Owen Stanley [mountains] so we got there – we had about an hour’s

39:00 sleep and then got down and went to the airport and waited to go over. A couple of days before that we’d heard this big bang about 2 o clock in the morning. The 2/33rd Battalion of the 25th Brigade were going up before us and they were in a convoy at the end of the airstrip. The plane took off and ploughed into the convoy and killed about 120. They shot some Negroes the following morning because they put sugar in the petrol, but all our

39:30 doctors went down there to try to do what they could. But anyway, we flew up into Nadzab and then we started moving, chased the Japs for a while and then we came back and went up the Markham Ramu Valley.

Was the sabotage of the petrol tank done by the indigenous people?

No, American Negroes, troops.

Why?

They didn’t like the Whitey.

40:00 They were a subdued race, they got all the menial jobs. I remember once, when I got malaria, I came down, flew down to Nadzab and for some reason or other we flew down to Lae and loaded up with petrol drums and there was one drum too many.

40:30 And there were these Negroes, stevedores they were really, they were soldiers . You know, a 44 gallon drum of petrol weighs a fair amount. They said, “Oh, we shouldn’t really put it on”. “No, no, don’t worry”. They bunged [lifted] it on anyway and it was a short strip and all they did was have one rope around these eight barrels from the front to the back of the plane and when the plane took off with the extra

41:00 weight the tail sort of went down and it looked as if we weren’t going to get off the strip – this was purely because they couldn’t be bothered – you know, if we don’t put it on today we’ll put it on tomorrow, shove it on now. So that was the sort of attitude and again when we went to land we had the same problem because the pilot put his nose down and all of a sudden these drums surged forward, he almost had them stacked into the cockpit with him.

41:30 **We’ll just end there thanks Leonard.**

Tape 3

00:41 **When you first caught up with the 7th Division, how were you treated as a new incoming replacement?**

The officers and NCOs treated us all right but the people who didn’t really were the reinforcements who’d arrived just a bit before

01:00 we were, because we didn’t know how long they’d been there. As far as we were concerned they were all heroes of the Kokoda Trail and in actual fact they’d only arrived a few months before we did because by the time the Units, after Gona, the unit was decimated and there was hardly anybody left, so they got a lot of reinforcements from northern New South Wales and southern Queensland. Again,

01:30 because it was a Victorian unit everybody was mixed up. I only made one friend – well, I had a couple of friends, one was killed, and the other one was in the same group I suppose. I never really mixed with anybody. We were still eight in a tent and I was never friendly with any of those eight in the 3 1/2 years we were together. We

02:00 just lived together and that was it, but not as a compact group. We were all in the same section but we had nothing in common with each other.

Why was it that you came to join a Victorian unit?

Because we went up as general reinforcements and we asked to go the 2/27th, we were going to 21 Brigade which was 7th Division, but when they came to allocate the numbers for the battalion apparently there were enough in the 2/27th

02:30 and they said, “Well they’re all mixed up anyway so you just go where you’re put which is the 2/14th”.

Then we just got settled and they came along and they said, “You’re going to the 2/27th” and we said, “You told us we’re all mixed up, what’s the point?”. And that was the second or third biggest mistake of my life in not going over to the 27th because, you know, I was one out in the crowd that I was with anyway.

You’ll have to tell us what your biggest mistake was?

03:00 The time I wasted in World War II was really my biggest mistake which is why I decided to make the Army work for me when I went to Korea and Vietnam.

How did you consider you were spending your time?

I applied for the commandos and I applied for the Airborne, the whole platoon

03:30 applied, we hated our platoon commander so much that the whole platoon applied to go to the parachute battalion and he caught up and we were very smartly told to do what you’re told.

This is before you went over to the Markham Valley?

Yes.

Can you tell us about the landing in Nadzab?

We heard about the paratroops landing and it was an unopposed landing and it was witnessed by General MacArthur who hated

04:00 flying with a passion but he still went over and flew around while they landed. But we landed about three days later and I remember we’d no sooner landed than we went off on a patrol along this track and on the way back I remember seeing this great big water bag, we used to have water bags, and there was an unattended 30 calibre machine gun sitting on the side of the track and behind it was this big water bag. And I thought, what a way to run a war, we could have been

04:30 Japanese but the Americans had that casual approach. And then we started off going up a big mountain chasing the Japs who would escaped from Lae, because Lae had just fallen. The 25 Brigade went up to Lae and we went up along this mountain going north east. It took us all day to get up there and we found a couple of dead Americans, in fact we found their carbines that had just been left

05:00 there. We stayed that night, I remember the first night I was in a little island. I thought, “I’ll be all right here, surrounded by knee deep water, ” but I didn’t realise that I was in the middle of an ants’ nest so I spent the night brushing off ants. And somebody made a move in the night and got shot, so nobody else was going to move.

What happened in that incident?

05:30 Oh, somebody went out to relieve himself . We were in triple canopy jungle anyway so it was black and you couldn’t see in front of your hand, and he was wandering around so somebody just shot him. It was the first night, you know, just nerves. I don’t know if he was killed or just wounded. Anyway, the following day we were moving along this track and we heard a few shots in front of us and so we all got ready for action,

06:00 cocking our magazines and all that. And poor old Finney, who was about 40, he was a runner in company headquarters and married with a couple of children, and Stan Harle who was the Orderly Room Corporal, he had an Owen gun [machinegun] . And he bumped the butt on the ground and the bolt of the Owen is very heavy and it went back and picked up a round and blasted off; and poor old Finney, it hit him in the groin. Well if it had been a rifle bullet it would have

06:30 smashed right through; but instead of that it went up through into his stomach. So Lou Francis, my friend and I, we both had medical care and one of us carried the morphine and the other of us had the needle for some reason. And when we got there Finney is breathing his last and we’re having an argument as to who’s got the needle. And I’d marked on his forehead the dosage and the time and anyway the

07:00 doctor came along later and said he only lasted two minutes, it wouldn’t have mattered anyway. But we finally got the business sorted out as to who carried the morphine and who carried the needle. We went along a bit further and the Pioneers had felled a tree across this river and we went across it. We’d no sooner got across it than the word came through that the commandos had ambushed the Japs

07:30 at a place called Kaipa about 60 miles up the valley from Nadzab and they wanted to reinforce them all of a sudden. So we rushed back, and on the way back, George Hubner, who was one of our tent mates back at Bootlers Inlet, he fell off this log into the river and was swept away and drowned. One of the fellows ran after him but he couldn’t get him. So we lost two fellows

08:00 accidentally within a few hours of each other.

What was your reaction to first encountering death on the battle field?

I was busy arguing with Lou about the morphia so we were more concerned with that than Finney. We

didn’t realise at the time where the bullet had actually gone, we thought he was only wounded but then we came back and somebody had put a handkerchief over his face as we moved by. The natives were there – there was an ANGAU [Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit]

08:30 fellow with his bearers and they were arranging to bury Finney and, you know, it was just one of those things. And then with George, being a tent mate, he was a nice sort of fellow. And then we went back to Nadzab and then there was a violent rain storm which flooded the strip for about two days. When the first plane took off it was practically covered in water. It was only a

09:00 dirt strip that they’d carved out, the paratroopers.

When was the first time you fired your gun in action?

I don’t know if I ever did in World War II. No, we spent all our time going up the valley, you know, just patrolling and at one stage the CO, who’d been the CO of the 39th

09:30 on the [Kokoda] Trail, he went out with two people and he saw some fellows cutting some bamboo and he went up to see what was going on. All we were doing was moving up the valley. Why anybody would be cutting bamboo and why anybody would go up to find out what they were doing - so of course they were Japs and they shot him in the

10:00 thigh and the two fellows with him had an awful job trying to get him out. In the meantime, our platoon was further back and they said, “You’ve got to go up and try to get the CO out”. This was about 4 o clock in the afternoon and by the time we got back it was about 8 o clock at night and our platoon commander had sent us out but he hadn’t gone himself. And when we got back

10:30 he and his little group had taken all their gear and moved forward about half a mile. And we said, “Where’s our gear?” And he said “It’s back where you left it”. So that’s when we decided, “As far as we’re concerned you can go; we don’t want any more to do with you”. And I don’t remember him after that and he was a platoon commander, he’d come from the Army Division. If that’s the way you look after your troops! We had to trek back another half mile to pick up all our gear and then go back

11:00 again after dark, where his mob had already dug in for the night and got themselves a hot meal and everything. So we decided we could do without him so we just went on and as I say I don’t remember whatever happened to him. And then we headed up into the foothills and the Shaggy Ridge operation

11:30 started and we were virtually carrying supplies up there. We did some patrolling around and the Japs used to fire, they used to pull a gun out of the jungle, they’d have it concealed up on the hill in a tunnel somewhere and they’d fire the odd shot at us. And during the day we used to see the silver aircraft flying over us to bomb Nadzab, they never came near us they just flew over us, they didn’t do anything to

12:00 us of course. That’s when I got malaria and I got evacuated. At one stage I remember coming back and saw something in the water of the stream and I said to the fellow that I was with “What’s that?” because we found a set of equipment on the side of the track. And it turned out to be a commando officer, I think, who’d got himself killed.

12:30 He was still in the water and I said, “Well, if we go back we’ll have to come back here and get him out”. So we left him there and he’s still there as far as I know and we’re not too sure whoever he was. But that was the way. Anyway, then we went back to Nadzab and I was there for about a week and they came around and said, “You’re due to go

13:00 out” and our battalion had actually moved up to the base of Shaggy Ridge and was building a road, they were trying to get through to Madang which they never did. But anyway they said “You’re due to go back” and I was feeling as sick as a dog and the doctor gave me the impression that I had an advanced case of gangplank fever. I didn’t want to go up the valley and I felt so ill I just couldn’t do

13:30 anything. They said, “Well, we’ll put you on a light meal” and the light meal consisted of them giving me a tin of salmon without a tin opener, that was their version of a light meal. Anyway, the following day an American doctor came along and he took one look at me and he said “You’ve got jaundice. ” I didn’t know, but your eyes are bright yellow with jaundice and I was evacuated back to [Port] Moresby and by the time I got out of

14:00 hospital the battalion had come down and we were just sitting around there for about three weeks and then we came home.

How long were you up in the Nadzab Markham Valley?

We got there in July I think, and we came home in about – well I had been evacuated in about November I think.

You say you didn’t fire your gun in anger up there, how

14:30 **frustrated were you with the conditions there and not being able to get into battle?**

There’s nothing to fire at so one day you’re going to run into trouble; but if it doesn’t happen, it doesn’t happen. I remember at one stage we got fresh food, fresh meat, and I thought it was terrific, but they

said, “Oh no, you’ve got to go back with one of the other patrols to carry a medical bag”.

15:00 So I got back about 6 o clock at night and I said, “Where’s my meat?” and they said “Well, bad luck about that, we’ve eaten it”. And they gave me a tin of bully and I was so mad I ate the whole tin. And that’s unheard of, normally a meal is a third of a tin of bully and three biscuits, and I was so mad I ate the lot but I had a bit of tomato sauce with it.

Can you take us through a memorable patrol up there. How it started and what you did on the patrol?

15:30 When we were at this place Conbarum we went out on a three day patrol. ‘Maggie’ McGuiness was our company commander and he was a nice old boy who’d escaped from Rabaul and we just blundered through the bush, you know, with nothing happening. And when we finally came out of the bush, there was the general, General Vasey, and the brigade Major. And the general always wore his

16:00 red hat, that was his sign, which was later taken over by Brigadier Dougherty. George always made a practice of wearing his red hat. All I can remember, Brigade Major Terry strips off poor old ‘Maggie’ because we hadn’t run into anybody. He said, “Well get back to where you came from, three days you’ve just wasted”. There was nothing else we could have done because we did what we were

16:30 supposed to do. There were no Japs there so you didn’t run into them. One day something happens, like the first day when Finney was killed and George was drowned, there were a few shots fired but there was nobody to fire at.

Can you tell us some detail about what that control consisted of? How many men and how the patrol was organised and the signals you used at that time

17:00 **during the Papua New Guinea campaign?**

It was a Company Patrol so we had 3 platoons and normally you have one platoon leading and then the O group, that’s the Orders group, follows which is the company commander and the signaller. And the forward platoon has two scouts forward and second scout, and then behind that you normally have the section leader and then you have the Bren group,

17:30 the light machine gun and then the riflemen behind that. My job was second scout usually and you were protecting the forward scout and then the ‘tail end Charlie’ he’s looking at the back so that nobody comes in behind you.

And how are you moving?

Well, you’re moving in extended file, at least five paces between men so that if somebody does open up [shoot] you’ve got a chance of everybody not being hit together and

18:00 depending on if you’re moving in very thick jungle or you’ve got wait awhile, you’ve heard of ‘wait awhile’? It’s a plant like barbed wire and it gets on you, it’s almost like Velcro and it hangs on to you and you’ve got to pull back and you can’t tear yourself away without tearing yourself or your clothing, so you’ve got to try and untangle yourself. And people can tend to get lost if

18:30 they get too far ahead. So in dense jungle you tend to close up but if you’re in reasonable sort of secondary growth you’re five or ten paces apart. If you lose the fellow in front of you, you’re in all sorts of trouble because the next time you run into him you might think he’s somebody from the other side. So you’ve always got to be careful. It’s the section leader’s job to make sure he’s got all his section. So you’ve got field signals to indicate

19:00 you know, thumb down is enemy and hold your hand over your ear to listen, if you pull up to listen. When the forward scout stops to listen then everybody else stops, no talking. The Americans, they’ve got a habit of smoking when they’re going along. In Vietnam and Korea too you could smell their aftershave and that sort of thing. You could smell the Japs from a distance away too.

What did the Japanese smell like?

19:30 Well, sour rice mainly, unwashed bodies and sour rice. You see their staple food was rice; in Vietnam it was Nuk Mam, that’s fish sauce, you could always smell the NVA [North Vietnamese Army] or VC [Viet Cong] from a distance and as I said they could smell the Americans by their aftershave or their cigarette smoke or cigar smoke, which was even worse.

20:00 **Can you describe the smells and the feel of the jungle on that patrol, that 3 day patrol?**

Well, the undergrowth is wet and sodden all the time so it’s got a dank sort of smell, it’s a homely sort of smell the same that you smell up in the tablelands, on the border fence between New South Wales and Queensland, the jungle there and you’re walking on rotten vegetation and

20:30 it’s not an unpleasant smell really; but in New Guinea it’s hot and humid the whole time, so everybody’s wet through with sweat, and if you’re trundling through streams, you’re probably knee deep in streams anyway. So it’s a matter of just follow the leader really on a patrol.

How did you deal with

21:00 **sleeping arrangements on those patrols?**

You always worked in pairs and when you dug in of a night you always dug in big enough for two. And some people didn't like it because you were virtually digging a grave, so if you die it's a quick way of putting it in rather than dig a circular hole which the Japs did. The Japs would dig – that's where the expression fox hole came in because they were very good diggers, the same as the Chinese and North

21:30 Vietnamese, they'd dig a round hole and just crouch in there but if you crouch in a hole for 8 hours you can't walk the following morning. So we tended to make a weapon pit that you could lie in, usually wide enough for two or else you'd put a weapon, a spot for your weapon. When you were on duty you were either at 50% so that one's sleeping and one's waking or

22:00 normally it's one hour off and two hours on. They used to say you should have two hours on and four hours off. I would never allow that when I had the authority because after the first hour you're going to go to sleep anyway. So, if you have an hour you've got something to look forward to, put your head down for two hours, but if you're going to stay up, and it's happened to me where someone's said "I've been awake up to midnight, you can have the rest of the night off". I've got

22:30 news for you, I'll wake you in an hour. Don't give me this nonsense that you've been awake for the last two or three hours because you haven't. You're always listening for noises. In Borneo I can remember the Japanese had a habit, they'd ball up clay and flick it at you to try and draw your fire and this happened a couple of times and it's a matter of whether you

23:00 throw a grenade at them or just don't do anything. If you do something they've found out where you are anyway, if you haven't killed them. If you toss a grenade and you're lucky enough to kill them, well that's all right. But if you haven't killed them they've found out where you are. That's what they do. It's the same as they call out in English, they'd call out fake orders or, "Are you there Charlie?" or something like that because a lot of them could speak English . So that the idea was, when you'd stay of a

23:30 night. Later on they used to have strings to notify the next crowd, you'd pull a string; but in those days in New Guinea and Borneo you didn't do any of that sort of thing, you got in there of a night and you stayed there.

How did you keep dry if it was raining?

Well you didn't – there was no way of keeping dry. The army never had – and even now in Iraq they're complaining –the

24:00 groundsheet we had was to keep the water off you. The first night we were up in this big mountain I made the mistake of putting my ground sheet over my gear. I don't know why and it was the coldest night, second coldest night, I've ever been in, in all my life, even in the tropics. It poured with rain during the night and we had to be leaving about 8 o clock the next morning and I had a migraine which didn't make it any better. That might protect your shoulders but then after a while the

24:30 rain would seep in anyway. The best thing we had was called a gas cape, and that was an anti-gas cape which you had, we used to initially have respirators and then we threw those away with our steel helmets, but the gas cape was impermeable. I've put that on soaking wet at night and woken up bone dry in the morning. On the other hand I've put it on dry and woken up soaking wet in the morning depending on the

25:00 body heat you see. But in cold weather if you've got that on then you will dry out overnight, but it will only keep the water off, if it's the right time when you put it on.

Why did you throw away your steel helmet?

Well they were useless. We didn't have them in Korea and we didn't have them in Vietnam. They weren't any good, you know. My platoon sergeant, he got

25:30 two holes through his steel helmet into his shoulder – I've got a photo. They weren't bullet proof and they were heavy and they were awkward. So the day we were told to, we threw them into the first creek we came to at Nadzab – the same as we threw our anti-tank rifle away. It was a great heavy thing that nobody was every going to use – there was not going to be any tanks there anyway, nothing to fire at, so we tossed that into the creek and the

26:00 same with our helmets, we never had any faith in them. Later on they had the American-type helmet but we didn't use those anyway.

Why do you think they issued you with these helmets if they weren't any good?

For shrapnel mainly. The other thing is, you could put the chin strap under your chin and something hits you in the front and it'll break your neck. So you wore it like you did with your

26:30 hat, with the chin strap at the back of your neck and you only wore them because you had to. In World War I everybody had them because there was lots of shrapnel flying around, but the odd bullet that hit you was unlikely to be deflected by the steel helmet. And now I notice the soldiers in Iraq are

complaining that their keffler helmets are not suitable. The army never gets things

27:00 right, you know, the boots have never been right, even now the boots aren't right. We had boots AB, which was the standard boot they had up until Vietnam, and then they issued one later on. But they were always wet and if you had a boot that was rubber then the water couldn't get out of it, so your feet rotted. There are various things that the army has never really got right, and helmets are one of them. And

27:30 of course the problem in Iraq now they wear body armour; but the place to aim is between the top of your opponent's body and his helmet, so you've got plenty of room there to knock somebody off.

In New Guinea how were the medical facilities provided for you when you were up there?

Well as I said I used to carry a medical kit which consisted of

28:00 morphia (in Korea also) and sulphur genoadine and that sort of stuff for diarrhoea and a version of iodine. Everybody had a shell dressing so that if you wounded you whacked that on and then there was a field dressing which was smaller, a smaller version if you just had a scratch,

28:30 a fragment of shell or a bullet fragment. But the evacuation from the valley, we were all on foot anyway, and they didn't bring any aircraft in but fortunately we didn't have any casualties. So if anyone was sick they just tried to get better really. And then of course they got scrub typhus and then when we got to Dumpu well then they put in an airstrip there so they could

29:00 evacuate. I was evacuated from Dumpu.

What personal possessions did you carry, personal mementoes, letters, things from your family with you?

No, we didn't. We had about 60 to 80 pounds of gear. We had 3 days rations and a couple of hundred rounds of ammunition and rifle and bayonet and groundsheet and a half blanket which was useless

29:30 anyway and a gas cape and one water bottle. At one stage in Vietnam they were carrying 8 water bottles. We had one water bottle and we didn't get much resupply. We did resupply from the local streams but they recommended not to, but it was either that or you didn't get any water; so we'd normally boil water if we could. And you carried an emergency

30:00 ration which fitted on to your water bottle on the strap of your water bottle. That was only if you were left by yourself - that could keep you going for 24 hours. That had some ground wheatmeal and fruit sort of stuff and tablets, sugar tablets.

When you were in the Markham Valley can you describe the moment you were most scared?

We were only moving

30:30 along the valley and the whole brigade was moving, 3000 people coming along a river stream, so there wasn't much to get scared about. When we got up into the jungle, the Japs climbed up straight above us, they climbed up into a position, they hadn't realised that we were there and they sent a platoon up to get them out. Well that battle lasted

31:00 all day but the most scary part was that the 3 inch mortar was firing at the Japs on the far end of the ridge. Everybody was standing around looking and one of the rounds 'cooked off', it was damp - and this thing went about 20 ft and then fell in a heap on the ground. Well, 16 people jumped into this hole. I wasn't the first one into it and I certainly wasn't the last. The bomb wasn't going off anyway because they've got to be hit at a certain speed to arm, but you don't take any chances. I guess that was the scaredest I was and of course the

32:00 thing just plopped down onto the ground about 20 yards ahead of where it went off. But when we went up to bring down the bodies after the attack. Teddy Bier who got a Military Medal when Kingsbury got his VC [Victoria Cross] on the Kokoda Trail, led the charge and he chased a lot of the Japs off and they ran over a cliff and they didn't realise it was a couple of hundred feet sheer drop off the other

32:30 side. But I remember when we went up to bring down the bodies, one fellow, I had to look at his pay book to see who he was. I'd had a disagreement with him a couple of days earlier and that's when I learned that I could put the hex on people because having hexed him he ended up dead this day, so that's one of those things.

How can you put the hex on somebody?

If you don't like them you put the hex on them. I found out it worked.

33:00 It's happened a couple of times so perhaps I've got the ability, I don't know. it might be coincidence.

That's a scary sort of thing to be able to do?

I've put the hex on Mr Whitlam so he might end up dead.

Could people foresee if they were going to be killed do you think? Did soldiers on the

battlefield have any forewarning?

No, it's all written in the

33:30 big book in the sky, but I guess until the first shot, nobody ever knows until the first shot's fired whether they're going to be any good or not. And we had cowards with us who you knew were cowards, but until the first shot is fired you can't be sure. And the big brave fellow, you know, he's never afraid but when you see the odd angry shot flying around then you find out whether he's true to what he thinks he is or

34:00 not. So the whatsaname [adrenaline] starts pumping when the shots are being fired, but once things are going you don't have much option, because you're scared but then it's a matter of if you don't get him he'll get you. A lot of the trouble, it's easy to kill people but it's hard to teach people to kill

34:30 people and the other side don't have that philosophy. The NVA, the VC, the Japanese, they see the other side and they shoot; whereas our philosophy is more, "Well, should I shoot him or shouldn't I?", especially when you've got a chance to shoot him and you don't have to. "Should I let him go?" You know, he's not going to have the same thought about you. His philosophy is the other

35:00 side, that's what you get paid for, to kill the other fellow.

When was the first time you found yourself in that situation? Was that in New Guinea?

No, in Korea.

Going back to when you were recovering those bodies, you're going in to recover colleagues and comrades. How did you deal with that?

Well, once they're dead, they're dead.

35:30 They're just a package, you know. When I was teaching people I used to say if you see somebody wounded, "You don't say 'poor Bill', you say 'lucky me'". If you stop to think about him, the fellow at the other end who's got the different way of looking at life than you have – you can't worry about somebody else. I had a case once where I dragged a fellow out and he said "It's very good of you". I dragged him out of the way

36:00 because he was interfering with what he was doing. And his son's been in contact with me just recently to ask what happened. Because this fellow, there was a Chinaman in a foxhole who pointed a rifle up and shot him in the shoulder. The only way I could get to him was to get rid of the other fellow. I dragged him and he said "You're hurting my arm, " and I said, "Forget your arm, get out of the way". So I got the credit for saving him but I didn't

36:30 save him; I got him out of the way so I could get Charlie in the foxhole. It's not a matter of worrying about the poor fellow that's wounded. I don't know whether he ever used his arm again, he made the best of it.

You were looking in this chap's pay book?

Well he'd gone a sort of bluey grey. When people are dead they changed colour and I just couldn't

37:00 recognise him, you know. As I said, I'd had a few words with him a couple of days before, I should have known him, but he had a waxen sort of pallor. It's like when somebody gets run over, I remember the first time I saw somebody run over by a truck I was surprised at his colour, a three-tonne truck had run over him. I suppose it was going to have some affect on him.

How were the casualties and

37:30 **bodies, what happened to them after you brought them back?**

In New Guinea they were buried in situ. The worst thing that ever happened in Vietnam, an Australian was killed and his American buddy had him shipped home to Australia and that started the rot. From then on every Australian that was killed was brought back. Well, the old story, "there was a spot in some foreign land", well that's where you should be, if you were killed that's where you lay. You went over there to

38:00 fight and the fact that you've been brought back to be buried back here is a waste of logistics. You know, the aircraft and body bags and all this sort of business. Of course it hasn't happened to me so I can only look at it from the point of the money that's expended and the parents and the people who are waiting for the fellow to come back and then they've got to go through all the business of the funeral and everything

38:30 again. I mean he's been killed once, he's only going to be killed once and if they want to go over to Gallipoli or France to see somebody, OK, but I don't agree that they should be brought back.

How did you feel about the possibility of your own death?

If it happened it happened, it's all written in the big book in the sky. I'm never going to be killed, it's the other fellow, I see other people killed.

39:00 And as I said, when I was teaching I said “Don’t worry about poor Bill”; worrying about whether he was wounded or dead. You haven’t got time for that sort of thing but it’s your attitude, your mind. To me, it’s the enemy on the other side, he’s paid to kill me and I’m paid to kill him, it’s as simple as that. And how he’s killed is really

39:30 irrelevant, you know, whether you cut his head off or hit him with a machine gun or hit him with a shell. It’s like bombing from 30, 000 feet, they never think about the thousands of civilians, it’s like the bombing campaigns in Europe. I heard somebody say the other day on TV, “I was flying a Lancaster and I never thought about it, now I think about all these innocent civilians”. But you never think about it,

40:00 if you do that then you’re no good at your job. You’re paid to do a job and that’s what it’s for. And if you don’t you’re not good, especially if you’re leading anybody else. And as I said, the hardest thing is teaching other people to adopt that attitude. And if they don’t adopt that attitude then they end up dead.

We might have to pull up there Leonard.

Tape 4

00:30 **How did you feel about being evacuated when you became sick. I mean, not physically but were you keen to continue firing or pursuing the Japanese?**

Well I’d taken Stan Harle,

01:00 this fellow who’d accidentally killed Finney, I’d taken him up to the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] the day before and he could hardly walk and I remember pushing him and seeing him fall on the ground and a couple of days later I was in the same boat. I was so sick I was on my back for five weeks and I couldn’t do anything at all. This time they told me to go to the kitchen to get this so-called light meal .

01:30 I could hardly walk there. And the other thing is the Japs at that stage were raiding Nadzab at night, bombing, and we were supposed to get under our bunks – all we had were logs with a bit of canvas on them so you might as well stay in them. There was nowhere to go, so we just stayed in them. Not that we got any trouble from the bombing anyway, they were actually bombing the airfield at that stage. But I just felt as if I was

02:00 supported at the shoulders and the hips and in between. There was just a great void and this I found out was the hepatitis. I was just too sick to worry about it and then by the time I’d got better the unit had come back anyway.

You said there were some people who didn’t cope so well up there. You obviously were coping with the pressures of combat but were there people that didn’t?

02:30 No, it was more in Korea because in New Guinea, as I said, all we were doing was marching up or moving along this valley and doing the odd patrol into the foothills and there wasn’t much really involved. Of course when [the battle of] Shaggy Ridge went on, our battalion wasn’t involved in that anyway, we were actually building a road and I got the impression they thought I was trying to get out of a bit of hard

03:00 work when in actual fact I was as sick as a dog.

After you came back, can you take us back on that second time when you went up for the Balikpapan landings?

Well we went on this General A.E. Anderson which was a 10, 000 tonne troop ship and we were actually mess orderlies on the ship and we rode a cyclone out of Darwin so we were as sick as dogs.

03:30 There was a continual queue in the ship – if you worked you got three meals a day, if you didn’t work you got two meals. And the amount of waste, crates and crates of oranges and apples that just had to be thrown out because they were rotten. And the American food was sweet and the coffee, take a quarter of a cup of coffee and fill it up with sugar and milk and throw it out because it was so strong. So it was a pretty

04:00 miserable sort of trip. And we were about three deep in bunks down below – you were only allowed up on deck once or twice a day. So when we got to Morotai we were unloading LSTs [Landing Ship Tank] and that gave us a bit of a break but we were living in a swamp area there and it was only temporary. Then we got on the LCI [Landing Craft Infantry] and we did

04:30 one big exercise. We landed in this native language and somebody said, “Why don’t you try your Malay?” because when I’d been in hospital in Moresby I’d gone to the Amenities Hut and found “Malay Made Easy” just to fill in time, so I studied that. And then later on in the tablelands they had a course in Malay, but they wouldn’t let me go to it for some odd reason so I hadn’t spoken it for twelve

05:00 months. Anyway, we went ashore on this island and I was in business, I found I could understand it.

Then, I got a job as a lookout on the LCI at night, which meant that we could sleep in the gun tubs on the side of the vessel. The other thing I remember, my family had sent me a gold watch for my twenty-first birthday and I went and had a shower one day and I came back and somebody had helped themselves to it.

