Australians at War Film Archive

Maurice Fairhead (Fred) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:38 **Fred, thanks very much for talking to the Archive. Perhaps we could start with that summary of your life and kick off with where you were born and when?**

Okay nineteen fourty-one in Wiluna, Western Australia,

01:00 on the edge of the Gibson Desert. Mining town but ah it fell apart after the war, the Second World War I guess and we moved then down to Williams, in the south west of Western Australia.

Your dad was a miner?

No he ah, he did many things but his main job in Wiluna he ran the bus and the taxi service.

How old were you when you moved down?

Ten, I recall.

Where did you move to?

Williams in the south west of

01:30 Western Australia. And Dad then ran the um the local power supply because you know it was a hundred miles from Perth, they had no mains or electricity. Ah, or tap water for that matter either. Incredible because we came from Wiluna which had all the water you could use and went to Williams and it was all in a rain water tank. And my mother was a school teacher.

And you went to school there until what age?

I went to primary school there and then, then

02:00 ah first year high school at Narrogin Agricultural High School. And then I got into Guildford Grammar School in Perth and boarded there for five years, at Guildford.

And after you left grammar school what did you do?

Well I, I did my leaving and got accepted for Duntroon that year. My mother decided I wasn't old enough to be let loose in the world so I managed to get a scholarship to go back to Guildford to what was known as the Upper Sixth the mongrels made me do my leaving

02:30 again though. I thought I was just going back to play footy and cricket. And then I went to the Royal Military College.

And what year was that?

I went into Duntroon in nineteen sixty and graduated in nineteen sixty-three and then um ...

What did you graduate as?

Lieutenant. And because um ... It as something that really bugged me all my military career at Duntroon. I ... At school I'd done

03:00 all Maths and Science subjects. Because of that they made me do Engineering at the Royal Military College – the academic staff. I wanted to do Arts because I'd discovered History and Geography in my, at my second go at the leaving in Guilford. Ah but they made me do Engineering so I didn't perform terribly well academically at Duntroon but still managed to finish in the top then in my class, mainly through military and leadership points so to speak.

03:30 Um, but it meant I graduated and went into Signal Corps as a communicator. I was doing telecommunications and engineering.

Where were you posted to first?

Well I went to a regiment in Melbourne but because I'd discovered on the first leave that my mother had about three months to live because of breast cancer I got a posting back to Perth to some grubby CMF [Citizens Military Force] signal squadron that was

04:00 run by a bunch of charlatans, ah and that wasn't a very happy start to my military career I guess. So I managed to get out of that and got posted to Sydney on a course at the Marconi School of Wireless. Which was a disaster also because it was basically a practical course dealing with the matters that we'd done in theory at the Royal Military College in radio engineering. So I got ah, so I managed to get off that course and got posted to the Pacific Islands Regiment in New Guinea in an

04:30 infantry regiment.

When were you posted to New Guinea?

Um, about the middle of nineteen sixty-five, yeah.

How long did you spend up in New Guinea?

A two and a half years at Wewak, Vanimo. The Second Battalion was based at Wewak and we had an outstation at Vanimo up on the Indonesian border, a company outstation. And by that stage I was a Captain. I was a company 2IC [Second In Command] up there or acting

05:00 company commander in many cases.

And when did you come back? You came back in nineteen sixty-seven?

Ah nineteen sixty-seven or thereabouts as I recall. And I was doing a tactics course at the Jungle Training Centre as it was known then, it's now called the [(UNCLEAR)] Centre at Canungra and I got posted to the Sixth Battalion Royal Show Regiment.

Where were they?

Well they were at that stage at Ennogera. Um and having just come back from their

05:30 first tour in Vietnam, you know Long Tan and all of that. Now, ah I was posted as second in command of D company which was the Long Tan, the Battle of Long Tan company of course but the company commander I think was only there for about four or five days, he got posted somewhere else, so I became the acting company commander, with four platoon commanders. And for nine months we were the demonstration company, we demonstrated courses, battle wing courses that were being trained to go to Vietnam

06:00 um in all sorts of military schools. And also provided the enemy for the exercises they did. We worked every day of the week ah for about four months I think. Not all day every day but part of the company worked every day. Um, it was a lot of fun. We worked hard and played hard as I recall.