05:30 That was the 2/14th Battalion, that was my experience of my so called mates about to risk their lives together. And the other thing was, we used to have to guard a fellow who was down in the chain locker. The captains of the LCIs were 90 day wonders [briefly trained, inexperienced], they were from all over America, and they were sent to this thing to learn in three months how to run one of these

06:00 LCIs and when they came over the Pacific they said it was like a mother hen and a brood of chickens, they were scared to leave the mother ship because there was only one navigator in this group and they all clung together. But anyway, this fellow had mutinied so they'd thrown him down in the chain locker and he vowed that if he ever got out he was going to kill the captain. Our job was to wear a 45 [pistol] in a holster and just stand over

06:30 this chain locker and talk to this prisoner, so that sort of kept us occupied. Then during the night you'd hear the odd bang because the LST in front of us was towing a LCVP [Landing Craft Vehicle Personnel] , and it would get a bit out of line and every now and again it would bash into our vehicle and there were hundreds and hundreds of ships in this convoy. They let us watch the bombardment, we didn't go

07:00 ashore until 8 o clock which was about half an hour after the initial landing. So they let us, before they sent us downstairs, to rush up on the gangplanks on either side to get out. And I remember the brigadier, Brigadier Dougherty, he came back standing on the bow of an LCVP and he'd adopted the red hat because General Vasey had been killed taking off from Cairns to take over the

07:30 6th Division. Anyway, we landed there at about 8 o clock and as we were moving up the beach, this is later on when we ran into General MacArthur, well he ran into us actually.

Can you describe your feelings as you were going in on the boat to the beach?

Well it was wet really we were up to our chests in water, they didn't want to land, nudge in too hard in case they couldn't get off so they just eased up

08:00 and we ended up soaking wet and then we just flopped down on the beach waiting for orders to move up. And we went up the Vasey Highway, which was the coast road. 25 Brigade, they went up the Milford Highway which was going inland so they were trudging through jungle and we had the beach on our side all the time, the water. And we came to a place called Sepinang which the Japs had had a fighter

08:30 strip and later on our people had a fighter strip and I ran into a fellow I'd been to school with who was flying Kittyhawks [fighters] out of there. And when we got up to Manggar they never got a plane off that because it was waterlogged. It had been a fairly big airfield at one stage. We went along without much trouble and we crossed over this bombed bridge over the Manggar Vasa, there were two rivers the Manggar Kachile which is a small river,

09:00 and then the Manggar Vasa which is quite a wide one. We climbed across on the logs over to the other side and there was an aircraft control tower, a spindly sort of thing, just there and we went on to the middle of the airstrip and we got half way across and what we didn't realise is the Japs had two 6 inch coast defence guns, they had 20 or 30,

09:30 thirty-seven millimetre quick firing guns and some 75s and mortars and machine guns and we were in the middle of this strip and they opened up with everything. Well, we just lost one fellow with shrapnel in his back, it killed him, and we were there for about 3 days and the battle raged over our heads without us really being involved in it. Eventually some of our fellows got into an aircraft and

10:00 then the following day the Shropshire I think came up and started shelling this coast defence gun. And 3 Matildas [tanks] came up by barge and they landed them and as they just lifted up over the sea wall with 3 shots this Jap gun, well there was only one left by this time they'd knocked one out, it knocked out the 3 tanks and they killed some of the crew. Then eventually they got a 6 pounder [gun] up

10:30 across the other side of the Manggar River and a 25 pounder [fieldgun] and they eventually knocked out the second coast defence gun. And then our Charlie company I think fairly did an attack on this gun and by that time the Lightnings [fighters] came over , and before the days of napalm they used to have petrol mixed with raspberry jam I think, and they dropped their belly tanks

11:00 and then come back and strafe them. And then we had to put out the markers for a Liberator [bomber] strike and we laid those out and they used us as an aiming mark to bomb the CD [coastal defence] guns. Then it poured with rain one night so we had to lie alongside our foxholes because they were full of water and then a couple of days later we were pulled back across the Manggar and

11:30 then things settled down the battle was finished by that time.

You mentioned before that the Japanese were flicking clay at you to attract fire can you describe that incident when it happened?

We were dug in for the night, we were on a bit of a rise and probably about 20 ft down, and they'd come

along, probably one I don't know how many, but the ground was clay based and they'd just make little balls of clay and then flick them at

12:00 you. They'd make enough noise that you'd hear something and wonder what it was and then after a while we realised that that's what they were doing. We had the choice of throwing a grenade at them which might or might not have killed them, in hindsight we should have done it but the other thing was of course it gave your position – when you throw the grenade the spring, striker lever springs up and it gives a twang anyway so it means they'd know where you are before you've even

12:30 thrown the grenade. It gives your own position away so the easiest way is just to lie doggo [dead] which we did and then of course they went away. But they were naval troops anyway basically so they weren't really infantry, so I don't know how good they were. But then later on we went out on a patrol, we'd been out there for about 7 days, one of our fellows trod on a booby trap really, a bullet went up through his heel and he got

13:00 upset because I wouldn't give him any morphia. And I said, "If I give you morphia you'll go to sleep and a Jap will kill you so the pain will keep you awake". So he had to trundle back to where we'd started from. Anyway, this particular day we're going along this track and the brigadier had come up, Brigadier Dougherty had come up with the CO to find out why we'd been there for so long because everybody else was down on the beach swimming and playing volleyball and things you see

13:30 on the other side of the airstrip. And the company commander, we didn't get on very well with him, and he said he'd do one last patrol, "and that's it, you can go back to the beach". So our platoon commander was a little Swiss fellow called Dugger and we trundled along this track, everybody feeling pretty unhappy about having to do it and not paying much attention, and the next minute the Japs ambushed us from the trees and started firing

14:00 and Sandy Perkins the platoon sergeant, two bullets went through his steel helmet and into his shoulder. So I put a shell dressing on him and we got him out and the bush was so thick that one of our fellows had to wriggle out and left his equipment behind. And the platoon commander tried to throw some smoke grenades but he couldn't get them through the bush so in the end he just pulled the pins and we edged out and came back and

14:30 went all the way back to the beach and that was about it for the time being.

What did you see of your enemy?

We didn't see any of them. There were two or three in the trees, snipers, and I don't know how many on the ground. It was just a reconnaissance patrol we weren't about to do any fighting and then later on we had a patrol base up the river, up the Manggar. We used to go up there on DUCS, our amphibious trucks.

15:00 And one day we were out on patrol and we saw what looked like grenade boxes on the side of the road and we went over to have a look at them and they had colourless liquid in them, they were about the size of a cricket ball, and fortunately we didn't touch them. We went back a bit and threw rocks at them and this sort of misty thing came. And I was talking to Richard Butler, former Governor of Tasmania, he

15:30 came to give a talk here, on Iraq after the '91 Gulf War. He cleaned up there [as a weapons inspector] and I asked him if he knew what they were and he said, "Oh yes, in Melbourne, a couple of days ago we had one of those and it was cyanic acid gas. " So it was just as well we didn't play around with it. We were

16:00 out on an ambush patrol and we'd laid a line behind us and about 2 o clock in the morning a message came through that to avoid unnecessary casualties we should extricate ourselves. And then we got back and the next thing we knew was that the headquarters crowd were rigging up a PA system – this was in the middle of the jungle - playing music, so we thought there's something funny going on. And then we heard about this so-called

16:30 big bomb, you know, that everybody was talking about. And that was about several days after the end of the war that we found out and then from then on we were guarding the Japanese. They put them in a barbed wire compound and they were called SEPs [Surrendered Enemy Personnel] , and every morning they'd come out and beautifully drilled they were, and they would all bow to the Emperor and go through their PT exercises for half an hour.

17:00 **How did you feel about the Japanese as an enemy?**

Well once the war was over that was it, there was no animosity. We didn't really feel any animosity anyway, we didn't like the Japs but there was no hatred. You ended up with a stomach ulcer if you started hating people.

But there weren't many Japanese prisoners taken by the Australians, why was that?

No, it's a disgrace to be taken prisoner, you see, so what they do and the North Vietnamese did the same thing, if they

17:30 thought they were going to die they'd lie with a grenade under them with the pin out and just hold it and then you'd pull them over and the grenade would go off. Lots of people were killed that way. Under

Bushido the Emperor gave all the orders so you couldn't do anything wrong, you know, this brutality that the Japs carried out was on direct orders of the Emperor because that was their philosophy that they were under the orders of the

18:00 Emperor and it was a disgrace to be taken prisoner. The fellow that was caught in the midget submarine at Pearl Harbour, he didn't go back to Japan for 8 years I think. He tried to bite his tongue off and ended up going over to Argentina or somewhere and he couldn't bear to go back.

The Balikpapan landings have subsequently been seen to be, well

18:30 **some historians have seen them as a bit of a side show, the Australian army was marginalised by MacArthur. At the time how did you feel about your personal involvement and the worth of the landings?**

Well, Sepinang ended up as a fighter strip which helped, you know, gave us support. Manggar, which was intended to be a strip for the rehabilitation of Singapore – now if they hadn't have dropped the A bomb we would have had to go into

19:00 Singapore so it wouldn't have been a side show. MacArthur didn't want anybody but Americans in the Philippines, we thought we were going to the Philippines, we learned out in the tablelands we did street and village fighting, we did amphibious warfare and all that, but he didn't want anybody but the Americans. Now, if we'd had to go into Singapore it was a different story so it's alright people saying that it was a side show and we shouldn't have gone into

19:30 Labuan and Balikpapan, but that's in hindsight and you don't know.

What did you know about Sandakan [notorious prisoner of war camp]?

We didn't know anything about that. I know one of the survivors from Sandakan, we had him in Korea, but he used to play with the Japanese children, he was more of a father figure to them than any of us.

20:00 They said MacArthur wouldn't supply, he needed 20 or 30 C47s, and MacArthur said he wouldn't supply them but it was actually Blamey who put the veto [relief of the camp] on that.

How did you feel when you heard that the war was over?

You could walk along that same track that you walked up yesterday with a lot freer attitude. We weren't going to get

20:30 sniped like Sandy Perkins was with two bullets in him. Poor old Sandy, I applied for a pension for him because he had Alzheimer's and last year they wrote to me and asked me could I give any evidence. So I sent them a page of my diary which wasn't allowed and they said it wasn't quite enough detail and would I make a Statutory Declaration which I did and the requirement was that he had to be

21:00 totally unconscious for 15 minutes or partly conscious for 2 ½ hours. Well by the time we got him out he was like a stunned plover anyway initially – I mean anybody who gets a whack on the head with a baseball bat it's similar to what happened to him. The wound wasn't really serious, the two wounds, but [Department of] Veterans' Affairs wouldn't grant him a TPI [Totally and Partially Incapacitated] pension for Alzheimer's on that basis, he'd had it for four years. And then they wrote to me and said it

21:30 doesn't matter because he died last week anyway. You remember something on the 13th July 1945, and it comes back to a fellow getting a pension in 2001/2002, and what a memory . It was only the fact that I had it in the diary and it was in the official history anyway.

You kept a diary, was this allowed?

Yes. No, it wasn't allowed nor was any diary.

22:00 I didn't really go with the system. In Korea I kept a diary until there was a chance I might get taken so I sent the big diary back and just kept the small one.

Why did you keep a diary?

See that pile there, there's 500 pages from my diary in there, there's going to be a book if I last long enough.

22:30 **At the time though?**

Well, it's history in the making, you know that history's in the making and I'd have kept a better one if I'd really thought about it. Mine was just really notes. When I was in Makasar I used to write it in Indonesian most of which I've forgotten anyway. But I always keep a diary out of Australia, not in Australia, well I still do.

You volunteered to

23:00 **become involved in the war crimes trials. What did you know about them, how did you become involved in that, can you take us through that?**

Well I sidetracked the brigadier on the way back from the mess one night and he said, "What do you

want Len?" and I didn't even know he knew my name. And I said, "Well you're going to Makasar tomorrow to take the Jap's surrender and you'll need an interpreter and I'm it". And he said, "I hadn't really thought about that". So he said "Goodnight". This company commander

23:30 who didn't really hit it too well with me, called me up and he said, "Opie, you bastard!" and I said "Sir?" and he repeated it and I said, "What's the problem?" He said "You know the chain of command". I said "Yes, Private, Lance Corporal, Corporal…. ". He said "Yes, you know all about it". And I said "What do I know about?" He said "Get your gear and get over to brigade headquarters". Well the Brigadier had spoken to the Commanding Officer who'd chewed out the company commander because I hadn't

24:00 gone through the right process you see. So I jumped on this corvette [warship] and shot over to Balikpapan and when I got there the Brigadier didn't really need an interpreter so I attached myself to the war crimes, the legal officer, and we used to go out looking for Americans who'd been shot down and executed by the Japs. My friend, Al Kempwall was a Japanese interpreter, American, well, Australian-born but he'd lived in Japan

24:30 so we used to go out there and then of course I used to interrogate the Dutch or Indonesians and the Indonesians were fighting for independence at the time so we were the first real peacekeepers there. I was there for 5 months in Makasar.

How were the war trials run from your point of view?

There was one Warrant Officer who did most of it and we had him early

25:00 in the piece, so we just handed him over –the 80th Indian Brigade took over from us in March '46, so we came home then and I don't know what happened to them. By that time the Dutch were being pushed out by the Indonesians.

How did you feel about your war?

A waste of time. I'd have done a lot more – I applied for the commandos and I didn't get

25:30 them and I applied for the parachute battalion, which didn't go away anyway, so that was a good job; but with all the excitement that was going on in other places, it wasn't anywhere we were. I was in two campaigns but apart from Manggar, which was a decent battle and lasted for 3 or 4 days, but New Guinea was just a waste really.

What was your personal need to become involved in that

26:00 **excitement?**

Well, to die in battle. The greatest insult you can pay a Japanese is to commit harakiri [suicide] on his doorstep. If you give a Japanese something he's got to give you something better. The best way to do it is to die in battle. If you die in battle you're a hero whether you are or not – it's nice to be thought of, "He died in battle". Not that I really wanted to die but you pushed the envelope a bit I suppose.

26:30 It's going to happen anyway. I don't want to die of old age – I've made arrangements, I'm not going to die of old age. There are not too many wars left, I've applied for every one that's going. It's the only sport where the rabbit can shoot back in a war, you know, "the smell of cordite" as they said in "Apocalypse Now" - "the smell of napalm in the morning". Well

27:00 I don't like the smell of napalm, we've been napalmed too, but there's nothing like combat and everything else is a bit of a let down after that. That's what I got from Korea, Korea was my best war, favourite war.

Were you somewhat disappointed that the war had finished and things had quietened down?

No, no,

27:30 I'd been away from home for two years so I'd had enough of that, but I would just liked to have done something a bit better. When you see the "Battle of the Bulge" and all these exciting things that were going on, we were just plodding around the bush not doing anything. In addition, there was no companionship. As I said there was only the one fellow I knew and then I was with him during the war. But then I found 4 Japanese flags once and I

28:00 sent them back with a track map of Balikpapan and he was at the headquarters and all I got back was an empty attaché case. When I asked him about it, in fact he's long dead, but one of his daughters has still got the last of the flags and I've never forgotten that. I sent back four flags and I never got one of them back.

You said you had one friend, what happened to him?

He stayed on in the interim army and then he

28:30 joined the Psychology Corps but unfortunately he was the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] of the Psychology Corps but he sort of regarded himself as a Psychologist which he wasn't. Unfortunately his wife was the mistress of the Director of Psychology, so he had to keep his ally good with her and I often

29:00 wondered just how much – they used to send him off to New Guinea every now and again to get him out of the way and then he'd come back and bore them to tears with an evening of bare-breasted native girls.

How did you settle back to peacetime back in Australia?

Not very well and then of course Korea came along and I couldn't wait to get back.

Yes but that was 5 years.

29:30 **What did you do and how did you settle down after coming back after you were demobilised?**

I went back to the Adelaide Steamship. Dad had said, if I come back from the war I'd have to have a job to come back to. So I went to the railways and they said you can become an apprentice, because I was always interested in railways. I went and saw the Chief Mechanical Engineer and he said, Dad had said, "What about when he goes to war?" and he said, "No, he couldn't go to war, it was a protected undertaking" so that was the end of the

30:00 railways, we scrubbed them off. Under the rehabilitation I was bound to be given my job back anyway but that was the reason I went to the Adelaide Steamship to have a job and I was just a clerk at the Adelaide Steamship for 5 years.

Why didn't you stay on in the regular army?

I'd have gone to the occupation [of Japan] but they wouldn't give us leave first. They had a mutiny at Morotai because the war ended in

30:30 August and I don't think they went to Japan until about November, they went to Morotai and just drilled there. That was all you were going to do when you got to Japan. So I'd like to have gone, but I wasn't going to sit around - and then another two years on top of that. Well, two years occupation didn't impress me, which means I would have been away for 6 years from home. In actual fact one chap I know only spent

31:00 nine months up there. He was in charge of native labour and he used to get saccharine sent up home and he never drew a penny of his pay because they'd do anything, the Japs would do anything, to get jobs. And he was only a corporal, he only did nine months and he came home a millionaire.

What was drawing you back to Australia?

Just the end of the war, I hadn't seen my family for two

31:30 years. Then when I came home I had some stomach problems over there and I went down to Wayville and they said, "We'll put you in hospital for a week". Well, my family, I knew they'd be worried if I went into hospital so I asked could I have my rehabilitation leave

32:00 before, and then I'd go into hospital. So they gave me a week's rehabilitation leave and when I went back this fellow said, "You refused medical treatment, we won't touch you" and that's still in my records 40 years later. I had to battle that and the officer I'd spoken to, I'd got permission from him, it was supposed to be all right. But some petty little corporal made the

32:30 decision and the paper was marked, "Refused medical treatment, " and I didn't refuse it at all.

So how did you settle back into peacetime life?

Alright. I was mainly interested in model railways so that became my life after the war. There was no military much, I don't know if the CMF [Citizens' Military Force] had actually started then, it might have done. There was national service

33:00 but I wasn't involved in that.

Did you get involved with the Returned Serviceman's League?

I joined it. I was a member for 47 years until they graffitied the War Memorial and then I resigned. They said would I reconsider? And I said, "Reconsider! I've just made the decision". Why should I, as long as the president is the state president, I went to school with him and he was an idiot then and he's got worse over the years. Every time I inquire "Is he

33:30 dead yet? As soon as he dies I'll rejoin. " but I let my guard down and rejoined a month or two ago.

Just on a bit broader question, do you have any strong religious faith?

I'm Anglican, I don't go much on the church lately. I go on Anzac Day and I

34:00 used to go on Christmas Day but I don't have any strong feelings one way or the other.

During the '50s and the build up to Korea what did you know of those events, those political events leading up to the Korean War?

I always kept track of them. What people don't realise is that Russia lost the use of veto because she

walked out [of the UN] in January 1950 because they wouldn't

34:30 take Communist China into the UN. When the North Koreans invaded they had an emergency meeting and it was 14 to 1 with 1 abstention which was Czechoslovakia I think, and Russia had lost the power of veto. Now if she hadn't have lost the power of veto we would have had a similar situation as before the Iraq War where Iraq disobeyed

35:00 order 1441 or whatever it was. So, you know, it was close as that , that we didn't go to war. They could have dragged on and South Korea would have been lost anyway.

At the time what did you know of when Australia decided to commit troops to the K Force, what did you know of that here in Australia?

Well we heard that they were starting a special

35:30 K Force to build up 3 Battalion in Japan.

What was your reaction to this news?

I was the first one down there. Typical of the army, they started a 400, 000 group, now I was the fifth South Australian and my number 400, 006 because the army enlisted the first fellow as 400, 001 instead of

36:00 400, 000. This is typical of the army, you know, they can't ever get things right. So anyway, we enlisted and then we went over to Pukka [Puckapunyal Army Camp] , we were only there for about two weeks and then we went off to Japan and we were only there a couple of weeks and then we went to Korea. But when we were at Pukka the Chief of the General Staff came around one day and one of the things we were doing was stripping and assembling the

36:30 Bren gun [machinegun]. With a Bren gun you'd pull out what's called the body locking pin and kick it and it all falls apart. Well that was alright but we couldn't get it together again, so we were there for about ten minutes and the General shook his head and walked off. This was the people that were going to save Australia from the Red menace. And the other thing was, they had a special exercise put on for the Minister from the Army and they supplied

37:00 strawberry jam and scones and they put up some barbed wire and they had two Bren gun carriers and they were going to charge through the wire and attack this position, and it was going to be supported by mortar fire. Well the Bren gun carriers charged through, they got themselves completely choked up in the wire and the first round of the mortar shell

37:30 hit a tree and exploded and wounded one of the fellows. So the whole exercise was called off and the Minister went to see the fellow in hospital and he said, "Don't worry my boy I'll personally see you get to Korea". And in the middle of winter the bloke said, "I wish the fellow had never come down. I wouldn't be in Korea if he'd left me alone". So that was the exercise. Anyway then they shot us up by train to

38:00 Sydney and they put us in a hut and they said, "At 8 o clock tonight you'll go out to Mascot" [airport]. No "you'll have a briefing at 8 o clock and then you'll go out and if anybody attempts to speak to the media you'll be taken off the draft immediately".

Why was that?

Oh, it was all hush, hush. Nobody was supposed to know where we were going.

Did you know where you were going?

Yes, we were going to Korea.

What did you know of Korea?

Not very much. We'd only seen what was in the paper.

38:30 **Why were you so keen to go back to war?**

Because of all the time I'd wasted in World War II. I thought this time I'm going to make the army work for me instead of me working for the army. So they put us into a Super Constellation [airliner] and we few to Clarkefield and we ran into the 41 Commandos, they were the British who did a lot of work over the east coast, blowing up railway lines and things. And we got to Japan

39:00 and we were only there for a week, and we went out on a big exercise. And as we went down this road we saw the Japs putting bamboo stakes along the side of the road and tying white tapes on and we wondered what that was. Well that night a typhoon struck and I remember we went to the kitchen, this is out in the middle of nowhere, to get our tea and it was pouring with rain and blowing a gale and when we got

39:30 back there was only one two-man tent left so four of us got into that and somebody said, "What if the owners come along?" And we said, "We're all ex-servicemen they can't kick us out anyway" So the owners came along looking for their tent and we said, "It must have blown away, we don't know where

it is". Anyway at 4 o clock in the morning the wind died down and we marched to a place called Hara Mura which is a Jungle Training Centre, about 5 miles, and we played around there all day

40:00 and then CO Green had a bet with General Robertson, who was the head of BCOF [British Commonwealth Occupational Force] that we wouldn't get back to Hiro, our camp, by midnight. It was 35 miles. So anyway I don't know who lost, we got there anyway and a bottle of whisky was duly handed over. About two days later we got on the Aken Victory and

40:30 went off to Korea.

I might just have to pull you up there before we start on this story because we're going to have to change the tape.

Tape 5

00:30 **I I'd like to go back a little bit in time about the period you were guarding the Japanese after the war, how long did that actually last?**

Only about a week because

01:00 that's when I went off. I left the battalion and went over with the Brigadier or behind the Brigadier to Makasar. A chap I knew had gone over to Makasar on the preliminary flight. Maros was the airport there and they'd flown over and they found out the Japanese currency was still current and up the Millford Highway they'd come across a Japanese,

01:30 so there were boxes and boxes of Japanese notes. Everybody just helped themselves to a few for souvenirs and anyway he got wind of this so he took stacks and stacks of this stuff over. And the gilder was worth 3 shillings and 4 pence which is 34 cents in those days, but an egg would cost about 100 gilders you see, so they had millions of gilders and they were using this money as

02:00 currency. And when I arrived there I ran into one fellow and he had a 35 gilder note and I said, "That money's no good, would you let me have it?" He was very reluctant to give it to me which he eventually did and I found out afterwards it was worth about twenty pounds or forty dollars. Anyway, as soon as we got there the Japanese currency faded out. But that was a beautiful city, pre-war, it had never been touched. The Chinese quarter had been

02:30 bombed and virtually wiped out but the main city itself – we lived in the Dutch residence which was very comfortable. I was interrogating the Dutch ladies, they had an internment camp for the Dutch ladies and the crew of one of the English warships, they'd been there in the internment camp. I interrogated one Australian and he

03:00 wouldn't even speak English. He'd been there right through the war and nobody had even bothered, he'd gone native and he didn't want to speak English.

What kind of training had you had in interrogation?

None.

What did interrogation consist of?

A bit like what you're doing – stories, you know, getting their stories and finding out. This one chap, Toby Malegie, for instance he'd handed eggs through to these

03:30 sailors in the camp and the Japs had caught him and they'd tied him up with barbed wire and beaten him with bamboo sticks. So we added those to the war criminal list and put them out at Maros where we had an internment camp for the Jap war criminals.

Were the crimes just collected on a nationality basis, that it was a Japanese soldier that did it or was there an attempt

04:00 **to recognise the individuals?**

Well they were still in uniform, the Japs were still in uniform, and they'd been there for some years so of course he knew who the guards were, so he managed to finger them [point them out] . There was a Yoshida I think, a warrant officer, he was the one who was responsible for most of the murders. When they shot down

04:30 American aircraft he'd go out there and if there were any Americans still alive he'd chop their heads off and then usually leave the bodies there so it wasn't too hard to identify where they were. And there was a Lieutenant Drake who'd come down from the Philippines with an Australian fellow called Shea who'd been in the air force, he was an air force

05:00 navigator I think. They were part of the war crimes team. I was working with the legal officer and we

used to go around the south west Celebes area, which was about a two or three day trip, picking up the Japs. They never considered collaboration the same as we do, because the Japs had just arrived there and the Dutch didn't do any fighting, they just

05:30 went up to Mount Lofty in the hills and had a barbecue until the Japs came and there was no attempt to fight. And of course the Indonesians were fighting – they wanted to get rid of the Dutch anyway. The trouble was after the war, the young bloods who either had spent the war in England or in Holland they were "NICA", Netherlands in the civil administration, and they came and

06:00 tried to take over the old pre-war. The Indonesians weren't going to have any of that and the only person we could get who was suitable to be the mayor was the man who'd been the mayor all through the Jap [occupation] – a person called Nijimutan. He was the only really educated Indonesian there was. The lady we worked with, she was Chinese but she spoke 7 languages, she did all our interpreting

06:30 **You mentioned that there were some cultural differences between the Japanese soldier and the Australian soldier in terms of the way a soldier might see themselves in battle and their death and how that would affect their honour and so on. Is it your opinion that there was an intrinsically different set of**

07:00 **beliefs about the way people could or should be treated or do you think that beheadings or perhaps not beheadings or executions of that nature were committed as frequently on our side as they were the other side of the fence?**

No, there was no animosity. We didn't like the Japanese but there's a difference between not liking and hating somebody. Like I said, if you hate somebody you end up with a stomach ulcer -

07:30 but if you just don't like them and we just didn't like the Japanese. But once a Japanese was wounded you either left him alone to his own devices or you patched him up and his own people were unlikely to do it. So if they were wounded then they were given the same treatment when they got back to our hospitals as our own people.

Did you ever have occasion to treat an injured Japanese person?

No, I did in

08:00 North Korea but not Japanese because the ones we saw were all dead. They wouldn't do that to our people, very seldom, it did occasionally happen but not very often. Once somebody is captured, to them they are a non-person, that's their outlook because that's what they believe. For instance when

08:30 they sent a couple of destroyers back to Japan, old hulks that were towed back, they were treated as outcasts by their own people. They didn't want to know and they wouldn't go to their own people because in their own eyes they were dead, because they had surrendered. If they'd fought to the end of the war that's one thing, but those that were prisoners of war, taken prisoner, in their own

09:00 eyes they were dead; they didn't exist any more so they couldn't go back to their own families. When you go away you give nail clippings and hair clippings and you leave them with your people and that's it, you say goodbye and you never come back. They didn't envisage the end of the war, nobody thought the war was going to end – one of those things you can't look forward to. Nobody ever thought there'd be a [atomic] bomb. When we heard it we thought what's the next story they're going to

09:30 tell us? It's something you just couldn't encompass.

So the Japanese prisoners that you saw would have been pretty broken men?

No, the ones we saw were SEPs [Surrendered Enemy Personnel].

Did they know about the bomb?

Their own people might have told them, I don't know. We didn't explain that to them, because after Hiroshima for

10:00 six days the Japanese didn't know, the High Command in Tokyo didn't know about it. They sent somebody down to find out why they hadn't heard from 2nd Army Headquarters, which was in Hiroshima. They didn't know because that sort of thing doesn't happen, one bomb to wipe out a city. So they sent somebody down and they came back and initially they could hardly believe it too. There were some

10:30 Indian troops who'd been taken prisoner in Balikpapan and they said that when the Japs were put in tents, and they would put their rice on the ground just outside the tent, and when the Japs would reach out to get it the Indians would stamp on their fingers. That's being petty but they had been prisoners and they knew they couldn't because the war had ended but just to show how petty they

11:00 were they did that sort of thing. It's was like the Indians - they didn't want to fight with our side anyway, because the Indian National Army, INA, you know it's Chandra Bose [Indian independence leader].

It was already Indian vs Indians?

Yes, that's right.

So were there any POWs, Australian prisoners, to be returnee back to you?

No.

11:30 I've got friends now who jumped in behind Balikpapan before the invasion but they weren't caught, so they eventually came in once the war ended, or they found that they could get out - same as at Labuan. There was one American colonel who flew in and the Americans were going to court martial him because in the end he wouldn't come out. His excuse was that he couldn't fly out because the aircraft, the light aircraft

12:00 they had didn't have the range. They rigged up an airstrip, a rough and ready landing strip and he kept saying, "I can't get out because there's not range" and they said, "if you don't come out we'll court martial you". He still comes out to Australia with the Zed Special people, but that was up in South East Borneo.

By the time you returned home to

12:30 **Australia how old were you?**

I had my 21st birthday on the 23rd December '43.

And you were home by your 21st?

By my 22nd.

By your 22nd. So you're a 22 year old man who has now seen a lot of things and with your involvement in the war crimes you've certainly seen the uglier side of what can happen in war and seen an awful

13:00 **lot. Had you come back a different person or did you feel this was just your character developing naturally as it would at home?**

The war altered everybody, I suppose, but it didn't make any difference to me because I didn't know anything else really. I was only a schoolboy when I went away.

Did you tell your family, friends anybody about what you'd seen and done?

13:30 The odd story, not particularly, people weren't really interested about that stage. I told them more about Makasar, because I'd spent 5 months there and I'd seen a lot of city life there and dealt with people. We were told if we saw an Indonesian beating up a Dutchman, we weren't to do anything about it, but we would have. If they started picking on the girls, there were a lot of young Dutch girls around there then, but again

14:00 everybody wasn't really interested. We didn't have any trouble but every now and again, opposite the Residency I remember one morning we heard a fuss. There were some Indonesian revolutionaries I suppose, they'd got themselves down in a bunker and the local police who were also Indonesians, they went down and chopped them to bits with kepangs, sort of scimitars.

14:30 But it wasn't our affair so as far as we were concerned it was a bit of a brawl and break it up but it wasn't our affair to do it. Our orders were not to be involved.

Why were people disinterested when you came back?

Well they'd read so much about the war, they'd had it pounded into them and those

15:00 suffering from lack of amenities and that sort of thing you know – silk wasn't available, nylon wasn't available, meat was short and everything.

Were people still wearing cuff-less, lapel-less suits?

Yes. I saw a thing on New Zealand at war the other day and the New Zealanders, it was an election ploy, I've forgotten the Prime Minister, but he brought them home from the Middle East for

15:30 six months leave and they mutinied because they looked around and there were fellows getting sixteen pounds a week and they were getting six shillings a day and a lot of them went into jobs to get more money; but then, at the end of the six months it was, "Come back, you're going back over to the Middle East to get killed" and they said, "No way in the world". There were 500 of them court-martialled because they said, "Why should we have to do this, we've done two years of it, and you

16:00 expect us to go back and get killed and all these bums are getting twenty or thirty times what we're getting and living the life of luxury?".

Can you understand that mentality?

Yes, too right. They should never have brought them back from the Middle East, that was a big mistake.

Did you feel resentful when you came back?

No, but I can understand their point of view. They volunteered to go over, they weren't conscripted.

Same as the AIF, we weren't conscripted, I've always been a volunteer,

16:30 I'm a citizen soldier I'm not a regular soldier, it's only a hobby with me it's not a business.

That and the railways?

And the railways, yes.

So then you start hearing inklings about Korea and I'm imagining this was similar to your previous experience where you're charting what's happening and you decide

17:00 **that that's going to be somewhere you're off to. For a man who's seen the ugly side of war that's a brave thing to do. What were your emotions or feelings, how did you really feel about Korea?**

I wanted to get away from the Adelaide Steamship.

You could have gone to Cairns?

I walked in to see the head

17:30 man and I said I'm going to Korea. He said "You want to know if we're going to make up your pay". I said "I'm not interesting in that, if I come back I'd like to know if I've got a job". He said "No problem at all" so the next thing I walked in and I put a note on the head man's table "I hereby apply for 3 years leave of absence starting today" and I walked out. The poor fellow who had to take over my job he's never really forgiven me because it was a taxation, group taxation job.

18:00 **He had no training time?**

He had no on the job training and I was off and free.

So K Force, where did you have to go to do your month's training before you left?

We went to Pukka but we were only there a fortnight and then we went straight to Sydney and on the plane to Iwakuni which is the Air Force Base in

18:30 Japan and then we went by train down through Hiroshima to Hiro which was the Australian base and we got there and we were only there a week, a little over a week.

You left in fatigues, you left in army?

We had World War II battle dress, not battle dress, service dress it was called then. Skirt, dress, World War II – except the only difference was that we wore it open-necked with a tie, whereas before it was done up to the neck.

19:00 **You didn't wear civilian clothes going, everyone knew you were leaving. How was the Australian public at this time?**

Well, when we got on – we had a briefing at 8 o clock in the evening at Marrickville which was a personnel depot in those days. And the fellow doing it said, "Now you'll get out of here and you'll get on the bus to go to the airport and if anybody attempts to speak to the media you'll be taken off the draft"

19:30 And that was it and the newspaper people were waiting outside and we just went straight past and not a word was said, it was all very hush hush. We went to Clarkefield in the Philippines and then we went on to Iwakuni.

So what was Japan like when you got there?

Well we arrived at Iwakuni

20:00 at about 2 o clock in the afternoon and we went down by train. Everywhere we went all the fields had blue lightd like fluoro tubes which we found out later were sort of mosquito repellent things. And by the time we got down to Hiro, which was about 10 o clock at night, the Japs were all getting ready for bed and they don't have blinds and all the doors were open so we were just seeing the whole populace

20:30 getting ready for bed as the train went by. And then we got to Hiro and got in the trucks and went out to the camp. And the first thing we got I remember are what they now call sushi apples, a cross between an apple and a pear, beautiful. And then of course we weren't used to all this good treatment because we'd been living in this camp area and they were living in the lap of luxury with

21:00 sheets and pillow slips and all this sort of business, and knives and forks on the table -we'd been used to eating out of dixies with tin cups. Then we'd only been there two days and we went out on this exercise and got caught in the typhoon.

What were the conditions of the people in Hiro, did this look like downtrodden people?

No, they'd had the

21:30 occupation troops for 4 years, you see. We got there in 1950 And our common story was, "BCOF, they

wear lead weights well. ” What you did with your gaiters, you put lead weights in them and made them cuff down, you see, which was a fairly fairy sort of thing, we always used to reckon. And we used to say “BCOF they wore lead weights and sleep with their mates” that was always good for a fight. So we didn’t have much time for

22:00 BCOF because they’d only been occupation troops and all they’d done is drill. They’d go up – we were told at Pukka, one fellow said to me, “When you go up there you’ll be on the Imperial Palace Guard”. I said “We’re not going up there, we’re going to Korea to fight”. “Oh no, You’ll be at the Imperial” which we never were anyway. But that was all they ever did, they went up to form a guard at the Palace interspersed with the Americans. And they were getting all

22:30 ready to come home. The 3rd Battalion was built up to 900, but when we got there, only about 300 were left and the other two battalions had already gone home and BCOF, British Commonwealth Occupation became BCFK, British Commonwealth Forces Korea, once the Korean War got going.

Did you end up having any rumbles with the BCOF?

No, we weren’t there long enough. I

23:00 wasn’t in the army long enough to buy a camera, that’s how long I’d been in there. I thought I’d buy one because I thought there’d be censorship which was a mistake, that was the third mistake I think, and I bought a little one with a telephoto lens, 8 millimetres and it was useless. I got caught in an ambush in the bad days in Korea and I thought I’d lost this one, and six days later I found it in my pocket, so that’s how small it was.

23:30 I hadn’t even been there long enough to get paid, I hadn’t been in the army long enough to get paid.

Tell me about the typhoon, when you’d only been there two days?

We saw these big bamboo stakes being put on the side of the road and white tapes tied on them. Of course we didn’t have any idea what that was and we asked and the BCOF fellows said “This place will be under water tomorrow” which it was, it was about chest deep in

24:00 water, the road we’d been walking on. And the typhoon blew up that night and flooded the area where we were.

What were the stakes going to do?

That’s so you could see where the road was, as the road would be covered by water. Anyway, the whole thing was over by dawn the next day it had blown itself out. We had a couple of typhoons in Korea and the same thing happened, they came and went in a matter of 6 or 8 hours.

24:30 And after the exercise we gathered our gear and went on to this training area, did a few exercises round there and then we marched back to Hiro, got our gear together and went down to catch the Aken Victory to go to Pusan.

By train to Pusan?

No, the ship, the Aken Victory, went from Sasabo or

25:00 from Kure to Pusan and then we went by train to Taegu which by that time, a break-out had happened. Then they put us in trucks and took us to a dry river bed a few miles north and they said “Well, you know, the war’s gone, it’s twenty, thirty miles away and on a

25:30 fine day it’s 50 miles away. ” Then after a few days they said, “Well don’t look like – you’re probably going home to Australia because the war’s over”. And the next thing they took us back to Taegu and put us into flying box cars [transport planes] to fly up to Kimpo which was the airport for Seoul. And flying box cars have got two big clam shell doors out the back and twin tail booms

26:00 and they fitted us all with a variety of parachutes, not all the same sort of parachutes and we said “What do we do?” and the crew chief said, “If that red light comes on you’d better get out of here fast” and somebody said “Can you smoke?” and he said “Yes, you can smoke when the red light comes on”. So everybody sat there waiting for the red light, they knew they weren’t going to be able to smoke. Some were free-fall and others were fixed up to a leading line, so fortunately we didn’t use it. We got to

26:30 Kimpo and we sat there for three or four days while they decided whether we were going to go across the parallel at a place called Yong Dong Po, which was a suburb of Seoul across the Hahn River. And we were part of the 27th Brigade, the 3rd battalion. The Argyll and Southern Highlanders and the Middlesex were the other two battalions. Then when we got up there

27:00 we headed north.

Was your equipment sufficient?

We had the standard 37 pattern that we’d had in World War II, the same weapons. When we got to Japan they allocated us into sections and I became a section commander and I had 7 or 8 fellows. But then when we got to

27:30 Korea, it was after I think we got to Taegu, two or three of my fellows decided that the war wasn't going to last so they'd go off and find it. And the platoon commander called me up and said, "We want you to go and dig in on that hill" and I said, "It's going to take a long time" and he said, "Why?" and I said, "We're going to have to dig seven pits" and he said "Why?" and I said "Well, the others have all gone". He said "Where have they all gone?" I said "I don't know where they've gone, they've just gone". So anyway, I went

28:00 off looking for them and three of them had caught up with the Americans and come back and they were going to be court-martialled. But in the end the CO let them off, which he shouldn't have done, and the others had just gone off to see somebody else. So I was busted back from section commander to section 2IC and the fellow that they put in charge of the section was an ex regimental policeman. The only trouble was every time we ran into trouble he

28:30 seemed to be missing. And after a while the platoon commander said to me, "Where was the section leader in the last attack?" and I said, "I don't know, I didn't notice" and he said, "No, I don't think anybody else did either". So eventually we ignored him too.

He had a bit of gangplank fever?

He had a bit of gangplank fever, big time, he was a professional wrestler so I don't know whether that had anything to do with it.

Well that's all faked isn't it?

Yes.

You were warm enough, you had enough kit?

29:00 The service dress we were issued with in Australia, I don't know whether we took it to Japan or not, we had denim jackets that just came down to the waist and denim trousers. That was because we left in September and of course the cold weather didn't start until October/November and we didn't get any cold weather gear until

29:30 late October, so thing were pretty cold. All we got were combat jackets and wind-proof trousers.

So how were you sleeping?

We dug in every night. I dug a hole every night for 7 or 8 months.

Could you get a shovel into the ground pretty easily?

Not when the permanent frost, we used to have entrenching tools. I remember one time up in

30:00 North Korea there was a rock about half the size of that area there and we started digging at 4 o clock and I think at 9 o clock at night we gave up and went to bed and woke up at 9 o clock the next morning and gave the war away. We were trying to dig under this rock and we couldn't get any further and gave it away but normally we dug in every night.

How would you keep

30:30 **warm down there once you'd dug in?**

Well if you got any rice straw you could. And in the very cold weather some of the fellows got hibachis; they're , Japanese, they're little charcoal type brazier things. But I was never lucky enough to get one of those. I always used to sleep in my boots so my feet froze and then about 5 o clock in the morning, if we were in a reasonable place, I'd take my boots off and try to warm my feet up because of course they'd be frozen

31:00 by then. We were on the big long retreats; we'd march for 50 minutes and pull up for 10 minutes. And you'd just start to get warm and you'd pull up for 10 minutes and everything would freeze again, your feet and your fingers. You never felt cold the way you feel cold here, it was sort of a numbing cold, everything went numb. But on the way up

31:30 we used to take turns, the 3 battalions would leapfrog and the leading battalion would be mounted on tanks, American tanks, and the other two would be on TCV trucks [Troop Carrying Vehicles], and then you'd pull up of a night and the following day you'd take over either the lead or the second. Then when we got up near Pyongyang, the American first camp wanted to

32:00 take it, that was their big aim, but unbeknownst to them the ROK 1st Division [Korean] had scuttled around to the right and got in there ahead of them. But in the meantime, before that happened, we were the lead troops and to get us out of the way they'd sent us off to the west to Kyomipo, which is the port for Pyongyang. We got back at about 8 o clock in the morning, we'd been up since 4 o clock and the

32:30 platoon commander said, "Go over and have a look at that haystack over there, take your section and do a patrol". So we spread out and walked over and the fellow who was eventually taken prisoner at Kapyong he said to me, "How do you tell the difference between outgoing and incoming [fire] " and I said, "Well, if you hear a pop over in the distance and you hear a wail and a big bang behind you that's incoming; and if you hear a pop in the back and a wail

33:00 over there, that's outgoing". Anyway, while we were having this discussion, one of the fellows stood up, he and his mate had been the driver of the water truck in Seoul and they'd come across a brewery, so they'd emptied the water truck and filled it up with beer. And as a result of that they got the sack and they were sentenced to my section, because having been made the section 2IC we were in big trouble.

33:30 Anyway while we were discussing this outgoing and incoming, this haystack let fly and it was a T34 tank and he let fly with his 85 millimetre gun and his machine gun. So we spread out and on the road behind us was a great long convoy of people, because we were the lead troops and they were waiting for us. And one of the American tanks he swung his

34:00 tails around and the poor fellow got his foot caught in the tread of this machine and nearly lost his foot. Anyway, the tank fired one shot and hit the turret of the tank and that made the crew see green seagulls [stunned] I think. Anyway, one of our fellows got on top of the tank and banged on the turret and when the poor fellow opened it up he shot him, which was pretty stupid. And I said, "If you don't get off that turret I'll shoot you".

34:30 So we ended up capturing the crew and we went around the corner and found another self-propelled gun and went back again to the road and there were all reporters standing around and correspondents and everybody. And when I got back I found the crew of this tank, this one fellow who had deserted to go and work with the Americans, but hadn't been on our little

35:00 exercise. He'd made these poor Koreans strip off and sit on the bonnet of the jeep and they were blue with cold and I said, "Who did that?" and he said, "I did" and he said, "Gooks" (he called them) and I said "They're not Gooks, they're enemy and they're captured and give them their clothes back". And I said, "You weren't even on the exercise anyway". So he went very quiet after that and a couple of weeks later he got himself sent back to Japan where he spent the rest of the war. But

35:30 anyway, they put us on trucks and shot us up north again. So we'd been up since 4 o clock, we never got a word of thanks for taking this tank and capturing the crew, we swanned [drifted] around up in the trucks for about 2 hours and got back about 1 o clock. We didn't have any breakfast, we didn't have any lunch and we didn't get a word of thanks. And then off we went up north up to Pyongyu. So I thought, that's gratitude for you.

So you'd be a happy man at this point because you're seeing some action?

36:00 I wasn't very happy at missing out on lunch and breakfast. However, yes, we'd seen some action. But even in the official report it said that there was a small action but it didn't actually say what it was but we were the only Australians to capture a tank.

Why were the Americans moving people out of the way, was it so that they could be the first in?

Yes, they could be the first?

For glory reasons or any other reasons?

No, glory, 1st Cav, you know, we were

36:30 the 1st Cav. Their badge is up there, it's an oval with a horse and a diagonal black streak and the horse's head, and they said it was to separate the horse from the manure. That's what everybody says. But they think they're it [marvellous]. Anyway, when we got to Pyongyang, they even had nurses there, we went a bit

37:00 further on and piles and piles of railway had gone up there and piles of supplies, all of which had to be burned when we came back. But in the meantime the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team had jumped in to try to rescue a trainload of prisoners of war and they jumped in the middle of a North Korean Regiment so when we came - there was

37:30 nobody else. The 1st Cav had gone off to get ready to go back to Japan from Kyomipo, the port, for a victory parade through Tokyo and we were the only troops available, so we went up there. And we had this battle and we were reserve platoon, reserve company I think, and we had 23 killed and the battalion killed 250 and got 197 prisoners, I think.

38:00 **Why was your success rate so high do you believe?**

The North Koreans thought that they had the Americans surrounded and the Americans couldn't fire any artillery or mortars and nor could we, because we didn't know where they were. So our people had to jump and they went in initially with a bayonet and then they had tanks. They used to have about a 2, 000

38:30 gallons, it looked like a round concrete tank, but in actual fact they used to store apples because they had beautiful apples in Korea. When we were down in this dry creek bed north of Taegu all the fruit was green, but by the time we got up there it was all ripe. And this battle, it was called the Battle of the Apple Orchard, and we were going through chasing North Koreans and picking apples off the trees and taking them out of our

39:00 shirts to get a better one, you know, there were so many there. And out of this tank 20 odd North

Koreans ran out at various times because we were busy eating apples and shooting at them and having a whale of a time. I remember one fellow, I came back, and I said, “He wasn’t there when I came back” and I fired a little burst of Owen [gunfire] and he twitched and he was lying doggo [pretending to be dead] .

39:30 **He was sick?**

No, he wasn’t sick he was hiding.

Tape 6

00:53 **Can you describe for us your first sight of the Korean mainland?**

01:00 When we pulled into Pusan in the morning, we arrived at about 8 o clock in the morning so we’d seen it from about 5 o clock on I suppose, and later on they used to have smoke over it too, just in case the North Koreans had any aircraft so the whole place was covered in a smoke screen. But when we got there they hadn’t done that. On the way over one of our fellows, a mess orderly, and we got this call to come to this

01:30 porthole and he had a pail of orange ice cream, strawberry ice cream, and he said, “I nicked [stole] it off the cook Get rid of it” so we’re all gulping down this ice cream with the pain across the forehead when you gulp- ice cream in a hurry – we got rid of it and they never found out about it. But the one who was sent home early from Japan or took himself home, he got the correspondence, he was a prize-fighter around the town, he was a big boxer, but he

02:00 wasn’t any good when the bullets were flying and he said, “We’re called the warriors, the warrior section” and I said, “What about ‘wait until we see what happens’”. Like I said until the first shot’s fired, when the first shot was fired he and his section leader friend disappeared. He ended up the Fire Chief at Haramura in Japan and spent the rest of the war there.

What was the first action that you were involved in in Korea?

02:30 We went on this patrol, we were just sent out, I don’t know why, no maps or anything and we went along and found this village that had been destroyed by the Americans and there was a crazy old woman wandering around with a grenade in her hand. I don’t know why. They’d strafed a supply column and after we’d attempted to ambush there, the Americans they said, “We’ll go

03:00 back and get you some food” and they were down the line about 3 miles and they said, “We’re the furthest north of the United Nations, you shouldn’t be here, ” and we said “We are anyway and we haven’t got anything to eat”. So they said, “We’ll go back and get you some food”. In the meantime we had a look through this destroyed column and it was full of blankets and we had the choice of being warm or having lice, so we tossed up for being warm. It turned out they were brand new blankets so we all had five

03:30 blankets for the night, they were pretty coarse, but they were nice and warm. And then the following day we just went back four or five miles to where we’d come from. But nobody knew what was going off and we were just sent off into the blue, hopefully to find out. Well, by this time the North Koreans were all fleeing anyway. But then they had another case where this fellow, an officer, went out to relieve himself after dark and he ran into a

04:00 North Korean and they both embraced each other before the officer finally managed to shoot the North Korean. When everybody raced out to see what the fuss out, he was thereafter known as “fluoro” because it was a dull night and the moon shining through and they said his face shone like a fluoro, it was wet with sweat, so he was known ever after as fluoro. He happened to become the Governor of Tasmania.

04:30 **What do you mean “embrace” – they had a hand-to-hand fight?**

They were both scared out of their wits anyway and you don’t expect to see somebody when you’re doing that. And they both sort of jumped one another, but the Australian had the jump on the other fellow and he had a weapon anyway, which the North Korean didn’t have.

What happened when you first saw a North Korean?

I shot him. I suppose the

05:00 first one was the one mainly that I just saw who wasn’t doing anything really, lying doggo, was the fellow in the Apple Orchard and he’d jumped out of this apple container hoping that we’d think he was dead or wounded. He wasn’t even wounded, he was just twitching, so I finished him off. But everybody was shooting, they were running down this hill and we were busy eating apples and the whole day was just a

05:30 picnic really. We didn’t have any casualties and then to cap it off that evening we found a North Korean

bank with a paymaster, we captured his vehicle so we had some souvenir notes.

Was this the first time that you'd fired at a man and hit him as far as you know?

We used to rush through villages firing into bunkers but half the time we didn't know until later that they were probably civilians. You never knew, so you either

06:00 tossed a grenade in and if you called, nobody came out anyway, so it was hard to tell really, in those days nobody worried too much.

How does that memory sit in your mind?

It doesn't worry me. The thing was if you saw somebody moving at faster than a slow walk you assumed that he was North Korean. They had reversible quilted jackets, white on one side and khaki on the other. So if you saw somebody in white you assumed he was a civilian but if he was

06:30 moving faster than a slow walk you assumed he was a soldier, and you shot him. And two other things, one was everybody said, "Don't skyline yourself. " To skyline anybody, all you've got to do is bend down so that you're looking up at him and he's automatically skylined. So that was the first thing you learned, never to skyline yourself. And the other one, they had what they called A Frames and they'd carry anything from a sack of wheat to their grandfather on

07:00 them. They were shaped like an A and when they wanted a spell they'd just lean back and put a supporting stick which they used as a walking stick anyway to hold it up. From a distance they looked like a mortar being set up. So initially whenever we saw them we'd start setting up mortars until we found out afterwards it was only – and the same thing happened in Kashmir. I had a 3 day trek, the night that they landed on the moon as a matter of

07:30 fact, I told them what it was and they said, "No, you've got to go and investigate. " So 3 days later I came back and said that's what it was. It was a fellow carrying charcoal on an A frame; but from a distance it looked as if he might have been setting up a mortar. That's prior knowledge that tells you that, but it doesn't stop you from having to go out and find out anyway.

Can you describe the key incidents as you followed the North Koreans north?

Well the best one was the time that we got the tank

08:00 and what annoyed us was the fact that they put us on tanks and shot us off, and we never got a word of thanks from anybody for it. The only time in Korea I ever got a word of thanks was from the platoon commander was when I went out one day to bring in a body. A fellow had been killed the previous day and frozen over his Bren gun and I went out to where this battalion had been over night. I always remember the platoon

08:30 commander saying, "Terrific job, Len" and I said, "For what? I didn't do anything". And that was the only time in Vietnam or Korea or anywhere else that anybody ever congratulated me for doing something which wasn't really anything anyway.

What were you doing in particular?

Oh we did an attack in January, '51 and there was snow on the ground and we came across this North Korean battalion dug in on the opposite hill, 316 was our hill, and in the

09:00 attack this young Scotsman, he was the Bren gunner, and he was killed but he wasn't our section, he was the section next door to us. And they couldn't get him back, so the following day they said, "Go out and get him". Well by that time he'd frozen. I often wonder whether they lit a fire on him or how they got him away from his gun because it was frozen all night and the American 4/2 mortars were firing just in front of us, about 30 metres in front of us all night, protecting

09:30 us. So at first light I went out to where this battalion had been but they'd pulled out overnight anyway. So all we did was bring him back and then we continued on later in the day.

How did you bring him back by yourself?

I wasn't by myself, I had two or three other fellows. We dragged him back. I didn't actually do anything, I was busy looking at the North Korean foxholes on the other side of the hill but they had gone by that time.

10:00 **Can you describe any particular instances when you were under artillery fire?**

Yes. Before we went over the Imjin we went out overnight on a patrol and we were going to surround this village at night and go in in the morning and try and pick up some Chinese. That night the company commander said to me, "Would you like a half tin of apricots?" And I said, "Well thanks very much it's very

10:30 British of you" so I had half a tin of apricots. The following morning at breakfast he came to me and said, "Where's my half tin of apricots?" and I said "Which half?" He said, "I gave you half of mine last night" and I said "You didn't tell me that so I've eaten mine". So he wasn't very happy about that. But anyway we went out and the Chinese had gone anyway but one of the other platoons had killed one and

captured a couple. And on the way back we were out in the middle of the paddy [rice] field and the Chinese artillery opened up on

11:00 us. It was like an ants' nest, everybody ran in every direction. And one fellow died the following day but the medic tried to fix him up, and there was nowhere to go and you feel a bit naked in that case. And of course the other time was on Hill 317, Maengsan, when the Chinese would open up at the drop of a hat. I remember the padre trying to run a service and I said,

11:30 "With all due respects to you and the Almighty, I think you'd better get down in the trench with us rather than standing out there and giving us a sermon". You know, he was trying to prove that everything was all right. And the other time on Hill 317, the CO and the company commander, were both in a two-man hole and I went up and took some ammunition up and I went and told the CO that it was there and the company commander said to me, "You'll stay here and carry wounded"

12:00 And I said to the CO, "If you tell me to do it I'll do it but I'm not doing it for Major Gerke". Anyway, they started shelling and the CO said "Come in here, " and I said, "There's only room for two. " "Come in here, " and he dragged me and I ended up kneeling on this Gerke so I carried on a 15 minute conversation with the CO with this Gerke underneath me – it was the only time I'd ever stood over an officer or knelt on one , but nothing happened anyway.

12:30 **What was particularly wrong with Major Gerke?**

Pig of a bloke – well he's had a stroke – but 'Bandy' will tell you about him if you go over there. Just a pig, he was at Manggar, up the Manggar River, he tried some amphibious exercise there that's in the official history. Just an irritable nasty sort of fellow. He and I clashed, we clashed in the Celebes

13:00 as a matter of fact. When we were going around the island his company was guarding a village and we stayed there overnight. I put my trousers under the blanket to press them and when I got them in the morning the battery acid had just about eaten straight through them, so I had to go and ask him for a spare set of pants. Of course they weren't on issue for outsiders, so that's where we clashed the first time I think and it continued on.

Wouldn't give you a pair of pants?

13:30 He had to because I didn't have any they'd been eaten to bits.

How far north were you able to progress when you were chasing the Chinese?

Well, various, within 24/40 miles of the Yalu. Chong Ju was our last battle. And then the Chinese came in initially and the "Home by Christmas Offensive". We got to Pakchon and we had a battle there and then we just kept

14:00 going and then the Americans went through us after Chong Ju. There were eight North Korean tanks and they tried to hide themselves in a copse of woods which would have been all right except that they didn't realise that their tracks were very visible from the outside so the American Air Force chopped them to pieces. And then in the battle they came up within about 20 feet of us, one tank did, they did a banzai [suicide]

14:30 charge on us and we got the sort of overflow from the next platoon. The platoon commander, Manetti, got a Military Cross for killing about 50 Chinese. But this one fellow, we called him Horace, he was about 6ft 5' and it took me nearly a mag [rifle magazine] and a half to finish him off. He wouldn't die, you know, he just kept moaning and carrying on. And unfortunately there was a poor old farmer who was with him and I've still got his

15:00 pipe as a matter of fact, it's here, a Chinese pipe, and he got caught in it too. He was either being led in or going in with him. But that's when we got our second tank, one of our fellows, we all fired on this tank. It was abandoned anyway and the T34s have got unarmoured petrol tanks and it set it on fire and it blew up so we were the only section to get

15:30 two tanks.

What was the moment that you realised you were no longer fighting the North Koreans, you were fighting the Chinese Army?

When we got to Chong Ju. I had been demoted to section 2IC and I was told to go to the company commander, 'Farmer' Brown, and when I went to him he said, "You'll go and take over 8 section of 12 platoon as section leader" and I said, "Why?" and he said, "Just do it?" but I said "You

16:00 sacked me three weeks ago because of what happened and I'm no better now. Why has this happened?" "Oh, just try it for a fortnight". I found out when I got there that they'd mutinied and kicked their section leader out, just told him to get lost, and I never found out who he was or where he went but I became the section leader. And that night we heard that two Chinese divisions had come into the war and I said, "On whose side?" and everybody thought that I was joking and I said

16:30 "The Chinese might have sent two over because they told [India's President] Nehru that, Chou en Lai told Nehru that if we went across the parallel, that the Chinese would come on. Nehru passed it on to

the Americans who chose not to believe it and I thought, “If they’ve decided to put a couple of divisions as a buffer and say well we’re here if you go back we’ll have this bit of North Korea”. Anyway, my new platoon

17:00 commander who in the previous battle of Chong Ju hadn’t come out at all well because he’d left his platoon in a paddy field, he’d frozen, and they’d got a lot of casualties whereas we went on their flank and got in without any casualties. We were doing this - you do a - withdrawal is done by thinning out people until you haven’t got anybody left and then the last people go out and away you go to get on the vehicles.

17:30 And he came up and said “What’s happening, Len?” and I didn’t know he even knew my name and I didn’t have much time for him anyway and I said to him “What do you mean what’s happening, you’re a Duntroon-trained officer and I’m a Private how am I expected to know?” “Well, you know” So I told him the same story I said “well, what I think is we’ll give them breathing space”. Well we went back to Pakchon which is 13 miles further back –

How did you receive that order to retreat?

We were just told that we’ve heard the Chinese are coming in

18:00 and there’ll be a withdrawal starting at 2100 tonight. So 10 minutes before that a few people filtered back out and they’d taken up a position further back and eventually you’ve only got the very forward people and then you leapfrog back.

Where were you?

I was a section leader and I was at the front at this stage, well, the front or the back, whichever way you want to look at it. And on the way back we

18:30 passed all these prisoners that we’d taken over, guarded by a very disgruntled bunch of American Provos [provosts - military police] , “Why can’t you take your own prisoners?”. Anyway, we went back to Pakchon and in the meantime the Chinse had come in behind us and they were on a range of low hills and we had to put them off the hill and that was the first time that [RAAF] 77 Squadron actually supported us. They came in with the

19:00 Mustangs [fighter planes] , it was about 5 o clock in the afternoon. We dug in for the night and in the meantime Colonel Green, the CO, died because after the battle of Chong Ju they rigged up two tents, one for him and one for Major Ferguson. One was in the shade and one was in the sun. And the CO came along and he said “What are they?” “Well, there’s your tent and there’s Major Ferguson’s, ” and he said, “Wrong, there’s my tent

19:30 and there’s Major Ferguson’s”. His was in the shade. So he lay down in the tent and it was a hot afternoon and there were about 30 people standing around and a shell from a self-propelled gun, from way out north somewhere, hit the tree and one piece of shrapnel went through him and he died two days later. So never pull rank and insist on having your own tent where, if you’d gone where you should have gone, you’d still be alive.