When were you posted to Vietnam?

Well no that was ... Yeah that was D Company Six. By,

06:30 by the time our tour, if you like, at Canungra had finished we were replaced by the company of 5 RAR [Royal Australian Regiment]. The battalion had moved to Townsville – it was the first battalion in the Townsville Sixth. And we rejoined it nineteen sixty-eight I think, about March nineteen sixty-eight. And we went through a period of ceremonial parades. Getting colours, getting the Long Tan citation.

07:00 And the CO appointed me as an intelligence officer and we spent the next you know year and a half doing one exercise after the other and getting ready for Vietnam, including going back to Canungra to do things that I'd been doing as the Commander of D Company. And then we went to Vietnam nineteen sixty-nine/ nineteen seventy.

Can you take us through the major postings you were at in Vietnam?

Well I was the intelligence

07:30 officer for the first ah ... Well my appointment was as intelligence officer for the whole period. But when the Australian company commanders went on R&R [Rest and Recreation] which was, by the time you came out of the bush, got all your shots [inoculations] and went home or wherever you were going and then got back again and out of the bush, out to the bush it was you know something like two and a half weeks, was the turn around time. The CO decided that rather than

08:00 send ah another company commander from say an administrative company he gave me the job of running the rifle companies during the time that their company commanders were away – as a captain.

This is the Sixth RAR?

Sixth RAR yes. So I commanded A Company, B Company and D Company at various times between November nineteen sixty-nine and March nineteen seventy.

What actually was the month you arrived and the month you left?

We, we ...

08:30 Well I went up on the advance party so we got there in April but I didn't leave until June because I ... The battalion went home in April but I stayed on for another, sorry May, May nineteen seventy, because I came the commander of Redetails as they were called. I had to stay on for another three or four weeks to see that all the battalion material and kit was sent home properly.

So you were up there from April sixty-nine to ...?

Yeah thirteen months I was in Vietnam,

09:00 yeah, mm.

April nineteen sixty-nine to May nineteen seventy?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. ...

And you were intelligence officer and ...

Acting company commander because we were a New Zealand, we were an Anzac battalion.

So you had New Zealand troops?

We had two New Zealand rifle companies and a New Zealand 2IC and, and equivalent sections of mortars and all that sort of stuff so we were a very big battalion.

And where were you based?

At Nui Dat, yeah. But of the

09:30 twelve months that the battalion spent there I calculated one day I think it was eleven and a half months that it was on line so to speak and of those eleven and a half we spent ten and a half of them in the bush. So there was not a lot of time spent in Nui Dat. You'd come home from an operation and there'd be two or three days you know reconciling what the hell you'd just done and then another two days preparing for the next one and off you'd go again, mm.

10:00 **And where were you posted when you came back?**

I was posted as the Senior Instructor of Field Training at the Officer Training Unit at Scheyville which was out Western Sydney, near Richmond or Windsor. Sent up to do training for the national service officers, specifically for them. Quite a unique course of training for fellows, national servicemen who were selected to become officers. A quite important job because

10:30 the fellows that were graduating there in some cases were going straight to Vietnam as platoon commanders . So I was there for three years and then by that stage I'd got married and had children and I got a posting back to Adelaide to, to do some work with the CMF for a couple of years, as a Brigade Major of Nine Brigade which is still the local brigade here. And um from there

11:00 I went to Staff College for year and then I was posted as the second in command of the Eighth/Ninth Battalion, which is no longer in the order of battle, it was a Melbourne merged battalion between the Eighth and Ninth Battalions and it was taken off the order of battle a few years ago. Ah two years and then Canberra for about five or six years I guess. Three years in Operations Branch, Army Office trying to solve the shambles the army had got itself into with its ammunition. And getting

11:30 some sort of balanced approach, management approach to it and other training resources like flying hours and track running for armoured vehicles and so forth. And then I was sent to the Joint Services Staff College at Canberra, Weston Creek. It's called something else now I think. And then to the Joint Military Operations and Plants Division of Defence which is now the genesis of what's now known as Defence Headquarters or Headquarters, Australian Defence Force,

12:00 on the Joint Staff. And that was probably one of the most exciting staff jobs I ever did because it was, I was the writer of the Chief of the Defence Forces Training Director for the Joint Training Report and programmed all exercises between Australia and other countries and between Australian services and other countries. I spent a fair bit of time travelling backwards and forwards to Honolulu, to, in the ANZUS Forum [Australian, New Zealand, US alliance] which had quite a specific

12:30 training program.