20:00 We got this word, and in the meantime the fellow who had been the CO of 3rd Battalion, a fellow called Walsh, he was administering command of 3rd Battalion in Japan when the war started. He heard over the radio in the mess that Green was coming up from staff college to take 3rd Battalion to Korea, which was a slap in the face for him. He was actually the CO but he wasn’t a

20:30 soldier’s soldier. So, when Green was killed they brought Walsh up from Japan. So the first night, Walsh was down on the flat and we were up on these low features to the south really and in front of Walsh was the river, the Chong Jon River I think it was. Anyway, he decided he wanted a nice tight perimeter so he got all the companies to

21:00 pull out from where they were and come down around him. A Company started to go out and they got about half way down and they said, “No, go back. ” Somebody was counting their platoon which should have had about 20 in it and by the time he got to about 50 or 60 he realised something was wrong and the last 40 were Chinamen. So they chopped A Company to bits and they did the same thing to us but we managed to get back into our holes for the night.

21:30 In the morning the brigadier, well the ‘officers’ mafia’ said, “We’d better send somebody back to Brigade Headquarters to tell them that we’re not going to serve under the CO”. And they decided on a fellow called ‘Bing’ Crosby who’d joined up as a private, but he’d been an officer in the war, a signals officer. So he got on a pushbike and he rode down to Brigade Headquarters and he told the brigadier that the officers, the mafia wouldn’t serve under

22:00 Walsh. Well of course Ferguson was the 2IC and he was the obvious choice to be the CO anyway. So he really stayed in the back and pointed the gun while other people fired the bullets and as a result the brigadier came up and sacked Walsh and put Ferguson in command and promoted him. So then we stayed at Pakchon for quite a while.

You were able to resist the Chinese advance?.

22:30 They got in behind us but not in large numbers. We'd driven them off the hill and A Company had seen various groups of Chinese off to the north but they weren't there in force. So then they decided at Thanksgiving - we had the full American Thanksgiving, turkey and cranberry sauce the lot you know, exactly what the Americans had -and then MacArthur said, "We'll have them home by Christmas , we'll go up to The Yalu, kick the

23:00 North Koreans out, they're finished anyway and then we'll all go home". Well, they got up, the 8th Cavalry of the 1st Armoured Calvary Division they got – on the eastern coast the 7th division had actually got to the Yalu and the ROKs [Republic of Korea] had too, the ROK's 2nd Corps. About 40, 000, well, no probably more than that, Chinese came across and they lit bush fires so the reconnaissance

23:30 aircraft couldn't see them. And they got stuck into the 8th Cav and almost wiped them out and at the same time the Korean 2nd Corps. It was the overflow of those that had come down to Pakchon that we had to take off. But the Chinese had come from an area around Hong Kong and the cold weather had set in and they were in sand shoes and normal summer gear so within the first fortnight they had 40, 000 frostbite

24:00 casualties.

What did you know of the situation on the ground as you were there?

We didn't know anything at all.

How serious did you know the situation was?

Even after the two Chinese divisions, we went back to Pakchon and then we were all going home for Christmas. So they said, you know, that's it, you won't see another shot fired. We had a concert party and we were sitting around having cooked meals and everything. And then at 5 o clock in the morning my platoon commander came up to me and during the night I'd

24:30 heard some shots further back and I thought the Argylls had probably got on the grog and started firing a few rounds. And I said to the platoon commander, Jackie Ward - he was, a little ex-jockey - "Oh, what's happening?" "I don't know" he said, "We're on immediate orders to move". So we got in vehicles and we went over to the east to a place called Kunu-Ri. Now, we passed a lot

25:00 of, truckloads of Australians and we called out, "Who are you?" and they said "We're reinforcements" and we said "You're going the wrong way, the enemy's back that way, " so they had to turn around and follow us. But we sat at Kunu-Ri, we arrived there at 2 o clock in the afternoon and we didn't leave until 2 o clock the following day. In the meantime our company headquarters, they said we're on a moment's notice to move so dig in but don't put out

25:30 tents or anything, and in the meantime company headquarters had not only erected a tent but they'd burned it down. And at 2 o clock in the morning we took off and after that the Turks took over. The Chinese who had retired after their initial go at 8 RCT [Regimental Combat Team] , they'd come back - about 180, 000 of them -and we went through this

26:00 pass. We started off about 6 o clock in the afternoon and we were through it by about midnight and the Chinese attacked, went up on the hills on either side of the pass and the 2nd American division had orders to withdraw and they had two choices:to come down the way we had, or to come down the way we had gone up, to the west.

26:30 Well, they made the mistake of going down the way we had and by that time the Chinese had their mortars and machine guns and they lost about 2, 000 men, all their tanks and artillery and everything. We just beat them by about 2 or 3 hours. So we ended up at a place called Chong Tron which, when we arrived, was a corps headquarters and when we left about 2 days later we were the last troops out. We finally got on

27:00 vehicles about 4 o clock in the morning and they dumped us off just on first light and when we woke up there was a noise for all the world like geese and we couldn't understand what this noise was. And when we went over to the crest of the little hill we were on, there were thousands of refugees trying to get across the river. So my platoon commander sent me on a patrol across the river to find

27:30 out what was going on but we only just got across the river and I saw a group of about 8 soldiers and I didn't know whether they were Chinese or North Koreans or what they were, so I said to the fellows, "Cover them and I'll go over on the flank", I had an Owen gun and I said, "I'll let them know that I'm there and if they can fire then you can blast, " but it turned out they were only refugees anyway. So we went along on this patrol for 3 or 4 hours and we

28:00 passed a sea-air rescue amphibian looking for a shot down pilot. We were actually on the hills overlooking him as he was flying around looking. And when we came back, we had to go across this river, and all they had were logs which were about 2ft in diameter and about 3 or 4 ft long. The only way you could do it was to jump on one end and take two steps before it sank and jump on the next one. So we all managed except

28:30 Billy Folkes, who was a little fellow. He looked a cross between a Turk and a Greek so they all used to yell out "Hello" to him without knowing that he was an Australian. And poor old Billy Folkes had the

Bren gun on his shoulder and the Bren weighs about 23 pounds. He trod on one end of the log, it sank, and he threw himself forward to stop himself sinking altogether and when we got him up he had about 3 inches of ice down the front of his chest, frozen solid. And the

29:00 jeep driver, whenever he pulled up he had a huge great fire going so poor old Billy had to stand in front of the fire for about an hour until he dried out. And then we started retreating again. But the trouble was when each of the American units pulled out, to stop anybody interrupting them they'd back a vehicle across, it was only a one-way road anyway, so they'd back a semi trailer across the road

29:30 which meant they'd split whoever was coming down and put themselves in so you had a whole series of split units and everybody panning in just to try to get out.

How would you describe the morale on the retreat?

It was pretty low. We were alright because we hadn't really got into a fight. Every fight we got into we won but we weren't very happy because we were freezing cold.

How would you describe the state of the civilians that you saw also?

30:00 Whenever you saw civilians you knew that there was something – they would sense that something was happening and they would just start moving before we ever did. When we were behind the Imjin [River] , we were on what they called the lozenge feature for the Battle of Maengsan, we were there for about a month or so and as soon as you saw civilians, you knew that there'd be Chinese following them.

Were there any instances of civilians getting killed or wounded?

30:30 Yes, well the Americans used to strafe. At Kap Young, [Major] Bennie O'Dowd who actually won the Battle of Korea single-handed, if you ever get to speak to him. He had the choice of opening up when the Chinese initially came through, he had the choice of opening up the Vickers [machinegun] . Being a good Catholic he didn't want to kill anybody so he didn't, so the civilians got through, but so did hundreds of Chinese. And if he had opened fire,

31:00 he would have only hit a few and the others would have headed off into either side of the road anyway.

Were there any incidents that you were involved with where civilian casualties happened?

We went through a village in a hurry and we'd call out, they all had their sort of little primitive air raid shelters I suppose for want of a better word, they were really only brush anyway. And you'd call out and if nobody answered

31:30 sometimes you threw a grenade in and you never really knew whether it was the locals or not, or whether they'd previous departed hence.

You were a professional soldier?

No, not a professional soldier.

You were a front line soldier – what's your feeling about the involvement of civilians in those circumstances?

Well they shouldn't be there, but they can't help being there you see. The other side take advantage of that. The same as in Vietnam, every time you

32:00 came to a tree line, which was normally a village and the VC were dug in there and you opened fire, you were going to hit civilians. Now they had the choice of leaving –in the end they got fed up and said, "If it's going to happen it's going to happen, it's all written anyway so what's the point of trying to get away". So that's why so many were killed and the Koreans weren't really used to it. We really liberated North Korea rather than capturing

32:30 it, especially when we went off on this sidetrack before we got to Pyongyang - they were waving beautiful little UN flags at us which they'd made themselves. And one of our fellows got a UN flag and he was waving it and he was ordered not to, this fellow who had gangplank fever, he used to stand up the front of the truck waving a UN flag. They said the aircraft don't know who or what you are, nobody's allowed to have a flag.

It's probably always good politics to welcome an invading army isn't it?

33:00 That's right.

Can you just take us through the continuation of the retreat?

Well we did 190 miles in about 7 days which is more than 20 miles a day. The British idea would have been to go to the narrow waist of Korea which is 120 miles wide or something and try to make a stand there but the first mistake, or one of the

33:30 many mistakes, MacArthur wanted to land at Inchon and everybody said how stupid he was. They forget that in 1895 the Japanese did the same thing successfully. So then MacArthur send 10 Corps under his chief of staff, around to the east with the marines, and the marines sat at Wonsan for 3 weeks and were

welcomed by Bob Hope's Concert Party.

34:00 They couldn't land because there were so many mines. They ended getting Japanese minesweepers or Japanese-manned minesweepers to sweep Wonsan Harbour so the marines could land. So instead of doing an unopposed landing they just came in to the waving of flags. And they headed off to the Cho-Sin Reservoir which is on a narrow road and they got ambushed and had to advance backwards coming down again. But there was no connection between 10

34:30 Corps on the east and 8th Army on the west.

What about yourselves, what's happening with you at that time?

Well we were part of 27 Brigade and we took our orders via 27 Brigade through to the Americans, I think it was the 24th Division. But we just did what we were told, so when everybody was told to retreat we retreated like everybody else.

What did you see of the so-called human wave tactics

35:00 **did you personally see anything?**

No I didn't see too much of that because we were be told to man a road block and then they'd say right, that's it everybody's back, get back on the vehicles and tanks and get away again. Now after this massacre of 2nd Division in this pass we dug in one day and we thought we were nice, we had tanks in front of us and it was 3 o clock in the afternoon and the

35:30 mortars were there. We were so far behind we had 3 inch mortars. So we were going to have a hot meal. Instead of that they said, "Get on these tanks and go up the road to where this division had been ambushed". We didn't know what it was. Anyway, we were riding up on these Patton tanks and I heard what sounded like hail and I thought, that's funny I wonder what it was. Well, we'd been ambushed. The Chinese had got into this village after they'd chopped the Americans to pieces and

36:00 they'd ambushed us. So we jumped off into the ditch on the side of the road and the Americans went off backwards. The only fun we got out of the afternoon was they turned their guns around and shot their bed rolls to pieces because they were going out backwards you see and their bed rolls were on the back of the tanks. I could see some people behind me so I said I'll walk down the middle of the road to make sure that our fellows all get together. So when I finally got back to the fellows I said, "Who's there?" They said "There's nobody

36:30 left, you're the last one". Well the people that followed me down the road were Chinese but they were polite enough not to shoot and I had this 8 millimetre camera, which was all I could afford to buy in Japan, so I was fossicking around trying to take photos of the Chinese and I couldn't find it – six weeks later I found it in one of my pockets. That's how much junk I had in my pockets, little sacks of coffee and sugar and matches and stuff. So we went back again and by the time we got back the

37:00 tanks had pulled out, the mortars had moved off somewhere else and we got back after dark so we didn't get a hot meal. And then that night the engineers were building a bridge to let out some Americans across the river and all night long we could hear this drilling of beams to put the bridge down but then in the meantime at 2 o clock in the morning we heard the bugles going. That was the Chinese bugles you see. And it

37:30 turns out that the Chinese attacked, or A Company had a bit of a barney [fight] with the Chinese and drove them off. The following morning we were on our side of the bridge, the engineers blew the bridge so nobody used it because the Americans had gone out some other way. So then that night it snowed and so we got up in the morning to move and all our gear was under about 6 inches of snow. I lost a bayonet and a glove I think in that little

38:00 exercise. But one time we used to go out and we'd dig in on this hill and then late in the afternoon we'd come down and go back to wherever we were – we did this for about a week and then they said, "No, we're not going to occupy that hill". So the last thing we did, the artillery was firing and they said "OK when we've fired the last shot we'll limber on and you jump on the guns and away we'll go"

38:30 And that's what we did so we were the last people out of there. And that was another time where I saw a reconnaissance aircraft trying to find somebody who'd been shot dead. We went until about 4 o clock in the morning, they dumped us off on the side of the road and one of our fellows got off and a 155 gun ran over him so it didn't do him much good.

Was he killed?

No, just his leg, it didn't do his leg much good, it weighed a ton.

What happened

39:00 **how do you pull out, how did you recover this situation, what happened?**

We just kept going back. We'd be putting in road blocks and the only good thing about the road blocks was the Americans abandoned so much gear that you'd quite often pick up odd bits and pieces. But we ended up at Ui Jon Bu, which is just 30 miles north of Seoul and they said, "The front's going to

stabilise, you'll be here for Christmas" and in actual fact we were, until they attacked again on New Year's Eve.

39:30 So we had Christmas dinner – and that's when we learned to work with the 4. 2 mortars, Chemical Mortar Company. They were very good, they could fire within 20 or 30 yards until Kapyong when they left their mortars and took off. But we just did patrolling around there. We went in through Seoul. I remember one night in a snow storm and they were chasing some guerrillas or something but it didn't affect us.

40:00 **How were you feeling about war at this stage, you'd been in retreat for some time?**

Well, mainly the cold, you know. As I said, there were two sections, we used to share the picket, because it was a semi non-operational area they said we'll have one picket between two sections, that's about 12 people or 15. But I knew that if they started the picket we'd get a good night's sleep because they'd never wake us up and if we started the picket it would

40:30 finish when I woke their first fellow up. In fact I found out that some of my fellows were sleeping in Korean huts which were centrally heated; they have a fire underneath, they're raised about 2 feet off the ground and beautifully warm, but they didn't bother to tell me that they were doing it.

We just might pull up there and do the change.

Tape 7

00:30 **Could you tell me about the battle of Kapyong and where you were and what you saw?**

Well, we'd be in action on and off for seven months at Kapyong.

01:00 We'd gone into reserve and the 6th ROK Division were about 20 miles to the north and they were supported by the New Zealand artillery and so we had about two days and then the next thing they said that we had to occupy defensive positions. So we moved out about 4 o clock in the afternoon and D Company were up on Hill 504 which was commanding

01:30 feature over to the east. And A Company was on our right flank and C Company was in behind them. B Company was across the road on a long feature and they were so casual that Darcy Lockland, the company commander, had not only rigged up a tent and got his deck chair out but proceeded to have a drink in the late afternoon. Well the refugees started coming

02:00 through around about last light and this is when I said Benny O'Dowd didn't want to fire on them. So next in were the refuges with the Chinese plus the ROK soldiers in the 6th Division that had just taken off and were throwing their weapons and their equipment away. And one of the fellows from A Company went down to a listening post and he kept hearing noise and reporting it back and they said, "Don't worry, you're nervous".

02:30 And eventually they sent somebody down and said, "You're keeping everybody awake just go to sleep". It took him 5 hours to get back once the battle developed because the Chinese attacked A Company and they caused about 50% casualties to one platoon which was the forward platoon. And this went on until about 4 o clock in the morning and eventually the firing died down then

03:00 and D Company, a small Chinese patrol, came around to the east and company headquarters killed a couple of those. But then the main attack on D Company came on 12 platoon, which was my old platoon, because I'd transferred to 11 when I was promoted to sergeant. And they attacked there off and on until about 1 o clock in the afternoon. By which time the A were withdrawn and the Chinese didn't know, so the Chinese did

03:30 a final attack on nobody really. Then they decided that we were going to withdraw that night because they were running out of ammunition. In the morning a tank had gone up with Colonel Ferguson and the doctor, Beard, and Alf Argent, the I Officer, up to A Company. They'd taken ammunition but the trouble was it was Mark 8 which is only for machine guns and Worens [?] rifles so that was no good. They didn't take any food and

04:00 water; everybody was only having one water bottle so everybody was pretty down on water. And then they decided that we'd get ready to withdraw. In the meantime the New Zealanders had come rushing back with the 7th ROK division and they had taken up position about 2 miles behind us and they said they couldn't fire because they hadn't surveyed the guns in. We'll that's a pretty lame

04:30 excuse because with a mortar all you do is fire way out front and start bringing it in. You don't need to survey your guns. They were in the official history saying they fired on the night of the 23rd. In fact they didn't fire until the afternoon of the 24th. The Middlesex [Regiment] had been up there guarding the guns and they were supposed to take up a higher feature off to the north west in front of B Company. And they went so fast that they

05:00 ended up 2 miles behind us anyway. Over on our left rear the Canadian Battalion had taken up a higher

feature and their battle didn't really start until after ours had finished. So while we're getting ready to withdraw, 2 US Marine Corsairs [fighters] came over. The Chinese that attacked 12 platoon found there was nobody there so they'd occupied their old position and 11 platoon was

05:30 now the forward platoon. We were all waving to these fellows [pilots] and the next thing they dropped two canisters of napalm on us which landed on 10 platoon, killed a couple and wounded about 6 and started a bush fire. Of course at this time the Chinese attacked simultaneously so we had to cover the rest of the company out. In the meantime

06:00 A and Charlie Company had come up through us, behind us or through us and the withdrawal started about 6 o clock at night and it was 12 o clock, midnight, before we got down to the river. With B Company, after first light, the Chinese were out in the paddy fields and they were being fired on so they thought the best thing to do was to surrender. So we had a company sergeant

06:30 major, Blue Bradley, a big red-headed fellow and about 30 of them clustered around him like chickens around a hen and they wouldn't leave him alone. So everywhere he went they went with him. When it came to do the withdrawal A Company had had so many casualties and the napalm victims had to be carried out. The best way to do that was to give them to the Chinese. So they carried them out and when they got down to the river, the first

07:00 lot got to the wrong crossing and a chap from B Company was down there on the crossing, and the next thing he saw these 20 or 30 Chinese coming along with Australian equipment on. Fortunately he didn't fire on them because they were merely carrying the stuff that A Company and the napalm people had dropped. And the beauty of the Chinese is that once you've captured them, they're like good unionists, they pack it in and they don't try to escape

07:30 So we were all back in position by about midnight and the Chinese had occupied the position. Later on when we went back to check on the bodies a fellow from my original section had been in 11 platoon, he was the machine gunner but was wounded at Pak Chon and had been evacuated. When he came

08:00 back instead of being a machine gunner he was No. 2. Now the fellow who was No. 1 said to him, "I'm going over to see what was happening" and he took the gun with him and left him in the pit. Well the first time that the New Zealand Artillery fired, the first round landed near the pit and buried him and knocked him out. He didn't come to until about 8 o clock at night. And when I kept asking if anybody had seen him they said, "Yes, he's gone ahead with the

08:30 casualties", you know, carrying the casualties. All the way down the hill everybody had seen him but in actual fact he was still up in the pit. When they decided to go back and recover the bodies I asked the Company commander who was going to do it for each company to represent them and he said this fellow was going to do it. I said, "No he's not, he ran out on this fellow and I wouldn't like the story that he's going to

09:00 tell". So I went up and found out that he wasn't in the pit and I reported that I thought he'd been taken prisoner. And it wasn't until 12 months later that [Wilfred] Burchett, the communist reporter, the Australian – I don't know if you know, he wasn't allowed back into Australia, they wouldn't allow him in. But he was reporting from the communist side and he contacted this fellow's mother and said, "I met him up near the Yalu, he was a prisoner up there". So that was the

09:30 first indication for sure, even though I'd reported that he wasn't killed on the hill. Anyway, after Kapyong, the American 1st Cav came through and relieved us. They were supposed to occupy this big high feature which the Middlesex were going to but they never did, neither of them did. And eventually they took over and we pulled back further

10:00 and went into a position further back. And we went back quite a while until they decided to advance again and the whole thing started over again, moving forward. But at that stage they weren't blowing the bridges. In the early days a bridge was blown when they retreated over it and they said it's not really worth blowing up because we'll be back in a week anyway, so they got into the habit of leaving the bridges intact. We saw [on one bridge] this little lad walking along, hundreds of people looking at him, and he walked right to the edge of the bridge and we kept our fingers crossed because we knew it was going up [exploding] at a certain time. And he just got over it and the bridge went up and they raced down and rescued him, so he managed to survive. After Kapyong, after

11:00 Ui Jong Bu when the New Year's Eve Offensive started, we retreated 70 miles south of Seoul. And I was in a tent with the tank commander and he ran out of maps. He was stringing his maps out to see where we were going, which was a place called Inchon and we ended up down there expecting to be pushed off overnight. In actual fact we were there for 3 weeks and then we advanced to a place called Yo Ju.

11:30 And then we went out to relieve the French at a place called Jip Yon Nee. They were surrounded and they drove the Chinese off but a Taskforce led by Colonel Crombers of the American Army, he got a lot of tanks together and barrelled along the road and relieved them. So we were fighting away through the hills. We never got to Jip Yon – we went on a liaison patrol just before they were surrounded but while they were there. At

12:00 Ichon it was the only place that we were under cover in all the 7 months. We were in a old rice mill and we found a child's gramophone with the Viennese Boys Choir playing 'Lullaby and Goodnight' and we

played this over and over and over again, only the one record. Before we went to Yo Ju we were guarding a corps headquarters and there was a MASH [field hospital] there like you see on the television, same sort of thing, exactly the same,

12:30 and we were there for about 4 or 5 days before they decided to move up to Yo Ju.

You'd seen the Americans accidentally napalm and stretcher bearers, Chinese, having to carry them off. Had you seen the effects of napalm before?

Yes. I remember getting one fellow in Pak Chon actually. I'd dug a hole alongside of him to dump him in and when I took a hold of his arm it came off in my hand. So I achieved what very few people had done, I beat him over his head with his own arm. But he'd been pretty badly napalmed, there were lots of them napalmed. Most of them were just waiting to die really, because they were crusted and beyond anything that could be done for them.

The Australians?

13:30 Yes, one fellow he used to say it "Give them the heat treatment". And as they carried him out he said "The bastards, they gave me the heat treatment". And he ended up winning Tatts at a place called the City Club Hotel in Melbourne. But his hand withered up to about half the size it was, just a claw, but it didn't worry him too much, you know, he got over it. None of this post trauma stress nonsense.

14:00 But I had words with my platoon commander, I'd only just got a new platoon commander and when 12 platoon were running into trouble and getting casualties I said I was going over there to help them because it was my old platoon. "Oh no, " he said, "There are too many people there". So I got down in my hole, I had a nice big hole that was already built for me when I got up on Hill 504, and I was having a sleep and he raced over himself. Of course he didn't do any good and when he came back he said, "You don't seem to be very

14:30 interested in the war". I said, "Well, you wouldn't let me go over and help and it's going to be a long night so I'm having a sleep". Then I said to him, "It was about time he stopped fighting the company commander and started fighting the war" because they didn't like the company commander and it was mutual. And he was telling the troops what a dog the company commander was, who was a nice old boy anyway. And then later on when we were behind the Imjin [River] , he thought he could take the company commander on but he didn't

15:00 realise that the company commander was an ex boxer from the side-show troop. So they went around the corner and this fellow came back covered in blood and then he ended up transferring to Charlie Company and he shared a pit with a mortar bomb so that was the end of him.

These boys must have been in a lot of pain and you'd already previous dealt with carrying morphia as well and

15:30 **administering those kind of drugs. Did you feel a bit helpless not being able to help them?**

Well, there was one fellow, they did a video and the fellow kept saying, "I want a drink" and they said, "We can't give a drink, we haven't got any water anyway" which was pretty stupid as there was no reason why he couldn't have a drink, he didn't have a stomach injury. But the last time I used all my morphia was at Pak Chon. We went over this bit of a rise and a machine gun hit us and I had 7 casualties in just a minute. I ended up with only 3 in the section. And I had these little – I used to carry them in my hat and that was my supply of morphine and I don't think I ever got any after that. I used to just punch it into them, it was just an ampule of morphine. Except this time in Borneo and the fellow wanted me to give it to him and I wouldn't and I said, "The pain will

16:30 keep you awake, you can walk back".

What were you doing with the dead after this battle at Kapyong?

They were just left there. The Chinese of course took their boots because the Chinese really only had sand shoes. We went up with the priest and all he did was sprinkle some dirt on them and left them for graves' registration, which were the Americans anyway. So we didn't actually recover the bodies. We just sort of placed them and made a

17:00 note of them and then they were picked up later on and they were eventually buried down at Pusan. Most of those who died further up the track, if they could get them they took them to Pusan otherwise they just stayed where they were.

Why Pusan?

Well that was the United Nations Cemetery down south, a beautiful big cemetery there. So anybody who goes back to Vietnam they always go to Pusan and visit the

17:30 cemetery.

Your next major battle, Maengsan, can you tell me about that?

Well after Kapyong I became the company sergeant Major and we were always short of officers and they had officers but they didn't bring them up to Korea, for some reason. After I had words with my

platoon commander I switched to

18:00 10 platoon and I became the 10 platoon commander. Then I switched between the various platoons if they didn't have an officer and then I became company sergeant major. And just before Maengsan I was commanding 12 platoon and I think the day before the battle the platoon commander and the sergeant who were both on leave came back, so I reverted to being the company sergeant major, so that's what I was in the battle.

18:30 **Where were you during the battle?**

I was just behind the command group. Basil Hardiman, the company commander, he was a frustrated staff corps officer. He was in the parachute battalion during the war and he never got away. I think he went to Singapore with the Rap [?] where he was released, Allied Prisoners of War and Internees. But he really wanted to get into the battle and the first bullet that

19:00 went hit Basil, so that was the end of him. So then B Company commander he took over the company and the sergeant took over the platoon. And then one of the other platoon commanders, he was wounded too, so one of the platoon sergeants took over, so it was just a matter of swapping around.

Who else was with you during the battle, how many?

19:30 Well, I just had the company headquarters group and we were just re-supplying them with grenades and ammunition and carrying off the wounded. Again, we had prisoners of war so we took them, they took the wounded. Anybody, walking wounded Chinese would be quite happy and we didn't have enough stretcher bearers anyway. One time I told this fellow, he'd been

20:00 wounded at Chon Ju, badly wounded in the shoulder and he'd only just got back and he got wounded in the head. I said, "As soon as he dies I want him dumped off the stretcher and I want the stretcher back here because we're short of stretchers". Well, I didn't see the stretcher for 2 days and it turned out, they'd put him on a tank and he'd drowned going across the river anyway. They had gone back, another case of gangplank fever, when they were down the bottom of the hill and we were up the

20:30 top so I had to get the company commander to issue strong instructions that they'd be charged if they weren't back up within half an hour. That's why you used prisoners to carry the stretchers, the wounded. Then we got a platoon from B Company to help us because we started off with 75 and we were down to 50 by the end of the day, so we'd had quite a lot of casualties.

What time did you engage the enemy?

21:00 We built a CP for the commanding officer at 2 or3 in the morning. We moved off about first light. But there was a dense fog down over the river, you couldn't see more than a couple of metres. We were supposed to follow B Company but when 'Wings' Nichols came along we were just supposed to tail along after him and he called the CO up and said "I'm lost and so is Basil" which is our company commander, "Where do we go?"

21:30 Well, thick as our company commander was, all you have to do to walk up a hill is follow the ridge line. And we were going west because the Chinese were expected and they'd already beaten off some American attacks fighting to the north. Of course we were going to the west where their weapons weren't sighted anyway so we just had a fairly easy run up the ridge line. Silly old Wings wandered off to the north

22:00 and perhaps fortunately ran into a small group of Chinese and they had a battle with them and then sent over a platoon to help us. But in the meantime this Russian machine gun had knocked out our company commander so by the time we got up, we'd taken casualties, but I guess it was probably 11 o clock before we ran into any organised resistance. And then the

22:30 Chinese were running along their trenches which made it easier for the Bren gunners to shoot them. Even if you couldn't shoot very well you just lined up the trench and shot them that way.

How long did that last?

Well we got up to a place called Baldi which is just before Hill 317 - 317 was a hand over hand sort of – the peak of 317. And because we'd lost so many men, Charlie Company which followed

23:00 us up they took 317 themselves and occupied it. And then later on B Company went through to the leftover what they call 'the Hinge' and that battle lasted for another couple of days.

Was there a lot of loss of life?

I think we had about 50 killed for the battle. One whole division

23:30 had to be taken out of the line because they took so many casualties. And then of course after the Hinge was taken they were all clustered in the valley on the other side so our artillery made a mess of them there.

What did you think of the Chinese soldiers?

They were alright. They didn't think much. You see the North Koreans, when they were attacking they were

24:00 fanatical and I suppose the Chinese were when they were attacking, but by the time we were fighting they were really just paid to do their job. They weren't paid much anyway – they'd already been fighting a guerrilla war for years anyway so a lot of them were not all that imbued with wondering why they were there in the first place. Not that they thought too much. The funny thing was in the

24:30 early days they had so many stomach problems that Peng Dehuai. who was the head of the so called CCF [Chinese Communist Forces] , the volunteers, he came down to find out what they problem was. Well they used to carry a pannier of millet across their shoulder and that was a week's ration. So in the cold weather they'd have a handful of snow and a mouthful of millet. Instead of having a long lunch their meal would last about

25:00 15 minutes and as a result they were having stomach problems. So he said "You've got to take time wherever you are, take time to have a decent meal". Well after 317 was taken they moved down towards the Hinge and they came to a copse of trees and when they tippee-toed up to it, there were 15 Chinese sitting around having breakfast. This was in the middle of a battle. So they got all their

25:30 grenades and pulled their pins out and did the lot of them. That was because they were having a leisurely breakfast, they were doing what their general had told them. If you're told to do something in the Chinese army you do it, you don't query it. And it all gets back to the fact that initially they were having trouble because they were eating their meal too fast and they were obeying his orders in the middle of a battle to sit down and have a long breakfast. It's just the way things

26:00 worked out. And the British had tried several times, the Northumberland Fusiliers, they'd tried to take this Hinge and they'd had about 100 casualties and in the end our B Company took it. And then the Chinese put in a massive artillery barrage. Just before it happened it was about a quarter to 8 at night, there was dead silence, they didn't fire, they must have been getting everything ready. And then they fired madly for a couple of hours and then they attacked. About 3 attacks and Charlie and B Company, we were

26:30 back behind the hill by this time. We didn't have enough people to help much anyway. We were firing in support with the Vickers machine guns. They just fought them off and then by dawn the Chinese had packed it in and gone off.