What rank were you at that stage?

Lieutenant Colonel by then. I was posted from Eight/Nine RAR, from Second in Command there to this job in Canberra I was promoted then. That would have been about nineteen seventy-eight I guess. Went to JC's [Joint Chiefs of Staff] early nineteen eighty-one and I left the army early nineteen eighty-five, from the job in Defence Central, or the Joint Staff job. ..

13:00 **Was it a very high pressure job?**

Oh yeah, yeah but you got to see how the machinations of the great men, so to speak. Ah it's good to see today that it's great men and women but then it was all great men and it was really frightening

quite frankly. A couple of things happened because you had an inside run onto how things were really being done in the whole of the defence process. I mean I was responsible for programming, training and

13:30 exercises that would probably be worth a hundred and fifty million dollars in 1958 prices, which is a lot of money. And yet there seemed to be no quality assurance method of, of seeing that sending four F111's [swing wing fighter/bomber aircraft] for example to a red flag exercise in the United States [joint exercises], you know the old top gun [flying ace] type school, the R and R [rest and recreation period] was more efficient or cost effective to the overall defence capability

14:00 than using those same four F111's in some maritime exercise between the air force and the navy. There was no method, at the top level at least, there was at our level, we understood what was happening but the top level didn't want to know about it for all sorts of political reasons. It's there where you start to see you know the politics of it all and I didn't like that very much I have to say.

What did you do after you left the army?

Well I,

14:30 I wanted to get out of the army so I was looking for a job in Adelaide because what we wanted to do was make sure the girls, twin daughters, went to the same high school, that level of secondary school for the whole, at one school, not as they had done been from one school or another because we had around about a dozen postings. I, we looked for a job in Adelaide and the government here had,

15:00 had advertised for a job to take over their State Disaster arrangements after Ash Wednesday [one of Australia's worst bushfire days, 1983] which, a lot of things were found wanting, you know here the bush fires, the nineteen eighty-three bushfires. I managed to get that job and did it for about fifteen years and then moved on to other things in, in the public service here, but basically around the same job, Emergency Management including Counter Terrorism. I was the State's representative on the National Counter Terrorist Committee for about ten

15:30 years and represented all the States and territories on a sub-committee that was to do with training exercises – for example the lead up to the Olympic Games between the Police and SAS [Special Air Service] and all those sorts of things .

And ah you said you got married. Where did you meet your wife?

When the battalions went home the officers mess used to have a garden party and they'd invite you know the Ambassador and

16:00 other VIP's [Very important people] from around Vietnam – to Nui Dat, to the mess, in amongst the rubber trees. And every white eyed, sorry round eyed woman you could find alright they would be flown in, into Caribou [aircraft] and come to lunch and then flown out again. They weren't allowed to stay there obviously. Um and it was at the Ninth Battalion's farewell, I'd come out of the bush and instead of going down to Vung Tau for the R&R or RNI or what

16:30 it was called I opted to go and spend some time with a very close friend of mine who was in the Ninth Battalion. So I was there for their farewell party. And our second in command who was a lovely fellow called Neville Wallace, he was a New Zealander ,ah he brought up this lovely blonde woman up to me and said," Di have you met the battalion poet?", and I was leaning against a rubber tree with a bertsie copper goblet in my hand drinking

17:00 red wine ... battalion poet because I was the intelligence officer and we used to write the Intelligence Summaries which was a bit Enid Blighton-ish [reference to characters in books written by children's author] I guess. Anyway we met and ah things went from there actually. I read a lot of the letters. She, she kept all the letters because I used to write from five support bases to her down at ... She was the physiotherapist at the hospital. And um so yeah so ah I went home a bit before she did and then ah I drove from Perth to

17:30 Sydney via Adelaide to meet her parents, ah and picked her up when she got home.