Were you using a Vickers?

Yes, what we did a couple of us got a blanket and held it up in front of the gun so it would conceal the blast. But we had a company commander who was a bit religious. After

27:00 Basil was knocked off another fellow came up to take over. And what they'd do, they'd bring the bodies down to us and we'd park them for the night and then take them on. I'd wire them on the stretchers so they wouldn't fall off and scrape the gravel and stuff under them because they were dragged onto the stretchers under fire you see. So he said to me "Now, we can't leave these dead like they are, put blankets over them".

27:30 I said, "Well put it this way, would you let me have one of your blankets?" He said, "No. " And I said "Well you're not getting one of mine, they're not going to be any colder tomorrow than they are tonight, they don't need a blanket". So then he said, "Well, what are we going to do?" I said "We've got a 44 gallon drum of water there and people have been helping themselves without permission and we're short of water". I said "The next bodies that come down we'll rig them up in a triangle around this water barrel so that if everybody's as

28:00 sensitive as you seem to think they are, they'll stay away from the water". Anyway, the following morning I was wiring this fellow on a stretcher and it always interested me how long rigor mortis takes. I've spoken to various doctors and there are various opinions. But every time I've every come across a corpse they've always had rigor mortis you see, so I'm wrestling with this fellow trying to get him to lie still while I put him on the stretcher. And there was a new reinforcement just up on the hill above me

28:30 and I said, "I'll be up in a minute, would you put a tin of food on for me for breakfast". He said "I don't think I'm every going to eat again". And I said, "You're going to be awfully hungry by the end of the war". His eyes were sticking out like women's stops. I said, "It's got to be done anyway". So I called him down and I said "Now I'll lift him up and you shovel the gravel out, because we don't want any extra weight". But it's funny people get sensitive, you know, covering dead bodies with blankets. I couldn't see the point of

29:00 that when it was freezing cold anyway.

You said that a Russian gun had fired upon you, not with a Russian soldier behind it, just a Russian-made gun?

No, the old Russian guns you see in pictures of the revolution, they've got a little shield in front of them. It's like our Vickers but they're on a little two-wheel trolley thing and they pull them along. The Chinese

29:30 probably had them from pre revolution days, or pre Mao, and had got them from there. Another thing was the Chinese got their winter gear three weeks before we did. So we were fully clad in Chinese

padded uniforms so it was a bit unsafe moving out after dark. And this friend of mine, when the time came to leave, at first light everybody stands-to because everybody expects an attack at first light or last light.

30:00 So just at stand-down after first light and he took off and he got about 50 yards down the hill and I said, "They'll shoot you, you're in Chinese uniform" and he did a U turn and came back and he didn't leave until about 11 o clock in the morning by which time he'd taken his Chinese gear off. But they were beautifully warm and padded. Ours eventually came up and then when the Brits came we had lobster-tail

30:30 wind gear that was padded. But prior to that we only had our ordinary combat smocks or windproof jackets and windproof trousers so you were always cold.

You explained some problems within the Chinese army structure in that it seemed to be very bottom heavy and a very small top and not very much in between, so there didn't seem to be much initiative about things like when to

31:00 **eat or how long to take about it. It seemed like everyone was following one person's orders. And yet you were doing things like putting up blankets to stop the people seeing the flashes and innovating all the time so it seems that structurally they didn't have the advantage. What about the soldiers, were they inferior soldiers?**

They were peasants mainly. In the battle of Maengsan I heard two fellows having an argument and when I went over they had a Mauser pistol. Well the old war lords in

31:30 China, all their body guards had Mauser pistols, they call them broom handles because the butt's like a broom handle and they fit in a wooden holster which becomes a stock, like a rifle, and the magazine is in front of the trigger. And I've always been interested in those and the only people who had them were officers, so if you found a Mauser - they didn't have any rank badges in those days you see, there was no rank in the Chinese Army - so the

32:00 fact that they'd got this Mauser meant that there was an officer amongst them anyway who hadn't managed to get out, they'd killed him. But, no, once they got their artillery, when I was there the second time their artillery seemed to be better than ours. We were on the base of 355, an anti-tank spur which led off 355. And across the bowling alley [exposed gulley] was 159 and we used to have

32:30 Centurions [tanks] dug in there to fire down into the Samichon valley and every now and again Charlie would get annoyed and start shelling it and he'd knock out these tanks. And they'd just replace them with these other tanks. And then behind us there was a tank that used to come up of a night and they'd illuminate 227, there was a Chinese battalion on that, and they'd illuminate that with a flood light and just fire off a couple of rounds. It didn't do any good because they were all

33:00 well dug in anyway. Their trenches were about 15 to 16 feet deep with steps up so they could fire. But they had terrific diggers, they were not as lazy as our people. When we were behind the Imjin we were there for 3 months I think and our trenches were only crawl trenches about a foot deep. They should have all been 3 ft deep. When I came to hand over to the Canadians they couldn't believe it. We'd been there so long and

33:30 hadn't done any digging. And the ammunition we had was old and hadn't been used for ages. We used to just do patrols across the Imjin.

Did you have any time at all that you could relax and if you did, what were you doing with that time?

After 3 months you got five days in Japan. When we first had ours we went back to Suwon, I think.

34:00 We caught a plane over to a place called Ibasu in a suburb of Tokyo and you'd have five days. Then after 9 months you'd have 3 weeks. But any time out of the country you had to make up and on my second tour I was caught by a typhoon in Japan. No, the first tour, and I was stuck over there for an extra week. So I ended up doing 13 months instead of 12 months.

34:30 A bone of contention [arguing point] was that the BCOF fellows only had to do 8 months, period. So after Kapyong they started going home in July/August and of course the new reinforcements came in and September/October was Maengsan so you had new people being fed into the system. 3rd Battalion didn't go over, it went over as a unit but it had K force in it

35:00 then as people reached their time they went home. The CO was given strict orders that if anybody overstayed their time he'd pay the price for it. Whereas 1 and 2 battalions went over as formed units and they stayed there for the full time.

What leisure did you take while in Japan?

There were a couple of model railway shops and there was a transportation museum so I spent

35:30 most of my time there. And then I went down to the Naval base at Yokohama, there was a model railway club down there. But apart from that they had the Yomarti loop line. Occupation troops had a white carriage painted on nearly every train and you could go around and around this loop – it was a bit like

the loop line they have here with the buses. And

36:00 that was good for 3 or 4 hours just to see the passing parade. Of course you'd go into the Ginza and have a look around. And there was very good food at the leave centre. And then we went down to a place called Kawana which was on the way down to Yokohama and that was a 5 star hotel that had been taken over by the Australian authorities and they kept it for the Australians. The

36:30 Americans were allowed to go there but Australians had first preference. They had horse riding and swimming and tennis and golf.

Did you do any of those?

Horse riding until one put his head down and threw me, so after I'd kicked him we didn't get on any more after that.

You went back to Australia before your second tour?

Yes.

Did you go back to Canungra?

37:00 No, Korea. I went to 2nd Battalion and when I got there they offered me CSM [Company Sergeant Major] of a recruit company and I said, "I'm not a regular soldier. I'm not interested in recruits. I want to go back to Korea". So every week I'd alternate an application to go back to Korea with an application for discharge. And they'd say, "Would you like me to tear this up or shall I?". So, there's my application and they'd tear it up and put it in the bin.

37:30 So eventually they offered me five different jobs, one of which was President of the Welfare Committee or something and I said, "Well I couldn't care whether the thing goes broke or makes a million, I'm not interested, it's not my home". So they made me a platoon commander in what they called the DP2 company. When you initially go in you're DP4 and then after you've done a certain amount , DP3, and just before you go away you're DP2. So we had a six week course there. One week you'd be out on the range, one week would be walking on

38:00 roads, other cross country and that.

And where was this?

Glenfield, outside of Holsworthy, outside of Sydney. And I had that for 10 months and I kept putting this application in and having it torn up. So in the end this alcoholic battalion commander called me up and said "The only way you can go back is to revert to the rank of sergeant". And I said, "Well I'm only a Private Temporary Corporal

38:30 Temporary Warrant Officer anyway, it doesn't worry me". So they sent me back as a sergeant and again the army fouled up and I ended up as a Warrant Officer in Japan and I had a row with this fellow [Major] Gerke and when I showed him the paperwork there was nothing. Before you go anywhere in the army there's got to be what they call a MOB3, which is a Movement Order, and it's got to have the correct particulars. And mine didn't have it on and they shouldn't have

39:00 sent me before it. So in the end I ended up back in Korea and the CO said, "I'm short of a Warrant Officer and you're it so don't get back on the truck". So I stayed there for the rest of my tour.

What was the overarching experience of that tour?

By that time the lines were static and it was a big long wired valley called the Samichon and that

39:30 faced north south. And it was so wide that the mortars, who had a range of about 3, 000 yards , they couldn't even fire because it was too wide. So they were in a mobile role and the only thing that ever happened was that they went patrolling trying to get prisoners which they never did. I think the Chinese had what I called a fire brigade because if we put out 10 fellows they'd put out 20 and if we put out 20 they'd put out 60.

40:00 And every time we went out to try to get a prisoner we'd end up with casualties and no prisoner. Because the American General had said "You will get one prisoner a week" which is nonsense. If you can't get them, you can't get them.

So they'd given you a number that you had to fulfil. Is that common in the US Services?

Well it's the same as in Vietnam, an American has got to be better at the end of his tour than he was when he

40:30 started and his report has to say that – one of our fellows in Vietnam said that an American was very good and the fellow over this chap came back and said, "What are you trying to do, crucify me?" "Why?" He said "He's very good". He wouldn't even fire paper clips in the Pentagon with a very good report, you know, they'd have him out in the toilets or something or other. So if you go there with a 95 per cent rating you've got to come out with at

41:00 least a 98. It's all artificial anyway. Same in Vietnam, it was all body counts, that's why he wanted body

counts.

We'll just end there thank you.

Tape 8

00:30 **In your experience towards your second tour of Korea, how would you describe your quantity of courage?**

Well I got a new company

01:00 commander when I was there and I was in the command post for the patrol briefing every morning. and I saw this fellow peering at me and he had a set of teeth like piano keys and the hat turned square on his head and I said "Who's that?" and they said "That's your new company commander and he thinks the CSM's job is in the office, not out in the bush". And I said "Well, I've got news for him". So a bit later on he came to me and he said "I'm your new company commander" and he said "We've got this 2 platoon company on the

01:30 end of 355 against this Chinese Battalion would you take over as 2IC of it". I said, "Yes, that's what I'm here for". Then I got the officer and he thought I should be behind the desk too, and I said "No, you've got it wrong, I don't do office work". When I was at Ingleburn, or out at Glenfield, the Chief of Staff of Eastern Command came one day, he was a British Colonel,

02:00 ex British Army, and he said, "Who's in charge?" And I said, "I am". And he said, "What rank are you, you don't wear any rank?" I said "Well, I'm a Private Temporary Corporal Temporary Warrant Officer, "and he said, "Well, that's a sergeant major". And I said "Yes". He said "You're in the company are you?" and I said "Yes". And he said, "Well, you've got a company sergeant major?" I said "Yes. He's a sergeant, he's not very happy, he's been in the army 12 years and he's a sergeant. I've been in the army 18 months and I'm a Warrant Officer". He said,

02:30 "We'll have to discuss this more". So I said. "Well, give your driver a cup of tea and we'll have a chat about it". But that's what I said, having wasted so much time in the war, if they didn't like it they could, with a stroke of a pen put me back to Private, but nobody ever got around to it. I slipped through the cracks. I should never have been a warrant officer you see, because you don't have warrant officers in K Force. And they're only temporary ranks and initially when you came back to Australia you lost the rank but then they changed it and they said,

03:00 "You can hold the rank if you pass the requisite exam". Well I wasn't doing any exams anyway, so that was the way it was. You know, when we were on the 2 platoon, this friend of mine, he was killed. He went out on a mortar attack one night and was wounded. And I'd been out trying to get a prisoner the night before and he'd

03:30 called in to see me but I'd gone to sleep. I'd got back about 3 or 4 in the morning and if I'd known about it would have made sure he went down to get medical assistance. In actual fact it was a repetition of the night before and he went out and he was killed. So, you know, that's the way it is.

How did you feel about that when you lost your friend in that way?

Well I was sorry because he hadn't come to see me. I would

04:00 have said, "Get yourself down there and don't give us any argument about it". So I was really more annoyed about the fact that it was a needless death rather than the fact that he was killed. Of course was one of the two friends I had in Korea anyway.

We'll have to bring you out of Korea. Coming back to Australia how did you find the situation when you got back for

04:30 **yourself?**

Between the two tours?

At the end of the second tour?

At one stage they had a photographic exhibition in John Martin's [store] and they asked me to go in and sort of have a look at it. I stood there for an afternoon, they were all war memorial photos, and not one soul came up and asked me a question. Nobody was interested, nobody wanted to know. And friends of mine, so-

05:00 called friends of mine, reckon we were on the wrong side in Korea so there was this lackadaisical don't worry about it, why did you go business. And then they said well the only reason you went was to get out of office work in the Adelaide Steamship.

You said that was one of the reasons you went - but when you came back how did you feel about the war, the Korean War?

I'd rather have been there than back in the office.

How did you feel about the fact that the Australian public largely did not know what had been

05:30 **going on over there or even ignored it?**

That's them, it's them and us. It's the same as in Vietnam. At one stage we were told not to wear uniform, well never once did I not wear uniform. If that's the way that people wanted to behave, they didn't understand and you can't make people understand if they don't want to, so why bother to try. And the years after Vietnam– it's like the Iraqi protest you see,

06:00 now they're back on the weapons of mass destruction, but just prior to that they were saying. "Wow, it didn't take too long, we didn't have any casualties and we got rid of Saddam Hussein. It's not so bad'. Now they're back again, going in a circle, saying "Well, we shouldn't have been there anyway because people are still getting killed and it's really no better".

We'll have to move on to Vietnam and we'll touch on some of these larger issues towards the end of the interview. You've taken

06:30 **us through that period of time before you went to Vietnam – I just wanted to ask you a bit about your personal life. How were you dealing with things, you describe yourself as a loner, did you establish any special relationships at the time with women?**

I had a few friends but I didn't make a big point of it. The best friend I had,

07:00 she said I should never have gone to Korea. And then other friends said I shouldn't have gone to Vietnam.

That's your opinion, let's leave it at that, I'm not going to argue with you because I've got my opinion. I sat next to a lady on the plane coming back from Vietnam once and she looked me up and down and she said "I suppose you've been to Vietnam". And I said, "Yes, and I can't wait to get back" I said, "Has it occurred to you that because we're there now, your 4 year old son might not have to go". "I'd never

07:30 thought about that". I said, "Well have a Coke and have a think about it". So we ended up being quite friendly, but she just hadn't given it any consideration. And I wasn't trying to convince her, all I was saying was because we're there now you might not have to go.

When you did go back to Vietnam what was the primary motivation, obviously you'd seen a bit of action?

Well I don't like bullies you know – the Italians, the Germans, the Japanese, the North Vietnamese, the North Koreans, they were all bullies, I don't like bullies.

08:00 I'd fight the Russians tomorrow. Not that I've really got anything against them but they're bullies too. I tried to go to Cambodia, I tried to go to Grenada. I tried to join the New Zealand SAS after Korea, and they weren't enlisting.

08:30 When I go over to Holsworthy, I go over once a year on the 23rd April and back on the 24th. It's just like putting an old overcoat on, you're back home again, it's something you don't get outside. Of course the army's changed and we've all got our own opinion of the army - which isn't very complimentary - but when we talk about us, and I'm talking now about friends of mine, mainly one

09:00 chap I knew, a Hungarian, and I was talking to him one day and he said, "You're in Korea weren't you?" I said, "What do you mean?" and he said "Every time I start talking to you, you're back in Korea?" And I said, "I suppose you're right". Because that was the best war, the first seven months were. After that it was a drag.

Why do you mean it was the best war?

We were mobile. Every time we went into a fight we won it. We never lost a battle in Korea and when you're winning – that's like the poor little fellows that I had in Vietnam,

09:30 I'd say, "Once in a while just let them take on somebody who's worse than they are just to get their tails up". Because if you're getting beaten all the time you get that complex and you think you're never going to win, what's the use. But if you get the odd victory, well, away you go.

How did you settle back in that period in the '50s after you'd come back to Australia. How did you find peace-time life back in Australia?

Pretty dull. Of course I joined the CMF

10:00 in '58. I joined it for a while, my old platoon commander was the adjutant of the 27th Scottish and I can't stand kilts and I used to turn up five minutes before the parade and leave five minutes after. But that doesn't even appear on my record. But when I joined the CMF, you go to camp and you're back in the swing of things.

Did you miss combat?

Yes. There's nothing like combat, you can't equate it with anything else really.

10:30 I did parachuting, I've got a fear of heights but I did the parachute course and I joined a sports parachuting club because I was talked into it, not because I liked it. The psychiatrist said, "Why do you want to jump out of planes?" I said, "I don't want to jump out of planes, I'm terrified of jumping out of planes" but it was going to help when I went to Vietnam.

What did you know about the escalation of the conflict in Vietnam and the history of what had happened at Dien Bien Phu for instance in 1954?

11:00 Well I tried to get there, Dien Bien Phu. A fellow called Earthquake McGoon, he was a civilian, he ended up getting shot down, but I thought that would be a good idea to go over there and fight them. That was in 54, I think.

53 I think. So you actually tried to go to Dien Bien Phu?

Yes, I made some inquires.

As a mercenary, I don't know any other way to

11:30 **describe it.**

No, well I really am a mercenary because I do it for money, tax-free money, nothing like it. See the sights and get tax-free money.

What did you know of the history of the conflict in Vietnam and the reason for perhaps the American involvement and the fact that Australia was asked to get involved?

I read it all through. I never did history at school

12:00 although the history you got there wasn't much good anyway. We used to cal them ice cream subjects anyway, history and geography, but I've done more reading. I read all the time, all of these are all war and history.

But at that time what did you know of the conflict over there and the history of that?

Well I knew about the old Cochin-china and Laos and Cambodia and how it developed and the Geneva accords,

12:30 so I sort of followed that and then the Russian involvement and the Chinese, wayback in history.

Of course once more the call came. What was your situation in the early '60s before you went over?

We all got retrenched from the Adelaide Steamship when H. C. Sleigh were going to take over. It was the first of the retrenchments so I ended up buying a little bookshop

13:00 in Gawler Place which in the first two years I did all right and then everybody started encroaching on me so in the end I was glad to go to Vietnam. It was better than being here.

You joined up once again?

Full time, then I went. They were asking for full-time CMF volunteers. Because I was six years over age, but fortunately I had enough friends in the business, people that I'd served with in

13:30 Korea were then becoming generals, and head of the army and adjutant generals.

When was that, what year?

Well I went in in '65 full time. And a chap came round, Cullen, General Cullen, saying they wanted volunteers. You joined up for 18 months but you were supposed to do 12 months training in Australia and then twelve months training in Vietnam. That was 6 months

14:00 after you were due for discharge, so there was a flaw in their reasoning there. And when we went up before a board down at Keswick, the Director of Psychology, and he was the boss of my old friend from World War II, and he said something about going to Vietnam. I said, "When I get to Vietnam". He said "Just a moment, just a moment, we are a selection board, you mean if you go to Vietnam". I said "No, when I go to Vietnam". I said I'm not down here "If I go to Vietnam…. ". I said "I've got

14:30 more experience than anybody here". I was the only one who had any service and I said, "I'm going". And he shut up, he didn't argue the point. I don't know what he said after I'd left, but that was the position. Then the colonel down at Keswick he said "Now, we've pulled a few strings for you, are you sure you're fit?" And I said "Of course I'm fit". So I went to have a medical and when I came out one of the sergeants said, "What did you tell him?" I said "Why?". He said "He's got you

15:00 marked unfit for tropical service". I said "What?" And he said, "You've got a rash on your hand". And I said "I told him I had a rash in World War II and I went to the tropics and it cleared him up, let me back at him". So I went back and he said, "What do you want?" And I said "You apparently marked me unfit for tropical service". And I said, "I explained to you that the rash I had cleared up when I went to the

tropics". I said "I'd like that in writing please". So I made him write it down. I said, "I'm going to Vietnam which is in the tropics and you're

15:30 marking me unfit for tropical service". And that was a repetition of when I went to New Guinea I wasn't supposed to go. When I joined the army I was A2, "Fit for sedentary duties only". So if I'd listened to people then I'd never have even got into the army. So you make it work for you. As I said, having these friends from years back I know when to ask favours and they know that I'm

16:00 doing it not for any funny reasons because I'm genuine about it.

What did they tell you about what you would be doing when you headed off to Vietnam at that time?

Well they don't really tell you. They give you a whole row – most people were training at ARV, that's Army of the Republic of Vietnam then you'd go to either special forces or various other jobs. And I went to what they call CSD, combined studies division, which was a branch of the American Embassy.

16:30 And I was out on the hill one day and I ran into some American marines and the fellows said, "You're CIA" And I said "CI what?" "CIA!" And I said "No, I'm in the training team". And when I got back I said to the American, "This fellow accused me of being CIA". He said, "Do you know who we are?" If I'd known earlier I'd have run screaming into the night. But it's the people you work with, not the organisation.

So it was essentially a branch of the CIA?

17:00 Yes. And, you know, there were cowboys there with anything else. But the people you're working with you're there to do a job. Same as in Kashmir, I said "I'm here to do a job not to be friends, not to make friends".

What was your first impression of travelling to Japan. What was the situation of your departure and arrival?

Well two of us were the first CMF full time duty. The other fellow I was with was from

17:30 1st Commando. We flew up to Manila. And the hotel we were in had one salt cellar in the dining room, that's how new it was. And you looked out at bare walls, they hadn't even completed it. He wanted somebody to carry his bags and I said, "we haven't got any money, how are you going to pay them?" I'm not going to pay them". I said "Well he's going to be after a tip". So in the evening we went down to a nightclub or something down in the basement and we ran into a fellow who was

18:00 over from Vietnam and he was sort of casing the joint for future R & R [rest and recreation]. The following day we flew over with Pan Am to Saigon, Ton San Nhut, and sitting in front of us was a Queen's Messenger surrounded by all these documents and everything and partaking rather heavily of the champagne and chicken meal that was provided. He had to be assisted off the plane, I've never had much time for Queen's Messengers after that. But anyway, we

18:30 arrived at 1 o clock pm at Ton San Nhut. Everybody has a two hour siesta in Vietnam and you're looking around to see if somebody's going to throw a grenade at you. We weren't met by anybody. We didn't know what was going on and where to go. And eventually this fellow turned up and he said. "You're going to the Rex Hotel". So we got to the Rex Hotel and there were some fellows from the team there and they took us from then. But we ended up in the COs room at the Duc

19:00 Hotel in the centre of Saigon. We stayed there for a couple of times before we went out. And he said to this other fellow, "You're going down to Dap To, you'll be the liaison officer down there". And he said to me, "I'll pick you up and probably accommodate you behind the wash basins". I didn't know what he was talking about. We went out to this beautiful two-storey villa which was a safe-house for our people. And then one of the chaps took me down to the Gulf of Thailand for sort of a briefing and then I went to Vung Tau

19:30 and again they dumped me one night at this beautiful big villa with nobody there. And the owner came in the following morning and said, "What are you doing?" And I said, "Somebody told me to sleep here last night". No food or anything. So then I had a couple of working breakfasts and got a bit of orientation that way and then the CO said, "I've got 3 things to tell you. You'll be wearing civilian clothes, don't get caught in Cambodia and I'll see you in 12 months" and away I went. And then my first

20:00 trip was up to a place called Tam Ki and by mistake I went to Na Trang which is a beach resort about half way up to Da Nang, one Sunday morning. I arrived on this Saturday and this Air America pilot turned up on the Sunday and said I've got to take you to Tam Ki. I said "Where's that?" And he said "Up the road somewhere". So we got up there and we could see this pool of smoke and he said "I think that's Tam Ki". Well it turns out the VC

20:30 had captured this field 3 days before and only let it go about the day before or something. So again I arrive just before lunch, in the middle of what they call Tam Ki International which is just a gravel strip out in the middle of nowhere and nobody to meet me or nothing. Normally Air America would call in to the embassy house and say "I'll be in in 5 minutes, send a vehicle". But because it was Sunday they were all at brunch so eventually this fellow turned up in a little Honda

21:00 vehicle and he said “My name’s Kip I’ll take you to the embassy house”. So I climbed on and away we went and we got to the right place but that’s the way it is in Vietnam. You could have been kidnapped and never know where you were.

What were you sent there to do. What was your understanding of your role in that particular place?

Well you’re just sent as an advisor and it’s on the job training and when you get there you find out what you’re supposed to do. Well the fellow from whom I took over had left two months earlier so I didn’t know what he was

21:30 supposed to do, so I just learned as I went along.

What was your understanding of the military objectives at that time?

Well, just to keep the communists out. There weren’t too many NVA [North Vietnamese Army] coming down at that stage and it was just a counter-guerrilla war. I used to go flying with the Forward Air controller spotting for air strikes and the American civilian didn’t like that, so he told me I shouldn’t do it

22:00 So I went down to Saigon and I told the CO and he said, “Well if you want to get out of the program you can, but it’s his decision and he makes the rules”. Anyway, he came up on one of his cross country tours and looked in and as he came in the other fellow raced out of the door and said, “I’m catching a plane” and just took off and I said “Now you see what I mean”. They give you all sorts of little hints about what was going on but when you asked questions they’d never give you the

22:30 answer. So I went to the colonel and I said, “We’re getting all these reports of roving bands around”. They’d even have the name of the leader and the weapons they were carrying and how many. But what happened, whoever sold that bit of information had also sold it to half a dozen other customers and was making a fortune and none of it was accurate anyway. So the commander said, “There’s nothing in the province that you shouldn’t know, so if they won’t tell you come and see me and I’ll

23:00 give you the information. ”

How were you procuring that information?

Notes would be slipped under the door and we had one fellow who used to come in of a night and he’d talk to this American and he was just over the road in this little outpost. And then one night it got overrun but very handily he wasn’t there at the time. When the first election was on we heard a bang in the night and the

23:30 VNQDD, the Vietnamese National Party, they were holding a meeting with 69 people. The VC came in, in a concrete roof building, and blew it up and killed the lot of them in one fell swoop.

Where were you at that time?

We were a couple of miles away in the Embassy House. The only reason that we got the Embassy House was that the Province 2IC it was his house but he happened to be admiring the sunset one afternoon

24:00 and a rocket propelled grenade got him. So it was bad luck, the Vietnamese wouldn’t have anything to do with it, so they gave it to the Americans. It was a lovely villa with air conditioning and everything.

This is quite a different war from your previous time. How are you dealing with this sort of strange, obviously very nebulous role?

We had 39 revolutionary development teams, they were 19 man teams

24:30 and they had what they called census grievance. They were supposed to go out and get a nominal roll of all the locals, what they were and who they were. Then there was a medic crowd and there was a self protection crowd who were supposed to look after them and finance and all this. And altogether I had about 3, 000 people I suppose and I had to be the logistics operator for those and then operate with them. Of course when this

25:00 fellow tried to stop me flying, that happened until one day he came to me and he said “They’ve got an operation over on the coastal strip tomorrow, would you mind going?” And I said “Well that’s my job”. I said “Let’s come to an understanding. I’ll go there and any other time providing you let me fly with the forward air controller”. So that was the end of his veto on the forward air controller.

Why were you flying with the forward air controllers?

Well I like flying and you get to know the country

25:30 and he was conducting air strikes. That’s where I got my first bit of shrapnel, a piece from the rocket hit me in the face. That’s part of the soldiering. There wasn’t much soldiering apart from that. Going out with these civilians overnight they might get attacked occasionally but not very often.

Were you ever involved in being attacked?

On the odd occasion a

26:00 few shots would be fired. One night they came in and they burned – there was a huge refugee village, just straw sort of places, the VC came in and set the whole place alight, and lost about 1, 000 people. They'd just come in from hills and do that and go back. Nobody chased them, they had troops in the area but they were careful not to chase them.

Did you form an opinion or what opinion did you

26:30 **have of your role there of the reason for an Australian and an American presence in that situation?**

Well, we were supposed to be helping them in the jobs that I was doing. You see, I was responsible for paying them all. At one stage there was a knock on the door and it was the 'white mice', they were the police, they wore white helmets and grey/white shirts. The 2IC of the People's Action

27:00 Team, they were the military side of things. I said, "What do you want?" He said, "The policeman's come to arrest you". And I said "Why?" And he said, "Because you haven't paid the funeral benefits for the last 3 people that were killed". I said, "Well, I have paid them but so you won't have a wasted trip you can arrest this fellow". And I said "I'm a third country national so you can't arrest me anyway but this fellow is a crook so I suggest you take him back with you" which he was. I don't know whether he arrested him or not.

27:30 The legend of Vietnam is that a scorpion and a frog came to a wide-flowing river and the scorpion said to the frog, "Give us a ride over, I can't swim". And the frog said, "I know all about that. We'd get half way and you'd sting me and we'd both drown". And the scorpion said, "Do you really think that would happen?" "Oh no, hop on". They got halfway across the scorpion stang the frog and as the both were drowning the frog turned around and said

28:00 "What's that all about?" and he said "That's Vietnam". And that's the legend of Vietnam.

The riddle perhaps. How do you interpret that realistically, what do you mean?

Well, we found, if you told them that the sun wasn't coming up tomorrow and it came, that's your fault. You never promised them anything until you had it in your hand and put it in their hand. If you

28:30 promised them anything they lost faith. They don't think that we lose face "you made me lose face". So whatever happened, you made anything that happened that went wrong. At one stage we had a beach house and I was collecting fish and sea eggs and all that as decoration, we had some fishing nets. And I kept them there for a week while they dried out and every day I'd go and put hot

29:00 sand in them. And they'd watch me and the day before I was due to take them out and put them up the whole lot were smashed. Now they didn't know why I wanted them but it was something I wanted, so they deliberately smashed them. So you've got to learn to live with that.

How does that make you feel, if you actually feel the people you're trying to help are antagonistic to your presence?

Well you've just got to live with it. If you try to get back at them it

29:30 ends up a never ending battle. There was some poor old fellow who was a fisherman and all he had was an inner tube and he'd swim out and catch fish. And his wife would come down and bring him his lunch and we got on famously. He had nothing, that's all he did, that was his livelihood, and he didn't have enough fish to sell anything just enough to eat.

30:00 And then up in the mountains there was a little old lady and her husband and all she wore was a robe, she was naked from the waist up. She was in her 60s I suppose and her husband was the same; he just wore a loin cloth. I've got a photo of them borrowing a pair of my binoculars just to show them what they were. Lovely old people, they didn't speak a word of either, they were Montagnards so they didn't even

30:30 speak Vietnamese. There were people like that. And then you get the other people who were 'Chalon cowboys', they used to ride around on Hondas and particularly the American, he'd be sitting on the side of a car with a hand out and "Whoosh" off would go the wrist watch. This happened time and time again and you think you're there to help them and this is what they do to you . But if you didn't like that, you shouldn't have gone there at the first place.

What did you like about being there?

I didn't particularly

31:00 like it. Some of the country was all right. The highlands were all right. I didn't like the weather, the weather was pretty hot but up in the highlands – well, it was freezing cold in the morning in the highlands. But that was just another part of soldering. But then when I went back again after I'd been to Kashmir, then I was with the ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] which was the army of the republic. And then we took a sapper attack one morning and damaged my

31:30 ear, so I ended up going down where the task force was and I spent the rest of my time there. And that was the worst time I ever had in Vietnam because the task force wouldn't let us do anything. They had

what they call mouse traps and in an area controlled by the task force or a unit there'd be a tiny little thing about as big as a football field and that was about all you were allowed to operate in. They were very territorial. When I was at the special activities training

32:00 centre, I went down to Na Bay which is a navy base, and their headquarters were up north of Saigon. They were separated by the place that I had been but if I crossed that area without permission they'd jump all over me because I was on their territory.

Where did you spend most of your time during that first tour, that was the escalation of the war from Vietnam from the Australian involvement?

Well '66 I went to Tam

33:00 Ki. And typical of what happened, I was flying down from Da Nang by helicopter one day and a chap called Hamasaki got in. And I introduced myself and he said "You're Opie" and I said "Yes, why?" And he said "Well you were supposed to come to me at Hoi An" which is between Tam Ki and Da Nang, and he said "Your boss said I could have you for two days a week". And I said, "Forget it, I'll get somebody

33:30 permanently". But that was the sort of way I was supposed to shuttle by helicopter, which was only available once a week normally, between two places to work for two people. He quite naturally got himself somebody else. Anyway, after 7 months at Tam Ki then they wanted to reintroduce the trail watch program for the Ho Chi Minh trail. So we had to go up to Duc To, where the Montagnards were,

34:00 the best of the Montagnards, the Radai and the Piru, and pick out about 20 and then take them down to Ban-me-thuot, or south of Ban-me-thuot. They wanted me to go on the suburbs of that and I said no I wanted to be well out in the middle of nowhere. There was a camp there which [Captain] Barry Peterson had been –

Why did you want to be out in the middle of nowhere?

Well, there was no temptation for these people to wander off there was nowhere for them to go.

This operation, was this modelled on the

34:30 **work that [trainer] Ted Serong had done?**

Yes, well Serong was really too involved with real estate in the Philippines. The Americans got sick of him in the end. He started off with a blaze of glory and got a Russian wife. He had five children and a wife back here but he had his fingers in too many pies. He ended up working for some institute or somewhere or other.

Did you know

35:00 **him?**

I met him. One time in Australia House he said "I'm flying down to Saigon tomorrow would anybody like a ride?" And I said "I'm going to Pleiku". So he said, "Be down at the airport at half past seven". So I turned up at the airport and he said "Sorry, old boy, I'm full up with fuel and we can't fit you in, better luck next time". And then the next time I saw him was at Ban-me-thuot and he said, "Oh, you're at Barry Peterson's camp" which was about 30 miles south of

35:30 Ban-me-thuot. He said, "I haven't been able to get down there yet". And I said "Well, it's a closed camp and you wouldn't be allowed anyway". So he was a civilian then so he didn't pay my wages so I wasn't interested in him but he was a bit too arrogant for my liking.

How did the trail watch program work and what did you specifically do in that and where did you go?

Well, the trail watch started in Laos and came from

36:00 Hanoi really and again the old story is that they gave this fellow a big shell to take down to South Korea and he trundled through malaria and swamps and mountains and finally staggered through in the middle of a battle and the fellow threw the shell in the gun and said "Right, get me another one". So in the end they had bitumen roads and all sorts, but when we were

36:30 there were a series of tracks. And they used bikes with a big pole on the handlebars so that they could take about 3 or 400 kilos of gear.

Was it known as the Ho Chi Mind trail at that time?

Yes, the Ho Chi Mind trail.

Did you see it?

Yes, we were over it, yes.

What did you see of that?

Well, you only see bits and pieces of it. In some places you'd just see a trail but in other places there were regular roads but that was

37:00 over on the Laotian or Cambodian border. When they asked me to go over at the Cambodian border there and put a team in there – well, on the other side in Cambodia it was just wheat fields, there was no jungle like there was in Vietnam, it was as if they'd suddenly cut it all off. There were a lot of antennas there so they figured there'd be NVA

37:30 working there anyway.

How far did you go into Cambodia?

We crossed Cambodia going from one place to Vietnam. I was with the Seals [US special forces] in the [Mekong] delta and we went up Song Ba River and we were going up to put in an ambush near the border and they said, "We'll keep you on radar and we'll let you know

38:00 whatever you do because remember the CO told me not to get caught in Cambodia". And just when I arrived there a couple of Americans had turned up in a barge or something and they'd actually gone over to Cambodia with two bulldozers. So Cyanic had grabbed them as ransom and the Americans I think had to pay money as well. But anyway, this particular time, we tippee-toed up this river in a boat, a Swift boat, it was I

38:30 think. And we called them up and they said "Yes, we're shining a light". We said "We can't se anything are you sure you're shining a light?" They said "Yes". So we looked back towards Vietnam and miles down the road we could see this tiny little light. We were about 3 miles inside Cambodia. So we turned around and very cautiously crept our way back.

Do you know where you were in Cambodia?

Well into Cambodia . I could pinpoint it on a map but it would have been embarrassing for the

39:00 Australian government if we'd been caught having been told not to go there.

Ta Ka Province, I know the area.

Do you?

Yes, I've been down there. This is pretty recently I wouldn't have gone there then I tell you.

I remember seeing these great big boats with hardly enough water to float them, barges I suppose they were. We went into this monastery and there was this old blind monk and the VC apparently quite often visited him. But he was

39:30 neutral anyway so they didn't bother him. But some fellows called out to me and it turns out that I'd trained them as PAUs back at Vung Tau and they'd gone back to their own province.

You weren't with the PAU at this stage were you?

No, this was in '68.

This was '68 the second time.

It was part of the first tour. I went '66 to '68. They kept extending – my time in the army had run out but because the Americans kept asking for

40:00 me – then they brought in an edict that nobody was allowed to extend unless it was operationally urgent. Well my company commander from Korea was now the Chief of Staff of AFHQ [Australian Force Headquarters] , So, you know, friends in the business and he saw me one day and we were

40:30 watching a parade and he said, "I got this signal saying that absolutely no extensions permitted except operationally urgent". He said, "I hope that applies to you because I sent back and said it was". So he'd got me another six months.

We just might stop there I have to change the tape.

Tape 9

00:30 **Would you bel able to give me a rundown of what you did in that second tour of Vietnam?**

Well, when I went

01:00 back I was posted to the first division of the RVN the Army of the Rep8ublic of Vietnam and I went up to Da Nang and to Hue for briefings and then I was posted to the 2nd Battalion of the 2nd Regiment and that was based in Quong Tri and it basically had a regimental base and a fire support base called Barbara which a few weeks

01:30 before I arrived had been attacked by the North Vietnamese and they'd really sprung back. I remember a story about one fellow, they'd captured this North Vietnamese and he had a convex container and the fellow shoved him in it and threw a grenade in to keep him company and the North Vietnamese didn't do too much damage anyway. But we used to patrol out to the west out towards Laos and along this same

02:00 ridge line and they did it time after time unfortunately, always doing the same. The one thing they taught you when you went to Vietnam is never establish a pattern, because if you do the same thing day after day, Charlie will get fed up and put a mine on the side of the road like they're doing in Iraq now, so you don't establish a pattern. But every week they would send out, which we did, they had a light CP [patrol] and a heavy CP [patrol] and at night the

02:30 light CP, which is the battalion commander and one company, would settle down and the heavy CP which was virtually an ambush, they'd go out somewhere else. So we trundled out there and I remember first light one morning we heard this burst of fire fairly close to us on the hill. And they said, "Somebody's in trouble they're being attacked by sappers". Well the North Vietnamese sappers are

03:00 engineers and they carry blocks of C4 explosives which are about 4 kilograms and they've got a fuse attached and what they do, they just toss them into a fixed position and they blow up whatever they can. The following morning I think it was the day after, the same thing happened to us at first light, we heard these terrific explosions and we have 6 killed and 26 wounded. I called in a dust-off [airlift]

03:30 helicopter. And the other rule was that you were only allowed to be in groups of two, you weren't allowed to be by yourself. For some reason or other I didn't have anybody with me. So I called the dust-off in and he said "How many have you got?" And I said, "We've got 26 wounded. Let me know when you've got a load and we'll wait for the next lot". So anyway, nothing happened and I said to him, "What's happening?" And he said "Have you got any

04:00 more?" And I said "No" and he said, "Well that's it". So he took off and he actually had 21 and there were supposed to be 6 passengers in a helicopter. So when he got to Quong Tri and the door of the taxi opens and about 30 people came out, they couldn't believe it. The crew all got medals for having a world-record number of people on a helicopter. And unfortunately, same as when they went into Laos, they had people hanging onto the

04:30 skids because they panicked so much that they'd do anything to get out. But anyway in the course of that day one helicopter went in to bring out the weapons and stuff for the fellows who'd been killed and it was shot down, so the American 101st Airborne, they declared what they called a Red Team I think. A colonel said, "Everybody clear the air and we'll bring in a Red Team and we'll be ready in about half an hour. "

05:00 He went on and on giving instructions and the next thing a fellow came up and he said, "This is Phoenix 16 I've landed and I've taken everybody off". So while the American was organising himself this fellow had whipped in and done the job. I always remember Phoenix 16 was his call sign. Anyway, I lost 25% in the left upper range of my left hearing. So I was supposed to go down to Saigon for a check and a

05:30 doctor who'd been at Canungra who wasn't a great friend of mine sent up a signal saying. "In view of he improved hearing you will not need to go down for a test". If I'd gone down for a test I would have been on the next flight to Australia so again it's handy to have friends in the right places. But anyway, they were pulling the officers out of ICOR so they had this reaction battalion in the task force area at Phuoc Tuy Province so I was the senior advisor for that.

06:00 But unfortunately the commander of that had been in the province for so long that everybody was scared of him. He never did anything. He took me a couple of times into the capital of Phuoc Tuy province. One place we went in and there were two dozen little old ladies operating sewing machines which had been presented by the people of Australia for the peasants to use and he was operating a sweat shop to

06:30 make garments to sell. And then another place we went in and lumber from the ammunition boxes, a truck load of it turned up at our fire support base one day to be filled with sand on the boom for protection. And it just sat there. And I said to the old sergeant "What about unloading this truck?" And he said "I've got to wait for the commanding officer". And I said "If that's not unloaded in ten minutes and full of sand I'll send it

07:00 back and it'll be burned". And what he was doing, he was taking this to his carpentry shop and they were making various chairs and stools and things and selling them.

These were Australians?

No, they were all Vietnamese. And as I said he'd been in the province for so long that I think he had the province chief under his thumb too. And I used to send in these reports and in the official history

07:30 I think it was the Assistant Chief of the General Staff in the back says, "If you think you've got problems, spare a thought for Captain Opie" because I kept sending in these bad reports. And the other thing they have in Vietnam is talking about "bad mouthing". You know, "He's a nice fellow but he's really a dog" that sort of thing. And they used to come down to see me, the head civilian and the head

army fellow, the colonel, and first of all we'd have a cup of tea and then "What do you want to talk about?"

08:00 They'd say "Well, where's the CO?" "I don't know he's probably Vung Tau". And they said "Well shouldn't you be with him?". And I said "My job's with the battalion, I don't chase around after the CO, if I go there it's to go to one of his sweat shops and show support for what he's doing, which is ripping off the populace". Anyway, what finally got him. We cleared Route 44 which was around the bottom of the Long Hai

08:30 peninsula and they had all these millionaire's villas which the VC had owned for 40 odd years, but the Vietnamese and American warships had shelled them so they were just shells. But the courtyards were all foot square granite blocks, beautifully contoured. And one day I was going along behind one of his vehicles and he pulled up and they

09:00 started unloading these blocks, selling them to the farmers. So I said to the driver, "Just pull up and I'll take a photograph of this". So I photographed this and of course the driver dobbed me in to the CO. The next time I went flying in the helicopter with the Australian pilot he got out his 81 millimetre mortar and tried to shoot us down. When I told the pilot he said, "I've got to get back, I can't be here". And I said, "He's never hit anything I wouldn't worry too much about it".

09:30 And he said "Why's he doing it?" And I said "Well, we're somewhere where he doesn't want us to be". And I said it actually stems back to this fact that I caught him selling – because all the millionaires came down, they knew their villas had been ruined but they thought they had beautiful courtyards still there and they got heaps of sand where all the granite blocks had been taken off. That's what really set him off.

So he had quite a number of rorts going?

Oh yes, he had all the

10:00 rackets going.

Is that common? Is that something you've heard other stories about?

Yes, you hear it quite often. And there was another time when he was going to put on this big operation and he needed about 14 extra training team fellows. And I only had 3 with me I think, so I went to the headquarters and I said I want to borrow these from all over the place and be there at a certain time.

10:30 So I got these from all over the province and some of them had come a few miles. And when I got them I said "Here they are". And he said "It's too late, the operation's started". And I said "Well, they're here by the time you wanted them". But I said, "Don't worry, I'll say goodbye". And he said "What do you mean? And I said "Well I'm going home". And he said, "I don't understand". I said, "My job is to work myself out of a job, I'm here to help you, you don't need any help because you've gone

11:00 off the operation. I've got all these 14 people sitting around". I said "They'll go home and I'll go back and pack my gear and go back to Australia". "Oh, you can't do that". I said "Well shall we start again. I've got 14 people here, where do you want them?" So within about 10 minutes he had guides out to take them where they were wanted. That's the way you've got to play the game you see. He thought he'd put something over me. Well, it didn't

11:30 work. It really is a game you know, it's like [the Department of] Veterans' Affairs, you've got to learn how to play the game. You can't do your Charlie [get angry] and let them get away with it because they've won by default. This often happened, lots of things happened like that. And anyway then they had a change of command ceremony and he didn't tell me anything about this. And I saw the old S3, he and I used to

12:00 converse in French. I didn't speak much Vietnamese and he didn't speak much English. And everybody was polishing their brass and I said "What's happening?" "Change of Command Ceremony on the oval this afternoon". And I said "Well, that's new to me". So anyway he went and the new fellow came in. I was tainted by association with the old fellow. so the new one wouldn't have anything to do with me. So then they had an

12:30 operation one day and John Hartley, who was a major at the time, he ended up Chief of Army before Mr Howard sacked him over a disagreement, he went flying and one bullet went through everything except his heart, so the helicopter crashed in the corner of the compound. In the other corner was an American helicopter, and the Chief of Staff of the Vietnamese is in one other corner, and ours in another, and nobody's

13:00 talking to each other. So I arrived down there to take some ammunition up because we had some people up in the hills and the major said, "What are you doing down here?" I said "I've come to bring some ammunition". "Well there are too many people here already". I said "All right, we'll go back". We got about half a mile down the road and the next minute this vehicle came tearing after us. "The Major wants to see you". So I went back and I said, "What do you want?" And he said "John Hartley's been wounded, I'd like you to take over". I said I've been here for 10 months trying to get out of this

13:30 job and I've just been fired and you want me to come back and I'm due to go home in a fortnight".

"Well, you know, just for a week". But I didn't get any cooperation from the new fellow because I'd had – I didn't really have dealings with the old fellow either but because he associated – one of the warrant officers went missing one night and we didn't know whether he'd been kidnapped or what had happened. He turned up about nine o clock and I said, "Where have you been?" "Oh, he said the CO invited me to dinner".

14:00 I said, "Well, you've made me lose face" I said, "He didn't tell me and I don't care where you have your dinner but at least have the courtesy to let me know so that we're not worried about whether you've defected or been lost of been kidnapped or whatever". But that was another time, twice it happened. I'd be driving down the road and I'd see a bunch of our fellows off on the side of the road in one of the

14:30 compounds and I'd go in and, "What's happening?" "Oh, there's a party". All my warrant officers and corporals were there and I'm the senior advisor but I hadn't been invited. They'd say "Oh, come in and have a beer, " and I'd say "No, I haven't been invited, I'm not staying for a beer". And then I'd leave a note for the CO to say that I'm putting on an act, bleating about losing face, but I'll explain to you later. So, I went back later and told them. I said "This is what they

15:00 do just to make trouble. But then you learned to live with that, so that's part of the game of being an advisor. But if you get annoyed and do things you shouldn't do then you've lost them forever. As I said, if you promise them something and you don't deliver – we were doing a co-ordinated search one day, the following day, and at 7 o clock at night they came to me and they said they wanted 1, 000 prods. Well a

15:30 prod is a 3 ft length of mild steel that you shove into the ground, to see if there's anything underneath it. Where am I going to get 1, 000 of those at 12 hours notice? Then the Brigadier came down one day and he said, "You know, you've got a nice little CP [command post] here. " He said "Where are the Vietnamese?" I said "Over there". He said "Why aren't you with them?" I said "Would you care to go over and have a look?" So he had to get in and crawl in on his hands and

16:00 knees and they were all sitting around playing cards - the smell of the fish sauce and raw prawns and things. So he came staggering out and he said, "I think I see what you mean". I said "I'm Father Christmas with a radio set that's all I am. If they want my help they ask for it. There's nothing I want from them so when they need me they'll ask for it". And a lot of them worked on that basis, you know, if they

16:30 wanted a refrigerator then you might get a Cross of Gallantry or the Gold Star or something like that. You know, you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours. But as I said, I wasn't there to make friends, it didn't matter whether they liked me or not. So I was never very popular.

Did you spend a lot of your time on feeling like you didn't have much to do , if they weren't using you to your

17:00 **full potential?**

No, I had plenty to do. For instance, they sent out a fellow – you see the Americans had bright ideas and somebody back in Washington – so one time they had these sensors and what you do, you put them out 100 yards and anybody that comes past, it lets out a little beep. Then you put out another one further out and depending on how far out you go – over the Ho Chi Minh trail for instance they used to drop them on spigots and anything going past

17:30 would give a signal and then hopefully the AC130 Spectre aircraft would come over and fire their mini guns at anything on the Ho Chi Minh trail. But they forget that there are all sorts of wild animals. There are tigers and elephants and all sorts in Vietnam as well as domestic. So where there were domestic animals wandering around and either these things would malfunction or else the

18:00 animals, or the wet weather would set them off. And then you'd have to go out and recover them. Anyway, this fellow turned up with hundreds of these things and I said "There's only one little thing, we haven't got any batteries". "Oh, don't worry I've got 3, 000 batteries". We went to see them and they were all the wrong size, every one of them. He didn't have one battery that fitted his sensors. Then they got another idea down in the canals in the Delta, you know, these rivers they said, "We'll

18:30 get a barge and we'll put an old tank turret with a gun on it and when they see a target they'll turn around and fire". Well, two mistakes they made – one was the barges were too long to turn in the river and the other was that the VC would be 20 ft up on a bank laughing their heads off because the gun couldn't elevate high enough to fire at them. But somebody would have a bright idea and tried to sell it to everybody. Then another time they

19:00 they came to see us – when you picked up a weapon the heat from your hand would go on to it or the heat from the weapon would go onto your hand. Similar to a finger print although it was on your palm. They forget that every farmer's got a plough or a hoe or something that's got a metal handle – so little things that they'd overlooked. Between the Americans not knowing what they were doing and making mistakes. The

19:30 American thinks if you don't like me, then I'll give you some money and then you'll like me. So I give you money and you don't like me more, so I give you more money and the more money I give you the more you don't like me. But the Americans can't see that, and they think they can buy everything. You can't buy loyalty. So our job in the training team was to show people by example that you don't need a

lot of money to do things. We had one case

20:00 in Tam Ki, we were going out over towards the Ho Chi Minh trail to do some surveillance and we only got the helicopter, the American helicopter, on a Friday morning. So I had it all lined up and I'd got these people ready to go and they were ex policemen who knew the area. And they came to me and they said, "We can't go" and I said "Why not?" They said "Tomorrow's a bad day". Well, a bad day to the

20:30 Vietnamese, they won't do anything on a bad day. Mother said there'd be bad days but she didn't say every day would be bad, you see. So what you do? The answer was, I said "Well, the operation's not going to start tomorrow". They spoke to me in the morning and said, "We can't go tomorrow because it's a bad day". And I said "Well, we've changed the plan, the operation will start today. So you living in the refugee home, after lunch you go

21:00 across to the office and that's the start of the operation. Then tomorrow we get on the helicopter and away we go". They were quite happy about that. As long as you produced an answer that was satisfactory.

So you were negotiating around the various oddities of the different nationalities?

Yes. Another time an American down at a place called Li Tin down near the Chu Lai marine base, the air base. A terrible

21:30 panic half a dozen of these fellows had locked themselves in this local jail and were going to starve themselves to death. So I drove down there, it was about ten miles down there, and I said, "What's the problem?" He said "Well, they're going to starve themselves to death". So I went and had a look at them and they had demijohns of orange juice and I said, "How long are you going to stay here". And they said "Until we starve to death". I said "Well the orange juice is Vitamin C, you're going to be fitter in a month's time than you are

22:00 now". So the American said, "What do I do?" And I said "Leave the door of the cell open and anybody who goes out, as soon as they go out, don't let them back in again, into the compound". Well, at 11 o clock Mrs Win came along because hubby wasn't home for lunch so she dragged him off and by 12 o clock they'd all gone off and that was the end of the strike. But in the meantime the secretary of the revolutionary development,

22:30 he'd very conveniently gone up to Da Nang on weekend leave so he couldn't be reached. It was because they were wearing black pyjamas, but 17 million Vietnamese wear black pyjamas. In fact the marines at one stage wanted to give them all purple pyjamas to differentiate them from the VC, but it doesn't matter if you're a civilian a VC or what, you still wear black pyjamas. These are things that the Americans had trouble getting

23:00 through.

What can you tell me about the aims of Operation Phoenix?

Well, we were aimed at the infrastructure. The previous counter-terror business people were getting out of hand and there were just family feuds. Our chief instructor at the special activities training centre, he was married to a little half-caste French Vietnamese

23:30 girl and after I left there I came back and I said "Where's Charlie?" And they said "Oh, they killed him a couple of weeks ago". I said "Why?" "Oh, he upset them or something". You know, there's no real reason why they should have killed him. He was the head instructor and a nice fellow and he spoke good English but they just didn't like him so it was sort of a family feud. And the counter terror got to be the same way, there wasn't much control and the Americans used to just send them off

24:00 and they'd go out and kill who they wanted to and of course a peasant doesn't have any come-back anyway. So they decided to clean it up. They had operation switchback I think back in about 1963 where the Special Forces used to handle it. Then they handed it over to the other crowd so then they decided that they'd clean it up and it would become, instead of counter terror, it would become the provincial reconnaissance

24:30 unit, they worked in their own province. We were going to have a sort of nation-wide hit team which would just travel around but then you've got to know the locals anyway so that wasn't much good. But then again you had Vietnamese, Chinese, Nungs and various ethnic nationalities and none of them liked each other so they would go out and get stuck into each other. At one stage I remember we got

25:00 seventeen VC from information. We took it into the local province capital, we went to about four different places before we could find somebody who was prepared to take them. They had the DIOCC which is District Intelligence Operation Command Centre. They had all this various alphabet soup, you know, in Vietnam everybody had initials.

25:30 PIC was the Province Interrogation centre, and PIOC was the Province Interrogation Operational Centre – they didn't really have much. But a lot of them, you handed the prisoners over and there was a good chance they'd end up dead because they didn't know what to do with them. We had one fellow, he handed people in three times and in the end they ran him out of the province because the province chief, who was a six-fingered character,

26:00 we didn't get on at all well with him. He actually ordered this fellow to be killed. So we had to have him moved. And he was the fellow who was aiming to get rid of the VC because the province chief was in lieu of the VC. And another place we had the PIU leader, we had a course going and the second day it was going we went down to check on it. And before we got there they'd put claymore mines around, it was a roofless building, an old school building and the

26:30 class had walked in and they'd detonated mines all around the walls and blown them in. And what they hadn't killed they put into an ambulance to take up to the capital city and the command detonated a mine and blew the ambulance up so they got rid of virtually the whole lot. And at one stage they said to me, "Are you going to conduct an operation against the

27:00 province, the head of the PRU or the American advisor?" And I said "Well if you do it and its successful I'll pay you all a bonus because you've never conducted a proper operation yet" so they didn't do it.

Was the PRU director of operations your link to the CIA?

Yes it was handled through a commander in Saigon, a marine colonel. I had him as

27:30 my boss and I operated the special activities training centre. What I used to do, I'd put them through a course which was similar to Canungra, the advisor's course, and then I'd go out with them to the provinces and operate with them to see how they performed. It was based on performance. But we had a bunch of ARVN officers come through our centre once and they complained that the food we were

28:00 giving our people was better than the ARVN officer's mess and I said, "Well we don't dispute that" You know, they were working 24 hours a day and we had a 24 hour kitchen going. They'd come in at 2 or 3 in the morning for a meal. And they were being paid better and they were all vetted of course and they were being fed better. And if anybody played up then we could always send them off to the ARVN where they'd be getting

28:30 nothing, practically nothing, and they'd be back in the normal army so there was an incentive for them to stay with us. Even though we had murderers and rapists and everything else, we had the dregs, but they had to prove themselves in our operation.

How was that dealing with the dregs?

Well, again it's the psychology – they were there to do a job not to do what they normally did rape or

29:00 plunder or whatever. And they were aimed at the infrastructure. They weren't supposed to go out on operations unless they had firm information. So we had what we called impact interrogation. We'd go out and we'd grab some people and then instead of bringing them back to the capital to interrogate them we'd bring them back just out of earshot or out of gunshot and interrogate them then. So then we could go back if we hadn't got all we wanted.

29:30 And down in the Delta I was working with a Cambodian. They've got a vicious streak. Everybody thought, before Pol Pot, they thought the Cambodians were friendly and more Buddhist oriented. But I remember once we got about a dozen suspects and we took them around – the head of this - and he just beckoned the one and take him around behind the building and then he might come back in

30:00 ten minutes with or without the fellow and he'd get somebody else. Now what happened with the first fellow, sometimes a shot would ring out and you didn't know whether he'd shot the fellow or not. But by the time the last fellow was there he was ready to tell anything. I used to say, "Why do you take 2 VC suspects into a helicopter, throw one out and take 2 notebooks?" because the second fellow will talk enough to fill two notebooks.

Is that something that actually happened?

No it was

30:30 just one of our, business about why they'd talk, you know. And the other thing they used to do was to take two suspects in a helicopter and they'd come down low at 6 feet and push one fellow out with a guard and then go back up and take the blindfold off the other fellow and say, "Well, we've pushed one out are you prepared to talk?" That was another incentive to talk. And then the other thing

31:00 to go to the hereafter a Vietnamese must be buried hole, so that started the business of cutting ears off, apart from the fact that they paid a bonus on ears. When the VC went into an attack or the NVA particularly, although they're communist and they're not supposed to have any religion, the thing that really got them going before they started was that each one had 20ft of rope tied on his foot so that when he was

31:30 killed he could be dragged back out. And they were always finding body trails - that was a big thing. You didn't get body counts so you had body trails and you'd find trails of blood which hopefully were the people you'd killed and they were the people who'd been dragged out by their comrades. If you were buried without part of you, your head or your ears or anything else, you wandered the earth for 364 days of the year. They have a day called

32:00 Wandering Souls Day where everybody puts out fruit and rice and flowers and stuff. And that's the one day of the year that a person without a soul can come back and get some sustenance. So even though they were all – well communists aren't Buddhists but they still believe in that sort of thing. The other thing, within the same family, you might have a fellow serving with the ARVN

32:30 and his brother's serving in the VC. If they both ended up in the same building they'd go their separate ways, you know, they wouldn't report each other. And the other thing is when you killed any VC and you left them in the market place within a week they'd be collected. So then you'd find out who collected them and then you'd go back and probably get some more suspects because they'd all be collected by their family members?

How do you define

33:00 **suspects?**

Well, they were supposed to have various criteria by the fact that they'd done something earlier or they were in a VC area. At one stage, after 1972 I think it was, every house in Vietnam was allowed to put up a flag, either a VC flag or a national flag. And when you went down on the Delta every village was full of VC flags so that meant that they were VC

33:30 suspects by definition, the fact that they were flying a VC Flag. So then you'd grab them and on interrogation you'd find out whether or not they, or family members, were members of the VC.

Can you explain to me an operation that would involve grabbing them that you were involved in?

Yes, one place I went out down the Delta and the family gave me their bed for a night. The bed was a foot

34:00 thick plank and they gave me mosquito coils and everything. And they woke me up at midnight and we went out and we had to go for about 2 hours and when we got there, there was a farm. We passed one farmer - - and I've always been sorry about this – he had his oxen. Well who wanders around in the middle of nowhere with his oxen at 2 o clock in the morning, especially a farmer who's in no hurry to go anywhere?. And I think he

34:30 was tying a sled of weapons but the Americans weren't very fussy about it so we let him go anyway.

Were you in vehicles?

No we were on foot.

And wearing black pyjamas?

Yes. And anyway the next fellow we came to he was making an early morning cup of tea which he invited us to join without much choice. And a little bit further on was the

35:00 target. But unfortunately when we went to the target it turns out that we should have gone to a target a little bit further on than that. So instead of getting 5 suspects we only got a couple. And that's the business of having the impact interrogation where you speak to the first couple and say "Well if you've got any friends in the near neighbourhood". Well, a couple of yards further on was a hut with the other 3 people in it.

What techniques were you employing to extract that information? Was it

35:30 **forthcoming without any threat to them?**

No, there was impact interrogation. The ARVN they had what you call the water treatment. They'd put a cloth over somebody's face and pour water down to make them choke. Well that really gives you a stomach ache but not much else and that wasn't encouraged. The normal interrogation was you say, "Well, we've got you. Do you want to go to jail or do you want to go into the

36:00 ARVN?" You know, you're a civilian hanging around here and you should either be in the army or what are you doing – so if they hadn't got a reasonable explanation then you'd take them back to one of these, the DIOCC [District Intelligence and Operations Coordination Centres] or the PIC [Province Interrogation Program] or one of the others and leave it to them.

And who would make the decision as to whether or not that was a reasonable excuse or reason for being there?

Well that was based on where we were and the information that we had but we worked mainly on the

36:30 information that we had. We didn't just go out rounding people up left right and centre. And if you got into a fire fight with anybody, well they were fair game. If they were firing at you then they can't be very friendly, they shouldn't have had weapons anyway.

Who decided whether or not they needed to be taken?

Well we were advisors so we worked with the PAU [Population Activities Unit] leader, he was the one who made the decision.

37:00 And if we had any argument about that then we'd wait until we got back to the province headquarters and say "Well, we don't think there was anything wrong with him" but then how did we know anyway because we were third country people.

As advisors would you ever do any of the actual interrogating?

We'd be there while it was going on. We could ask the questions but then we'd need an interpreter anyway because we didn't

37:30 speak Vietnamese.

The two fellows that you picked up when you ended up having to go back for the other five anyway, what questions were you asking them that you needed answers to?

Well first of all are you VC or are you government? And they'd say, "Of course we're not VC". Well then they've got to do something to prove that they're not VC. If we found a weapon or a VC flag in their area or something like that. We didn't go out there without information in the first place.

38:00 When this operation, this particular one that I was telling you about. That was all planned before I ever got there. I just flew in and went out on the operation with them. And then we got back about noon, I remember, and I walked into this villa and I opened the fridge and there was what I thought was a glass of water and I gulped half of it down and found it was straight gin. But up

38:30 in the Montegnard area, the same, we'd have the locals with us and they would know if there were any strangers in the area. The Montagnards aren't, they're not like the Aborigines, they don't much go walk about. Some of them do, depending on the particular tribes and they'd know somebody there who didn't really belong there. The Montagnard villages all had bamboo palisades and spikes around their villages so they were pretty well

39:00 self-contained. If you wanted to do a co-ordinance search then you took the local district chief or the local Montegnard chief and he would know all the locals that were there or who shouldn't be there.

These operations of retrieving information from suspects would happen roughly how often?

39:30 Well, APRU which would have – they were in groups of 6 and you might have 3 or 4 in a province, they might go out once a week or once a fortnight. I remember once we were going up from Vung Tau to the task force at Nui Dat and every morning the Quang Kan the military police used to travel up to do rifle practice at

40:00 the capital - just before you got to task force. And Charlie got fed up with all this business of never establishing a pattern so Charlie Command detonated a mine in the middle of the road, it was a bitumen road. And when we got there, there was one truck racing towards us blowing their horns and screaming and yelling. When we arrived at the position there was a big hole in the road and there were about

40:30 ten or fifteen dead Quong Kan. and just off to the side of the road in the paddy field there were some survivors and they had a few of the local farmers and they were giving them the water treatment. And we were a convoy going up to Nui Dat and there was another convoy coming down so all the soldiers got annoyed and you know they said "You're not going to do this, you're not going to torture the

41:00 local farmers". And I said. "If you want to have a full-scale battle just try to stop them. They have just lost ten of their companions by the VC and they've got some suspects. Just let them go their own way or be prepared to have a fight". There was no point in our people fighting the Vietnamese who were ostensibly on our side. So I said "If you

41:30 don't like it just turn your back and go the other way because you're not going to stop it and they're prepared to shoot anybody trying to stop them doing what they are. If they get a confession or not, it's not really our affair". But that's the sort of thing we'd get caught in the middle of. And in the end I stood in the road and directed the traffic. They said, "Well what if there's another bomb". I said "It's very unlikely there's going to be another bomb because the first one was command detonated anyway". Just outside our camp we found two, 1. 55

42:00 millimetre shells.

Tape 10

00:30 **Can you take us through your experience of the Tet offensive in '68?**

Well we were in the special activities training centre or we used to go out there every morning. I lived there most of the time.

Who's we?

01:00 There were two American civilians. There was one fellow who is a three time loser really – he was a Yugoslav, I think he'd been in the Bay of Pigs, I think he'd be in Laos and this was his third effort. And then his offsider who'd been in Korea and got a commission. So he thought an officer was better than an NCO so he had a face lift. And he was married to a beautiful little Egyptian lady and he went off on leave and beat her up to such an extent he had to take her to Japan for

01:30 plastic surgery. But he was useless, he was supposed to be chief of training so he got the sack and I ended up as chief of operations and chief of training. But they lived in Vung Tau, in the villa at Vung Tau which was five miles away from the ALSG, Australian Logistic Support Group. And when Tet started

02:00 we used to go out there during the day and then we'd go back to the villa at night just in case anything happened. But we had a 120 man Nung guard force and they were left in charge of the camp. Bu Rai, although that was taken by the VC, that was another 3 or 4 miles further north towards the task force. So they just ignored us anyway so we were probably the most peaceful place in Vietnam. Tam Ki, my old place, the locals sprang

02:30 up and really chewed the VC up. The VC thought that was an easy picking.

What did the Australian command or the Australians that you reported to know of Operation Phoenix and the things that you were involved in?

The General, A.L. McDonald, he knew about it and general, the one who has just died,

03:00 Daley, General Daley, he knew about it but they didn't ask too many questions?

Why is that, why didn't they ask questions?

Well, they thought if the Australians heard about it they'd get all sorts of ideas about the CIA and what it was. It gets back to the people we were dealing with. Colby was the head of it at one stage, he was head of Phoenix. And there was a chap called Li Torch Koma - he shouldn't be there, but to turn around and barrack for Ho Chi Minh and reckon what a wonderful fellow he is, they've got no idea. And if you haven't got any idea, then it's just best to stay out of it. As I said, when they warned us about not wearing uniform it was an insult for a soldier or a sailor or anybody to be told he shouldn't wear a uniform. A uniform is something to be proud of not something to be ashamed of.

03:30 You shouldn't be there but to turn around and barrack for Ho Chi Minh and reckon what a wonderful fellow he is, they've got no idea. And if you haven't got any idea, then it's just best to stay out of it. As I said, when they warned us about not wearing uniform it was an insult for a soldier or a sailor or anybody to e told he shouldn't wear a uniform. A uniform is something to be proud of not something to be ashamed of.

04:00 So he settled for the briefing which shocked the Americans a bit because they were making their points and trying to leave with a better record than they'd started with.

What did you tell them in that briefing?

Well the fact that these people that had been trained down at Vung Tau to come back and go out in the field were reluctant to do so. They were only civilians and all of a sudden they were dumped out virtually in the middle of VC territory.

04:30 I remember coming back from Tan Vin which was our northern district. And I walked in down off the road and I got about a hundred yards and they said "Don't go any further". And I said "Why not?" And they said "That's VC territory". So this was in the one village where you had VC living in the village with the locals. And these people were only civilians who'd been given a couple of months training. Some of them were given weapons training, the others were census grievance and supposed to be

05:00 teaching farming and digging wells and things. Well, they were basically lazy. They always said that the North Vietnamese works hard and doesn't eat very much, the South Vietnamese doesn't do much and eats a lot. So that's basically the difference between the north and the south. So even in the same village you'd get VC and nobody could really touch them.

Militarily how did you feel your contribution or the contribution of

05:30 **Operation Phoenix was going?**

Well, we were only aimed at people who we had information on. You said, "Well, where did we get this information?" Same as anywhere, you'd get informers, people would leave notes in the letter box and other people wouldn't like other people. There was a national police, he was a member of USAID [US Agency for International Development] and he had a file on everybody in

06:00 the province, hopefully reasonably accurate. So if we had any suspects we'd go to him and check it out with him and if he thought they were reasonably suspect, then we could target them. We didn't just target people haphazardly you worked on information.

Were you ever forced to consult your own conscience?

I didn't really have a conscience, I was doing a job.

Nevertheless you are confronted with decisions that are affecting other people's

06:30 **lives. How are you maintaining some moral balance in all this?**

Well, I did what I thought was right. The same reason I went to Vietnam. People said we were wrong going to Vietnam but I think I was right going to Vietnam. The people we were working with, I had people I didn't like, but I still had to work with them. And I didn't adopt the Vietnamese attitude. I mean

07:00 if they could do something to spite you, it's in their nature to do it. They can't really help themselves you see. So hopefully we had a different outlook.

Operation Phoenix was eventually wound up. Looking back on it what's your feeling about your involvement in it?

Again, it's the people that are working it. The advisors, some of them had a

07:30 cowboy attitude and others worked more by the book and of course once you get the cowboys going and you get people who like killing just for the sake of it, well then you run into trouble. Part of the job, once in a while down in the Delta you'd go into a VC village and we'd go in and the next minute we'd have RPGs [rifle propelled grenades] fired at us and we'd call in helicopters. The helicopters were shooting up the village and we'd let the fellows go and there'd

08:00 be a bun fight between two opposing sides - our fellows letting off steam. They didn't go there to start a fight but they were going to do a reconnaissance of a village or to try to get prisoners but they weren't equipped and they weren't meant to fight. But when you've got these odd people, as I said, where you had murderers and thieves and anybody, they were people who weren't in the ARVN and

08:30 they had motivation. Hopefully some of them were patriotic otherwise they just had to be careful as to what they were doing.

Did you have any other Australian colleagues that were working on Operation Phoenix?

Yes, there were some there. The fellow who replace me at Hoi An for example. As I said, Hamasaki only wanted me, release the other fellow and he wanted me to go two days a week. He ended up full-time there.

09:00 No, there were about half a dozen officers over that period of time.

How were you reporting your activities to the Australians?

We reported back to the Americans, we didn't have anything to do with the Australians. Out of courtesy we'd let them know. I remember the senior fellow down at the Delta, he said, "You were in my province last week and you didn't call on me". I said, "I didn't see any reason to call on you. You're not my boss I don't work for you, I work for the Americans". They'd say to me

09:30 "You work for the Americans". I'd say, "I work with the Americans".

How were you getting on with the Americans?

Well I had good relations, but when I was in 2 Corps, I was at Pleiku for a while and when I left there the Australian who took over from me he said "Oh, you were PNG [persona non grata] in 2 Corps". And I went to my boss and I said "Why aren't I allowed into 2 Corps?"

10:00 And it developed that the fellow who used to run a bus out to the airport and pick people up, he was actually the senior fellow and I didn't like him because he used to sit down to breakfast with a fried egg and a cigar and smoke one and have a mouthful. But for some reason he took a dislike to me and said to Saigon that I was PNG. Well, I never went back there anyway I had no reason to go back but I still don't know why I was because I'd never done

10:30 anything to upset him, I'd never even had a cross word with him but once your PNG they don't want to have anything to do with you.

And this was the Australian?

No, the Americans. He was a fellow who used to run boats to Cuba. He was in the Bay of Pigs and he was a bit of a pig himself. One of the old hands, you know, the old timers.

You were there during the escalation phase and first going in there. By '68/69

11:00 **there was a degree of opposition to the war in Australia. What did you know of that and how did you feel about that?**

We knew it was on but it didn't affect us. You know, what people do in Australia – the thing that annoyed me, they had a big demonstration in Adelaide and Brigadier McKenna was the Chief of Police at the time, and I remember apologising to him on behalf of the yobs who put on the demonstration. It's one

11:30 thing to say you shouldn't be there, but to turn around and barrack for Ho Chi Minh and reckon what a wonderful fellow he is, they've got no idea. And if you haven't got any idea then it's just best to stay out

of it. As I said, when they warned us about not wearing uniform it was an insult for a soldier or a sailor or anybody to be told he shouldn't wear a uniform. A uniform is something to be proud of, not something to be ashamed of. And I never stopped wearing it all the time I ever went on

12:00 leave and travelled up and down.

But in Vietnam you were in civilian clothes when you were doing these jobs.

Yes.

How did you feel about that?

Well, there were lots of civilians there anyway so it didn't make any difference. I was presented with a little 25 calibre pistol which looked like a watch really and it's a matter of protecting your back. I used to drive in and out with an

12:30 open jeep all the time or a Toyota – I had a Toyota sedan. The only thing that ever happened to me – once I'd gone to the PX and a little lad reached in and grabbed my shopping bag. I only had 50cents worth of stuff in it but that's the sort of thing that could happen.

How did you feel working for the CIA?

Well, if I'd have known I'd never have done it but then it got back to the people I was working with. And the people I worked with in Saigon

13:00 you know, they weren't cowboys. We had one fellow who was a card-carrying Ku Klux Klan member. He was logistics. And we bred some dogs and he wanted one just to be savage. I said "Well, you're not getting one of these dogs, these are bred to be friendly". He was quite proud of the fact that he had this Ku Klux Klan. And the other fellow, who was logistics again, he brought

13:30 over one of those 'do it yourself gyrocopters' or something or other. He had visions of flying that around there but I don't think he ever got the thing assembled. They had these funny ideas.

What did you make of meeting these strange people?

I just learned to work with them. We had another old boy who was killing himself - he always used to chew snuff. Instead of sniffing it he would chew it and he was going to end up missing a cheek because the cancer would get right

14:00 through. But he was one of the old-timers. And then there was another fellow called Luigi Kineen, well before the Geneva accords, he went to Hanoi dressed up with all his ribbons and medals and everything, dressed up as a liaison officer. And he wasn't a liaison officer at all, he was CIA and he countered the North Vietnamese or the Vietminh they were in those days. He got a run-down on all their equipment

14:30 and everything. And when I ran into him in Vietnam he'd been expelled to a place which he called Fuerba because he went to the hotel that they owned and they had some big ornamental pots up on the fifth floor and he tipped those into the courtyard. And he was called up before the boss and the boss said, "Well if you were sitting here and I was sitting there, what would you?" And the bloke said, "I'd expel myself to Fuerba". And he said "Right, that's where you're going" and it was way out in the back blocks.

15:00 I remember he cadged a ride with us. We were going by helicopter down from Pleiku down to Ban-me-thuot and he said, "Can I get a ride but don't tell anybody, I'm not allowed out of my province". He was a nice old boy and he'd been in OSS in World War II. Luigi, he was a Corsican originally, American but Corsican.

And he was CIA?

Yes.

Did you have any close friends at this time?

In Vietnam?

15:30 No, this John Hartley, he was the sort of adjutant at Vung Tau, but I didn't have anybody apart from that. The people I worked with at the Special Activities Training Centre they were just acquaintances really. The colonel I was a friend of his. He was a Marine Colonel, he'd been in the Chosen Reservoir in Korea.

How were you staying in touch with Australia while you were doing these operations?

I just used to send letters home. I had tapes in those days.

16:00 In those days they were bigger tapes but later on I got cassette sort of tape and I used to send those home. But I was fortunate I worked in 36 of the 43 provinces. And I took the CO around the traps once and he said "I've got to wait 2 hours at aerial port to get a flight" And he said, "You seem to be get aircraft whenever you want them". And I said, "Well life wasn't meant to be easy". That was the catch cry at the time.

16:30 But all we had to do was say we wanted to fly and they would fly you anywhere, no questions asked.

What credentials did you have to provide?

I had extended travel orders which permitted me to travel in civilian clothes. So if I went by aerial port I'd just produce those. Otherwise when I went to Air America, I just booked in at the office and told them where I wanted to go.

And those orders essentially told people what bout you?

That I was entitled to wear civilian

17:00 clothes.

What did that mean then?

Well, they didn't know. We all had travel orders with our names and numbers on them and an asterisk alongside our name that said that we were permitted to travel in civilian clothes. I had my own version of a uniform. It started off being green but after they'd been washed, they came from Okinawa, and they developed into a grey. And I was picked up by the Marine Military police in Da Nang once so I just

17:30 produced my Australian ID Card. I had two ID Cards, I had an American one and an Australian one. They talk about how munificent the Americans are – my ID specifically says I'm not entitled to PX privileges. So if I turned up with an American ID card they wouldn't let me into the PX. But if I turned up with an Australian one they would. Until later on and they said, "Oh no, you've got your own you've got to go back there".

18:00 Same as I had an American licence. I had to learn to get an American licence. I had to have somebody over my shoulder telling me the answers because I couldn't remember all the traffic rules and things.

Why was that?

Well to drive a civilian vehicle. I remember when I went down I was the only one allowed to sit for promotion exams because I'd been there for so long. And I turned up after the gates had all shut as the ALSG [Australian Logistics Support Group] and I did my

18:30 exams and I wanted to get out at 10 o clock at night and there was an awful fuss. Nobody was ever allowed out then. They said, "Where are you going?" I said "I'm going back to camp, five miles up the road". This was terrible.

You applied for an extension of your time there?

Several extensions.

Why were you wanting to extend your time there?

Well I was just getting my feet wet, I was just getting used to things. In Vietnam you go for 12 months normally. The first 3 months you're

19:00 looking over your shoulder to see if someone's going to throw a bomb or shoot you. Hopefully, the next six months you're into things. The last 3 months you're looking over your shoulder and looking around to see whether you're going to make it to the last and they count the days down. When people got to Vietnam they'd have a picture with numbers on it and they cross it off down from 365 to zero.

19:30 Twice I went down to the airport to see people off and that was it, I couldn't do that any more. I didn't want to go home but I couldn't see the aircraft off. It was just like part of me was going home and I wasn't on it.

Yet you didn't want to leave?

How do you explain that to yourselves?

Well, I was doing a job. As long as I was doing a job and I was getting paid for it and it was tax free. I was a Captain and I was getting Captain's pay.

Were you doing it just for the money?

Well that had lot to do with it I

20:00 suppose. And then the other thing – I went to Singapore, I went to Hong Kong, I went to Okinawa, I went to Taipei, unofficially. And there was a stack of paper that thick because I had to go to the Australian Ambassador to explain that one away because they said, "You got into the country without papers, you can get out the same way". But it happened to coincide with the double 10, the 10th of October which is a big national day in Taiwan.

20:30 I just flew over out Chu Lai with the American Air Force and never thought about it. It was when I got there I was supposed to have had a visa or a passport or something or other.

What were you going there for?

Just for a few days. A chap invited me to go with him, the plane was going so we just hopped on.

R&R?

R&R.

What did you get up to on R&R?

I travelled around the railways in Taipei. I went up to the north and ended up watching a fellow playing

21:00 tennis. I got sick of that and came back on the train. He invited me to go up, he was a rich Chinaman, a young fellow, he said "Come up". I went up on the train and all they were going to do is play tennis and that's no good to me so I caught the train back to Taipei. But the other places, you know, in Hong Kong you went out to the new territories and went to the shops. In Singapore I went to the Chief Engineer of the British Army and had dinner with him

21:30 because of what I was doing. And the Australian, he heard about it and he was writing a book on low intensity warfare or something or other, so we went out. I remember we had egg and bacon pie for tea. And he picked me up in a little Mini. And his wife said, "I can never catch up with it; he's going over to be the Chief Engineer of the British Army which entitles him to VIP travel but he doesn't get it until we get there. And in the meantime I've got to travel business class, or one lower".

22:00 You know, she was either travelling economy class or one up or something or other. It was all very laid back with the British.

Eventually you must have realised it was time to go home. What were the circumstances towards the end of your tour?

Well, my family – my mother and father had died and my sister had died, both sisters had died. I'd sold my house, I had a place up at Blackwood so really I had no

22:30 roots to come back to.

When did your mum and dad pass away?

63.

And your sisters?

65. My elder sister only died a couple of years ago but the other one died around about that time anyway. She was in a home. So I had nothing to hold me in Australia particularly. And as I said, the job in Vietnam, I could fly wherever I went, I could do what I liked. I used to go into the Wung Sat, into the

23:00 swamp places, you know, and go with the junk fleet. I went out with the navy to the demilitarised zone and went out on destroyers. It was all in connection with either time that you had off or time that connected with your work.

What would you be doing for work on the destroyers or going out with the destroyers?

Well, we went out to the destroyer because it was shelling the Long Hai mountains in Phuoc Tuy province so we went out there to liaise with

23:30 them, flew out there. Picked up some fellows from base and they got a terrific shock. They landed in the middle of nowhere and picked us up and flew us out there and they still didn't know what it was all about. Then the commander of 7 Battalion, he let me have his Possum [helicopter] every day for a flight and he wouldn't even let his own company commanders have it. And I used to fly over the Long Hais and do reconnaissance there.

You enjoyed flying around?

Oh yes, especially in helicopters.

24:00 **What's the advantage of a helicopter in that particular warfare?**

Well, there are no doors in a helicopter – although I've got a fear of heights when I'm strapped into a helicopter I don't have that worry. But when I sat in the gunners seat in a dust-off helicopter which didn't have a gun to lean on, it all came back to me. I practically pushed the engine backwards I think I had my feet pressed so hard on the

24:30 floor and my back against the wall. Because in a normal gun ship you've got a gun sitting in front of you to lean on. But the dust-offs don't have guns so I was just sitting in the death seat I think they call it which it felt like to me.

Have you been in a helicopter since you left the army?

No.

With all this massive support and

25:00 **fire power yet the war really was not exactly going in the favour of the allies - how did you feel about that?**

Well I went out with these local people one day and we had casualties and we ended up – we were on Highway 1 which ran from Da Nang down to Tam Ki and we got a little boat and paddled across there

25:30 and hailed the first bus. We just pulled the bus up and loaded the casualties on that and then we got back to base and I told them about it and they said, "Well why didn't you call in the dust-off?". And I said "I didn't know we had access to dust-offs". And we didn't have the same frequency radios.

Sorry, can we just back up a little bit – what caused the casualties again, just go over that?

Oh, we got into a bit of a fire fight.

26:00 We went across – they had a coastal strip. You had the beach and then the coastal strip which was virtually sand hills and low scrub for about two miles and then you had Highway 1 before you got to the paddy fields on the other side. And we went over there and got into a fire fight and took a couple of casualties. And the only way we could get them out was on the roads because we couldn't call in a dust-off helicopter because we were civilians you see. So we just

26:30 pulled the driver up and said you've got a couple of passengers and dropped them off at the hospital in Tam Ki. And then later on they said "Well, if you'd told us we could have supplied a dust-off". Well nobody suggested it because the American civilian I was working with he didn't now the system anyway. Another time, we had a 50 calibre machine gun which the fellow had obtained by means unknown. We flew out to a Special Forces

27:00 camp and swapped it for a couple of M16s I think. Anyway at the Tam Ki, the McVee compound, they had one but they didn't have the swivel that operates it. So without it, it was useless. And when the American officer found out about it he went to my boss and asked him for it and he said "No, it's mine you can't have it". So he said "Well, we'll attack your place and take it". So I

27:30 went to him and said "Look, he's leaving in a week, just leave it with me and you can have it" which he did. But you've got people fighting amongst themselves, you know, petty little things like that. It wasn't going to be any good to us. It was very unlikely we were going to be attacked and we wouldn't need a 50 calibre. We had a Nung Guard Force of 20 anyway, mercenaries, to look after us. But people are territorial, they like they're own little patches, they keep it and nobody else is allowed to have it.

28:00 **That was the US Forces?**

Yes. But we also had, over on this coastal strip there was a river running alongside of that so we armed the locals there with rifles and we provided a small craft for them. But I'm pretty sure that that was a local sort of internal squabble between themselves. Our mob were bigger than the others but if any VC

28:30 boats tried to offload weapons, their job was to shoot them up. Occasionally a coaster would come in a couple or three hundred tonnes full of ammunition.

What did you know of the bombing in Cambodia at that time?

That was later, we didn't have anything to do with it. I worked over on the Cambodian border but that was before the Americans went in there.

How were you

29:00 **feeling about the state of the war and your involvement in it at that time?**

It was just continuing day by day. Our particular place was 50 miles away from capital cities or Da Nang and we were just dealing with the local guerrillas really, the NVA.The Marines came in there in a big rush one day and ran into a battle that lasted about a week and then it just fizzled out and the guerrillas went off

29:30 into the hills and the marines went off up to the demilitarised zone, they had been down at Chu Lai.

Did you regard yourself as an Australian soldier or an American soldier?

Australian. I wouldn't be American.

But was this a soldierly activity in your book. How did you feel about your role that had evolved for you?

Well, it was para-military because I was responsible for the

30:00 3, 0000. I had not only to pay them and feed them and clothe them and bury them but I also had to protect them. So in that group of 39 there were probably 15 who were para-military who operated weapons to protect the other crowd.

That was in your first tour was it?

Yes. And then later on after I finished with RVN I went to this reaction battalion

30:30 under this old con merchant and they really didn't want to do anything. They were a regional force which is one step down from the regular ARVN and below that a popular force which are never popular. Then at one stage, overnight, they said, "All you regional force are now Rangers". It was like saying all of a sudden to 4th Battalion, over in New South Wales, "You're now commandos". They're no different

31:00 today than they were tomorrow, but they've got a flash [smart] name and they wear a patch that says they're commandos. But overnight in Vietnam they suddenly became Rangers. They weren't one bit better than they ever had been and they weren't much good to start with. But then again it was for the advisors to train them. When we were down on the beach after we had cleared Route 44, I found they were using grenades for fishing. So I took all their grenades away from them. Which didn't make me at

31:30 all popular, but I'm an Australian taxpayer. And at one stage they asked me if I wanted to get some Bren guns [light machineguns] when I was up in the Highlands. And I said, "Oh yes". They said, "We've got some Canadian Bren guns would you like them?" And I said, "Well, how much". "It's $250 each". I said "Well, I'm representing the American tax payer why should I be paying American tax to buy Canadian guns when we don't need them". The same when they wanted to develop

32:00 our jungle and swamp training area, because if we won the war the Vietnamese could see, and including the liaison officer I had from joint general headquarters, it was going to be a beautiful tourist strip. So they said, "We'll bituminise the whole of this area for 6 million dollars. Of course it will come out of your allocation". I said, "I don't have any allocation and I don't want it bitumenised. Leave it as it is, that's what it's meant to be, it's a training area, it's not for some

32:30 fly in the sky tourist thing when the war ends which it's never going to end anyway". But that's the way they try to get to you. If I'd said yes, they'd have had the bitumen strippers down there in no time.

When you were with Operation Phoenix how were you funding the operations? How were you getting the cash to do all this?

I didn't have any money. When I was up in the highlands my interpreter came to me one day and said, "Have you got any money?" And I said "Yes, I've got 600

33:00 Pee, which is about five dollars. And he sneered at me and he said "I've got a revolving fund of 20, 000". Well he didn't tell me, nobody told me. But all he had to do was get a scrap of paper with a signature on it and they'd reimburse him. So his money, I had nothing to do with paying him. I paid them, in Tam Ki, the revolutionary development. They'd fly in a couple of boxes of C-

33:30 rations full of money and I'd pay them for that. But that came from Saigon and all I had to do was get receipts. But then they had ghost payments. You had to be watching those. So I had to insist on – somebody got the money and they signed for it otherwise once people had died they'd be signing for that and they'd have 20 or 30 people who just couldn't come in today and they'd pick up the money. So my Christmas bill was I think

34:00 30 million piastas, up from about normal 18 or something like that.

What were the losses of the people you were training with or working with like? Were they ever caught or killed by the VC?

Yes, when they were out guarding, especially when they were guarding the rice crop. They'd be out there spending the night and the VC would come in and do a raid and just kill a couple and chase the rest away. Then we'd pay their burial

34:30 funds. We always paid 3000 piastas, I think it was, to bury a Vietnamese. They'd get very upset if a body disappeared. I remember once a fellow was caught breaking curfew and they shot him, the task force shot him on the beach. They didn't object to that but his body went into the American system and disappeared and there was a terrible fuss for about a month. Because it's part of their religion that they've got to not only be buried but be buried whole. So when a

35:00 whole body disappears, it's a big fuss.

In your last tour there, how did you come to leave Vietnam?

When this John Hartley took over and was wounded and I had to take over, well I was only there two weeks and I was due to come home anyway. Then the last thing that happened – they took a patrol into the Long Hais mountains and when one of the fellows was directing the helicopter in, the

35:30 VC shot it down and it landed on one fellow and incinerated him and burned another fellow up and damaged the air crew and they got them out. Then my last job before I went home was to identify the body at the morgue at Ton San Nhut.

This was in 69?

No, this was in 71. And they said, "Could you identify him?" Well, the

36:00 helicopter had not only landed on him but the rotors had chewed him up and he was a terrible mess and he'd been burned as well. I said, "Well I don't think he's our Mother, but he's the one". And at the same time this other fellow was incinerated. He was a medic and he was always out at Nui Dat on the airstrip.

And he went out every time a dust-off [helicopter mission] went out. And his family wanted them to mount an operation with a bucket and spade to get DNA.And I

36:30 wrote to the fellow who became the governor general, Hayden. I wrote and I said, “I identified this fellow, Blackhurst, and there was no possibility of error between this and Gillespie the other fellow”. And they wrote back and they said, “You don’t know what you’re talking about, mind your own business”. So I wrote back and I said, “If you read my letter you’ll know that I did know what I was talking about. We got the FBI in to identify him through his dental records”.

Why were

37:00 **you in the situation of having to identify these people?**

Because I’d taken over from the fellow who was wounded - John Hartley went up in the helicopter and one bullet went through everything except his heart. So they had to have somebody to replace him and I was due to go home anyway.

And you were replacing him in what role?

Senior Advisor. I’d been the Senior Advisor for 10 months but I got the sack because there was a change of CO and the new one wouldn’t have any dealings with me.

37:30 So he was obliged to take me because I was the only one available for about the next two weeks.

And at this stage you’d left your role in the Operation Phoenix?

No, that was back in ’68. I left there in ’68, I’m talking about ’71 now.

All right you’ve gone back to ’71. When did you go back on that tour?

After I’d been to Kashmir. I went in ’70, ’71 back to Vietnam. I was an instructor at Canungra for a few

38:00 months. The general said to me, “I can’t get you back until May’70”. And then he rang me up and he said “I’ve got you on the next flight to Vietnam in February” so I went back early.

So you went 3 times to Vietnam?

Yes. I spent 3 ½ years all together in two separate bundles.

38:30 **When you were finished with Operation Phoenix. how did that wind up for you?**

Was called to go to external affairs, to go to Kashmir. . They said I had to have a holiday. And I said “I thought I was having a holiday in Vietnam”. They said “No, you can have 12 months in Kashmir and then you can come back” which is what I did. So I was ordered out of Vietnam and I didn’t want to. I didn’t want to go to Kashmir at that stage because I was just getting my feet wet in

39:00 Vietnam, you know, I was just getting the hang of things. And they said “Oh no, you go to Kashmir”. They didn’t have anybody to go, so that’s why I went there. And then I had more on the job training for Kashmir.

Did you turn to Australia in between Kashmir and Australia?

Ten Days. I’d been in South Australia like a rubber ball. I went up to Woodside and I was there for a briefing and they gave me a book and they said, “That’s all

39:30 we know about it”. So I stayed over night and came back and caught the next flight to Sydney and then to Bangkok and then to Karachi.

Why the keenness to continue the overseas service?

Well, Kashmir was a place to see until you got there. I wanted to go to the Middle East and they said they couldn’t let me go there until 1972. And I said, “That’s all right, I’ll go in ‘72”.

40:00 But then when 1972 came the old boy [senior officer] had retired and the new fellow said – I said, “I’m on the wrong deal, I’m only full time CMF, only here by yearly increments”. He said, “You can stay for 10 years”. Well the new fellow said, “Oh no, that’s all changed now. You can’t go to the Middle East because you’re over the age. I’ve just brought an age limit in”. I pointed out to him that the fellow he sent was two years older than I was and

40:30 was a useless twit [fool] who’d never climbed a mountain and I thought I’d be a better representative of Australia. Well, I didn’t get to the Middle East but I let him know what a liar he was.

Tape 11

00:30 **Can you take us through your service in Kashmir and what happened while you were there?**

Yes, well I made the mistake of going to the Indian and

01:00 Pakistani Embassies to get visas which I didn't need. You get a diplomatic passport which is practically useless. When I got to Rawalpindi, just as I arrived Mr Bhutto who was Prime Minister at one stage and eventually was hanged and his daughter took over, he was attempting a coup and he turned up and there was tear gas everywhere so that was my introduction to

01:30 Pakistan. Anyway, the headquarters in the summer was in Srinagar on the Indian side and then in winter at Rawalpindi on the Pakistan side. So I went to the headquarters and the chief military observer was an old Chilean called Gazala,

02:00 we used to call him Louis Banana. And he'd started off as a major 18 years before and he'd got promoted up through the UN so he was an honorary Lieutenant General. But he used to spy on everybody and he told everybody when they arrived that all my drivers are spies for me and they'll say everything that you say that's wrong. And my first posting was to Rawala Kot and I noticed in the paper today that the fellow who tried to assassinate

02:30 the president of Pakistan and blew himself up, he was from Rawala Kot. Which is at about 5, 000 ft and it's about two hours' drive from Rawalpindi. Anyway, I was going up there and I passed this convoy of staff cars and I found out afterwards there was the CMO [Chief Military Officer] , who was the Lieutenant General, the Pakistani

03:00 corps commander, a Lieutenant General, the divisional commander, a Major general, and they'd all gone to Rawala Kot because the Swedish observer up there had knocked on the door of the Brigade Commander and thrust a congealed fried egg under his nose at 5 o clock one morning and said, "How do you expect me to eat this?" And the fellow said "Well I don't really, why?" This is the food that we're

03:30 given. So they'd had this conference of four generals just over a fried egg; so that was my introduction to the UN. It was just the start of winter so I went to Rawala Kot and the jobs there were going out and checking on violations of the cease fire line. Virtually you had a number of posts and you had to go out and verify that they didn't exceed the regulation number of sangas [shelters] or

04:00 tents. And then they wanted people to go up into the high country at Tajil which is at 8, 500 ft and to do that you had to get permission from the medical officer at Srinagar. After I'd done my winter at Rawala Kot, I went down to Jamu, the capital, the southern capital of Jamu and Kashmir and I was there for a few weeks and then I

04:30 applied for this job up into the high country. To get to Srinagar I had to go across the cease-fire line, up to Rawalpindi, spend a day going up along the cease-fire line, overnight at one of the stations, and then cross over to Baramula and I eventually got to Srinagar at 2 o clock on the Saturday afternoon and the fellow was playing tennis and he said "What do you

05:00 want?" And I said, "I've come for a medical". And he looked at me and said. "You look all right to me" and then went on playing tennis. So I stayed the night – went to the pictures and stayed on the houseboat. I got a vehicle which took me from 8 o clock in the morning to 8 at night to end up back at Jamu where I'd started from 2 days earlier. So then I flew up to Kargil and there was a brigade headquarters there.

05:30 And I went up with an old Swede and he said, "Well, I'll take my fishing gear and we'll do some trout fishing". We had 80 posts to do, we were there for six months and when we left I think we still had 30 left. And he went with a damaged heart because he'd climbed too high too soon and was sent home early. Anyway, again we used to go and verify these posts that they weren't allowed to

06:00 have any more than. And the bone of contention was a place called Shek Ma Top which was 12,400 feet and the Pakistanis had been on it for 2 ½ years and refused to move. And every time there was any dispute they'd have a joint party from each country and a survey team from the UN to come to an agreement. And they never could agree on this Shek Ma Top. So one day the old brigadier who'd been the military

06:30 attaché in Moscow for 3 ½ years, with a pretty switched on OC , he called me up and he said "Len" (I didn't even know he knew my name). He said, "You know what I've got and you know what they've got and your CMO [Chief Medical Officer] promised me that we would be there 3 weeks ago". He said, "If we're not there by next week we'll take it". So I got on the phone, they refused to talk to me because they said it wasn't safe. So I went down to Srinagar and the

07:00 Australian was the 2IC [Second in Command] and he'd been there for so long that the old general held it over his head that if he wasn't careful he'd send him home. So he had the Australian running after him all the time. And I said, "I want to be paraded to the General". He said "Oh no, he's farewelling somebody out in the beer garden and you won't be able to see him until Monday. I said, "On Monday you might have a war on your hands

07:30 because the general's broken his promise". "No, you can't see him until Monday". So I fronted up on Monday and I said "I've been told by the Indian Brigadier that you promised them you'd be there 3 weeks ago". And I said, "You have broken your word as a member of the UN and you've made me break my word as a member of UN and Australia. He said, "I could send you home". I said, "I'm ready to go, "

but, I said, “You’ve broken your word, you’re not a man of

08:00 honour”. He said, “I tell you something, the Pakistanis up there are what we call Mujahideen [Muslim fighters] and they are locally recruited and they feel it here”. And I said, “I’ll tell you something, the Indians up there are locally recruited, they feel it here, and they are in the right and you are in the wrong”. The following week I went in and put the Indians in position. Then they argued

08:30 about the map. The map was 1896 upgraded to 1923, photo-enlarged from one to 250, 000 to one to 50, 000 so the ceasefire line which had been drawn with a pentel was about 5 miles wide you see. And the things that broke the rules of the ceasefire, you weren’t allowed to go within 2 kilometres, you weren’t allowed to cross it and you weren’t allowed to fire over it. So the Indians wouldn’t accept

09:00 the reading. The real reading down where my base camp was, at 8, 000 feet instead of up at 12, 400. And I said, “Well, that’s the map reference, the UN won’t accept your reading of a metric map and if you’re not prepared”. They said, “Well, we won’t accept that”. So I said, “Right, I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll write you a letter telling you that on our map the position is

09:30 whatever the map reference is but it does not agree with the UN map, however, your map is correct”. But I said “If you ever let the UN see this they’ll deny my right to write it and they’ll deny all knowledge of it”. So somewhere in the 15th Indian Army Headquarters is a letter signed by me to that affect. And we know it’s true, but it’s unlawful by UN standards.

10:00 So then they came and they said, “Well we’re going to have the winter there, ” and, you know, it got to 58 below zero in mid winter. And they said “We’ll have to have some stone sangas” [shelter] . And I said “You’re allowed, it’s an observation post. You’re allowed what you’ve got, which is open sangas. You’re allowed to put a roof, a tent over them and that’s all and if you don’t have that the whole deal’s off”. So after 2 ½

10:30 years I got them in. And I put them in in a snow storm but that was the sort of thing. The old general said, “I could send you home”. And I said “I’m ready to go. I’m not here to make friends, I’m here to do a job and if you’re not satisfied…”. Then at the end of my tour he said he’d be happy to have me back. But he said, “That Captain Opie, I don’t know whether he’s an old young man or an old young man”. But I fought with him all the time.

Did you miss Vietnam?

11:00 Well, I couldn’t wait to get back to Vietnam. Because when he threatened to send me home I said, “I’m packed ready to go, I’ll go back tomorrow”.

So you did go back to Vietnam?

Yes, I went back. I went back as an instructor at Canungra . I went back in November, finished in November in Kashmir and he said, “I don’t think I can get you back there until May”. And then he rang me up one day and said, “You’re on the next flight back”. Again, that’s having friends in the right places.

And your role when you got

11:30 **back was back with the AITV?**

Yes, it was back with the training centre. And I was with the ARVN and then from ARVN, after I damaged my ear I went to the RF Battalion.

What was the major action you saw when you were on that last tour?

Well we had this sapper [engineers’] attack in the morning and as I said we had 5 killed, one died later, and then 26 wounded, mostly from blast. And we captured 200 of these blocks of C4 so we blew a

12:00 landing pad for the dust-off [helicopters] to come in, just wrapped those round the trees and blew them down and evacuated the things. And then later that day, there were supposed to be 2 people there, I was there by myself, two other fellows came and because my ear was damaged I went back to Quong Tri. They gave me an audio test alongside the airfield which was pretty stupid. I couldn’t hear a thing.

Who was killed were they Australian troops?

No, Vietnamese, ARVN

12:30 troops.

How responsible did you feel for losing troops who were ostensibly under your command?

They weren’t under my command, I was an advisor. I was the grandfather with a radio set. I could call in artillery and dust-off but all I could do was advise and this attack happened at dawn. We had dug in the previous night –well, they didn’t like digging in they had a great habit of rigging up hammocks you see. So of course – I think what happened was the sapper squads, that came in with these

13:00 explosive blocks – I think it was a training exercise or a graduation exercise. They probably – and because our people went out week after week on the same trail - they thought this will be a good graduation exercise. This mob will be asleep at 5 o clock in the morning, even though we were

supposed to have sentries out. So they just snuck up and pulled the fuses and threw the bombs, they were all blasts. I remember one rocket-propelled grenade, the RPG7. The RPG4 just fires a

13:30 rocket but the RGP7 fires one rocket and it goes about 200 yards and then another rocket. So I heard this one coming and I heard the second whizz as the second one went by, but fortunately it went over my head. But then I got damaged with the charges, the demolition charges so I was evacuated then. And they were getting rid of the officers out of 'I' Corps [US Army] anyway.

They were withdrawing, '71 was the withdrawal wasn't it or 72?

14:00 Yes, the Vietnamisation. We were down at the base of the Long Hais (mountains) with the future head of the army, Cowes I think his name was. He was an armourer and we were listening to Mr. [US President] Nixon's speech talking about Vietnamisation because the Americans were pulling out. By then they were into drugs and doping and all sorts of things. The American officers were scared to go around the compounds because

14:30 in each of the bunkers where the sentries were supposed to be, people were smoking.

Did you see any 'fragging' [attacks on officers] incidents or know of them?

No, I knew of a couple but I didn't see any.

What did you see of the Americans' abuse of drugs while you were there?

Well, at Na Trang they had a big base there, an air force base, and they were getting very worried there mainly with the mechanics you know because they didn't think the maintenance of the aircraft was up to scratch.

15:00 Fortunately, with Air America we had Filipino workmen, so they were all right.

Did you ever have to call in an air strike?

We called in air strikes, yes. The same day when we had the sapper attack, just before I went out, we called in a couple of air strikes but they were helicopters rather than fixed wing aircraft. And then when I flew with the FACs we'd call in air strikes all the time. But the trouble was

15:30 early in the piece when I was there the first time, they had what they called arc lights which were B52 [bomber] strikes. And we'd give them information which was dubious and the next thing we'd find there'd be an arc light strike. So in the end we just didn't send any because we knew that they were suspect.

Can you describe seeing an arc light strike?

Well we were at the special activities training centre and across the bay looking at the Long Hais. We'd just finished lunch and it was a

16:00 bright shiny day and all of a sudden we heard this terrific rumbling and we looked and the whole mountain was covered in dust. They'd done this strike and we didn't even see the planes or hear the planes we just saw the bombs. And again on the border of Quong Tin and Quong Nan province, I was in Quong Tin province, I was on a feature with some ARVN troops and they put in an arc light further inland. But it was just out in the middle of

16:30 nowhere, I doubt it did any good. You'd just see a continual stream of explosions and smoke coming up. But when I was with this ARVN battalion I had these ex policemen doing a reconnaissance over towards the Ho Chi Minh trail. And they were going out on an operation and the fellow in charge, the American, wouldn't let me go because he reckoned I was a civilian. And there was an Australian with him and he said,

17:00 "No, you can't go" so all we did was go out about a hundred yards further out and parallel with them anyway. They lost two in the day and I came back without any trouble but I was by myself and didn't have anybody with me.

It sounds like you operated better by yourself?

Well, yes. He who travels fastest is he who travels alone. I had black pyjamas and a coolie hat on. I don't think I looked very much like a Vietnamese.

So you did actually

17:30 **dress like a Vietnamese?**

Sometimes. Most of the time I had this sort of grey uniform – nobody knew what it was because it had been green, but with washings it just turned grey.

Was your desire to stay on in Vietnam still there in '71?

No, things had changed there and I didn't really want to stay there.

What had changed for you personally?

Well, with the Vietnamisation, it wasn't working very well and the

18:00 Americans, initially they were pretty gung ho but then they got into drugs and that sort of thing. Of course when I went back the second time we could call aircraft in to a certain extent, Air America; but we only used them as passengers, although earlier I could use them whenever I needed them. When we were up in the highlands at Barry Peterson's old camp, south of Ban-me-thuot, they would pick us up of a Saturday afternoon and fly us

18:30 down to Na Trang for a swim and a meal and a bath and fly us back on either Monday morning or Sunday afternoon.

So in some way your lifestyle had been curtailed?

I took the CO around the traps and he said, "You can have aircraft whenever you want and I've got to wait for 2 hours at aerial port". When we arrived he said, "Where's our aircraft?" And I said. "It's over there". And he said "Well, don't you think we'd better go". And I said "No, the seats re always

19:00 reserved, I always sit next to the pilot and if you don't mind you'll sit in the passenger seat". So we got up and then we were coming back from Duc To and he wanted to go to Pleiku, and there was a movie on I wanted to see so I said, "We'll go into Pleiku". The pilot, they were mostly ex-US air force. He said, "We'll have to do a GCA [ground control] approach, because the weather was shocking

19:30 and I said, "I've got this very important conference; we've got to land there". So we landed there and the following morning the CO said, "Do you mind if I go over and see Special Forces?" And I said, "Oh no, we'll go down to Lac Diem, south of Ban-me-thuot, and then we'll catch the flight back from Na Trang in the afternoon". So we landed there and they sent out a vehicle for us.

20:00 Anyway, a Filippino mechanic came up and he said, "Will you take me down to Brou?" which is the province next down below, and I said, "Oh yes, well drop you off there". So we dropped him off there and we went and had a look at this camp. And then we got back to Na Trang and he said, "Well don't you think we'd better get on the plane". And I said, "Oh no, the seats are reserved". So we got on the plane and we flew back and he looked at his watch and he said, "Oh, I've done it". I said "What's the matter?" He said, "My driver knocks off at six and we don't

20:30 get in there until half past". I said, "That's alright, I'll ring the car pool". He said, "What happens then?" I said "Well they'll bring a driver or they'll bring a driver around, we'll drop him back at the car pool and I'll take you into Saigon". So I did that and I went and had a shower and I drove back into Saigon. And he was up having dinner in the Brigs Hotel on the 8th floor. He said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "I've come for dinner". He said

21:00 "You're supposed to eat out at Kaik Man". I said "Kaik Man is in my name, it's my villa". I said "But your headquarters staff have taken the whole thing over. There are only two air-conditioned rooms and I'm expected to sleep in a non air conditioned dormitory. " So I said, "I'm sleeping at the other hotel". So a week later the American accommodation officer came to me and he said, "Look, we'd really like that villa back but if you want to keep it.... . ". Oh yes!

21:30 I said "feel free, it's yours" so they all got booted out.

In '71 all these things changed is that right?

Yes, yes.

And what were the circumstances of you coming back to Australia. Did you request it?

In '68?

'71.

Well I'd done my extra year, I only went back for another year. And I was going to be an instructor at Canungra anyway so I was 2 ½ years there as an instructor.

How did you feel about the

22:00 **war in Vietnam, how it was going?**

Well, it wasn't going too well. I remember at Canungra once hearing somebody sneering about the North Vietnamese invasion. And I said, "Well, if you were faced by 40, 000 angry people all with big tanks better than yours, what would you do, stand there and fire pistols at them?" You know, the whole attitude was we shouldn't have gone in the first place only because we got beaten because the Vietnamese packed it in in the end.

Did you still

22:30 **think you were fighting communists at that time?**

Oh yes, they were avowed communists.

It has been characterised of not a war against communism but a war of nationalism?

Well it depends which way you look at it. Ho Chi Minh was a communist and look at them now, North Vietnam or Vietnam has never – I mean tourists go there. But you speak to any of the

23:00 locals – why did all the boat people come out? And how did they come out? Off shore there were guard boats with their hands out waiting for gold leaf. That's the currency that they used there. And they were never stopped from leaving Vietnam, they were encouraged to leave Vietnam.

I was ready to go. I'd had it by

23:30 that time. And the job I was doing wasn't the same as in '68. If I'd have stayed there with the same job in '68 I would have been happy to have stayed on for another couple of years.

What did you come back to in Australia?

Well I had a month's leave and then I went to Canungra as an instructor and I was there for 2 ½ years.

And then you left the army at that time?

Mr. [Prime Minister] Whitlam fired me, my birthday present was the sack [dismissal].

24:00 **Was it Mr Whitlam or the government that sacked you?**

No, they woke everybody up at 2 o clock in the morning. They said "National Service - you can stay for breakfast or you can go home now". And some of them actually walked out of the gate because it was a 3 mile walk down to the village and there was no bus service so I don't know where they were going. The army was limited to 30, 000 but because I was only full-time CMF I exceeded that number and I had to go.

24:30 **Had you come across National Servicemen who'd been conscripted during your time?**

Oh yes, lots of them in Vietnam but they were just treated the same. All the ones I've spoken to with very few exceptions, they didn't want to go and I don't agree they should have gone; but looking back on it they're glad that they did because of the experience and the tax-free money they got.

Looking back on your experience, how do you feel about

25:00 **your time in Vietnam now?**

Well the second time after Kashmir I wasn't so keen ;I'd have been just as happy to have been at Canungra but then we were training people to go to the training team anyway, so what we were doing was teaching them what we'd been through.

How did you settle in to civilian life, not professionally but personally and how were you dealing with not having the army around you?

Well, I went into the map shop and fortunately one of the

25:30 directors was a major in the CMF.

I was thinking personally, how were you personally dealing with it?

Well I bought a unit which is the one that I'm living in now, and I had to start with this map shop. I was fortunate enough to get in. I did apply for a job in industrial training and I took some models along and they accepted me but it meant I would have had to do it part time and I wasn't interested in that.

26:00 **Was it an easy transition for you to go from military life to a civilian life?**

No, not really because the army's a home, you know. I knew one fellow who would have been an alcoholic and he said "I'm getting out". And I said, "What are you going to do?" He said, "Dig holes, I'd do anything". But he propped the bar up every night in the mess and wrote himself off, but he was available the following morning. And he ended up going to an Airborne platoon in 6th Battalion, he was in charge of that, he was a Warrant

26:30 Officer. He did a good job and now he's up in Darwin with one of these Outback Tours, he runs it, and he's a Captain in Norforce, which is the Army Reserve surveillance group up there.

How did you cope?

Well, I went to this map shop, but then I had trouble working with civilians; they acted as if I was still in the army and I said, "If I was still in the army you'd be running around a lot faster than you are". So I gave them the

27:00 choice. If they didn't like it, they could leave.

What did you miss most about the army?

Well as I said when I go over every year for two days to Holsworthy [military camp] it's like putting on an old coat, it's like being home again.

What were the times you missed most?

Well, I didn't miss any of World War II because you could never be alone. That was the worst thing, you were never alone you always had people with

27:30 you or telling you what to do. So when I got to Korea I enlisted in August and by the following October, which was back-dated to July, I was a Warrant Officer, which is equivalent almost to an officer. I got first class privileges, I got sleepers on the train.

Did you miss combat?

Yes, oh yes.

What did you miss of combat?

The adrenalin I suppose. I always say

28:00 until the first shot's fired you don't know yourself. People would come to me – an Indian officer came to me, he was what they called HO, which is Hostilities Only and they were throwing him out because he said, "I'm an engineer, 3rd class on the railways". I said "What does that mean?" He said "I'm a wheel tapper". He said, "There's nothing for me in civilian life. The army, you know, that's my life. Do you think I'm a good soldier?" I said "How do I know, I've only seen you around the camp". I didn't think he was a good soldier anyway, he was a

28:30 useless twit but I couldn't tell him that. I said, "Until you've been in combat and you've heard the first shot fired, then you know yourself whether you're going to be any good or not". We had fellows at Kapyong - at one stage, we could see the leaves in the trees dropping down and wondered why. It was because one fellow was in the bottom of his pit firing an Owen gun [machinegun] vertically upwards because the noise made him feel part of the mob. Everybody knew he was a coward. Why they ever gave him an Owen gun I don't know. But all he was was a

29:00 number in the picket [guard] . You need everybody to be on picket and that's all he was ever used for. We had other people like that. Other people would say, "He's a good soldier when he's sober". Well, if he's not sober all the time he's not a good soldier.

What makes a good soldier? What made you a good soldier?

I don't know if I was a good soldier, I only tried to be one. I used to say, when I was training people for Korea, I said, "If you want to hate somebody, hate

29:30 me". You know, you've got to focus your hate or desire on something so why not me, it doesn't worry me. And afterwards if you come back and say, "Well in spite of Opie I survived" then that's the thanks that I got. And I've never had anybody come after me from any of the wars I've been in looking for me, and I've known that to happen with some people.

Looking back on your

30:00 **particular experiences how do you feel about war now?**

I'd like to go to another war. I'd fight the Russians – I offered to go to Afghanistan. Actually, I offered to go to Perth, because I've been to Afghanistan when I was in Kashmir and I've dealt with the mujahideen and I've worked in snow up to 18, 000 feet and I've been in two winters in Korea and a

30:30 winter in Kashmir and I'm used to high altitudes and altitude sickness and all that. So I thought well I'll go over there and offer to go at my own expense and just put them in the picture. Well, General Cosgrove [Australian military commander] I don't think he ever got my letter because he sent me a Christmas Card from Timor. But when I wrote to him I didn't get a reply, but I got a reply from some colonel saying, "We have access to all the expertise we require, thanks very much". But that was after I'd written to the Prime

31:00 Minister and the Minister for Defence, the Head of the Army and everybody else. You know, I'm a dinosaur; they're not interested any more, they don't want to hear any more. I was going to get into an argument with the Minister of Defence over tanks. You see the Chief of the Army said you can either have tanks or you can have mortars or artillery.

Do you ever think it might be time that you can hang up your hat and say I've retired?

Well I believe in the Patron Saint of Lost Causes, you know, you never give

31:30 up.

What is that thing that drives you to want to go back to war still?

Well, the way things are going they don't do things right. You see now Mr [Defence Minister] Hill says, "You know these anti-armour weapons, the tanks protect the infantry". The tanks don't protect the infantry at all, it's the infantry who protect the tanks. Now at the Battle of Kapyong there was a ridge of

32:00 hills with A Company, and there was a road running through it, and B Company was on the left and the tanks went out the front. Now after dark the only way a tank commander can see anything is with his

head out of the top of the turret. Every tank commander was either killed or wounded. They got them back and if the commander was killed or wounded the driver drove the things back. But they're only mobile artillery

32:30 and we proved it – we knocked out two tanks with small arms in Korea – nobody else ever did that.

We've still got war, what do you think wars resolve or solve or do they resolve anything or what purpose do they serve?

Well they don't

33:00 really. It depends on, you know, talking about tanks and infantry, who's better or why. Mr [General] Cosgrove wants Abrams tanks which are 60 tonnes; they use aircraft fuel; they are nowhere near as cost-efficient as our 30-year old Centurions [tanks] or whatever they are, the German Leopard tanks. The Swiss want to sell us 150, what do we need

33:30 150 tanks for? We're not going to invade China or North Korea and if we go up there, only as an adjunct to the Americans. The British are admitting now that they can't fight a war by themselves without help from the Americans.

What does war solve?

Well, we're right and they're wrong and you hope that the

34:00 other side will make more mistakes than you do. That's really what it amounts to. You don't win a war, you only lose a war. Nobody ever really wins a war. And it all gets down really to either politics or economics, because the Chief of the Army wants Leopard tanks and he's having a row with General Cosgrove who wants Abrams. Well, I'd like to get the two of them together in a locked room and thrash it out, but nobody wants to listen to me.

34:30 **Any regrets?**

That I'm not still in the army, that's all. You see, like the old-time army I'm not for the new type army. I can tell you everything that's wrong with the new army because I'm not in it. But I know what went wrong with the old army. Like when I said when we enlisted for Korea, I was the fifth Australian, why is my number 6? Because the army got it wrong. A simple thing like that, they can't even count from

35:00 1 to 6.

Does it make a difference?

Well somebody made a mistake along the lines and they shouldn't have done. This business nowadays with computers, we didn't have computers. The disaster in Townsville with the helicopters. I spoke to the head legal mind of the army in front of 200 people and I said, "This is just a witch hunt". They are trying to charge a major. Now I

35:30 heard the head of the army, I've forgotten, the fellow who was in Cambodia, say, "The buck stops at the highest level" What is the highest level? The Governor General, the Prime Minister, the Head of the Army or the poor colonel who's in charge of the helicopters or the poor fellow who wrote it all out on the white board. "Oh no, you can't charge a general, " I said "No, you can't. So it's a witch hunt". I said "They're going after a major". Now he got his helicopter down

36:00 but he's never flown a helicopter since and he never will. Now the reason that it was an accident pure and simple, and it was caused by night vision because there's no peripheral vision. When you look at somebody with night vision, that's all you see, and the two helicopters got too close and collided. So why not just say, it's an accident, have a memorial service and call it off. Instead of that they thrashed the thing to death.

Looking to the future based on your

36:30 **experience, are you optimistic for the future or how do you think things are going for Australia?**

Well I've just seen the news, Stealth aircraft and helicopters and things.

Not militarily, but how do you feel about the future?

Well, not too well because the Mujahideen are or Al Qaeda [terrorists] or whatever they are, whether they are Indonesians, they're fanatics. A few years ago

37:00 Islam was going to take over the world. Well now they've decided to split it into splinter groups, but really that's their base. Islam is supposed to be a peaceful thing, not war like. But when you get these fundamentalists – the same thing happened in Vietnam - where you get these fanatics. And when they first came across the parallel in Korea they are fired up with

37:30 communism or whatever it is, and we're supposed to sit back and rationalise and say, "Well it's pretty reasonable". But nobody wants to be reasonable about it. And our way of looking at it doesn't allow for

that.

We're getting I guess o the end of the interview. This will be kept in perpetuity, this archive, and in a 50 or 100 hundred years

38:00 **somebody will be watching this. Is there any message you'd like to give to that person or people who'll be looking at this in the future?**

Well, when I was in Vietnam I went to Okinawa and to get green dollars you had to go to the American paymaster and you were accompanied by the head fellow at Da Nang the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major]. So I went and on the way I was

38:30 going for 4 days, so I thought $250 will do me. So the two incumbents at Australia House who spent most of their time taping recordings from the USO [United Services Organisation] and sending them home and wanting to know when your flight was ready to go, each of them said to me, "Would you get me a couple of hundred dollars". And I didn't think anything about it so I drew $700 from the paymaster. A year later I was asked why

39:00 I had drawn $700 and how long I was there. And I couldn't very well say, "Oh these people…" because it was for me. Now, in the archives in Canberra I'm listed as a suspect in a money-laundering operation together with a major, who ended up as a general, who's since died, who went with me. And my name apparently will never come out of that. So it doesn't matter what people think of me

39:30 in a hundred years time, I'm listed as one of 5 suspects because I did somebody a favour. That's about my last word.

Len thanks very much for talking to the Archive, it's been a real pleasure.