We might, we'll go into that a bit later in a bit more detail because it's a big part of your story. Um how many kids did you go and have?

Well we had three. Ah, um a boy who's now dead would have been thirty-two or thirty-three today actually, it was his birthday actually today. But he was the first born,

18:00 but he was stung by a bee on Christmas Day in nineteen seventy-six and suffered an anaphylactic reaction and, which ultimately finished and he was a vegetable and he died in nineteen ninety-four, seventeen years later at Julia Farr Centre. We had a couple of girls, a brace of girls, ah about twenty months later or something, one of whom is presently in the United States. She's got a PhD [Doctor of Philosphy]

18:30 in Marine Botany. Um the other one who lives here at Norton Summit is completing her PhD in I guess History to do with indigenous service in the military during the Second World War and the effects of that of reconciliation and all sorts of other Aboriginal issues. And um yeah so that's the children, that's what they're up to I guess.

That's great. And ah your mum passed away, is

19:00 **your dad still around?**

Ah no ... The doctor who said she had three months to live was actually right, ah she died 1964 and my father died in 1976 which is the same year that we had the accident with David. That was Christmas 1976 yeah. Mm so yeah my parents went along time ago.

And ah

19:30 **you retired from the Government Service?**

Yeah I, I did a big dummy spit [threw a tantrum] so to speak. . Well I'd been in the habit of going to an important conference um every couple of years, mostly in the Hague, but one of them was in Prague and one of them was in England and then I'd do side visits to people like the Italian Emergency Services and so forth

20:00 because they had some pretty good ideas about you know on the principles of how to do things as opposed to the practical outcomes ... But anyway and I was doing a lot of work at community level and that entails going to Broome ah to talk to Aboriginal people about some programs they'd done successfully there. And we wanted to go to Alice Springs and people started to say,"Well all this travel and da-de-da-de-da and so ... "At the same time the financial

20:30 programs was a shambles and there were some quite absurd things going on which they wouldn't bite the bullet on so in a sense we were not being able to do our job properly. And so I did the big dummy spit and went on sick leave for about eleven months and then resigned, which as I say went to the Governor and the Executive Council to be approved and I retired in April last year. So but because I'd had

21:00 nearly a year off in which time I'd painted the outside of this place which hadn't been touched for about forty years so there was a huge amount of work involved, you know I'd gotten over the work nonsense and all that sort of thing by then but ah it ... I guess it was pre-empted by quite incredibly suddenly nasty events in Vietnam came back, they hadn't been there. I guess they'd

21:30 been blocked out because I had been so focussed on the job at hand right from the start. You know training our officers at Scheyville you tended to put your own personal feelings aside because of the task in front of you and that went on for most of my working life. To the, to the detriment of all sorts of other things. You know the model railway it's still in its bloody box but this time it's up in an attic because I've built an attic as well ...

22:00 since we'd been in Canberra, from Canberra in1985. Um all because I was focussed on the job. Now I'm doing things for me.

That's great.

Yeah.

Um that's a great summary. We'll go back to the beginning. Take a deep breath, you can range over all sorts of things now. And we'll go back to

22:30 **mining camps in Western Australia and those early memories days up there. Do you recall running around up there?**

Yeah I can recall quite a few things about Wiluna. Ah one was that when the temperature got over I think it was a hundred and five your school used to close, and that used to happen every day during January, February and March basically at about two o'clock in the afternoon. Wiluna

23:00 was a town of about fifteen thousand people. Um it had I think about six pubs, you know picture theatres and all that sort of business and two huge swimming pools. Because there was plenty of water, artesian water, and we'd spend the rest of the day in the pools and then drive home on your bike so to speak. I remember those sorts of things and playing with aborigines

23:30 and finding aboriginal camps – because the desert aborigines came in from the Gibson Desert into Wiluna. Clambering through old mine shafts, dangerously of course but you know as an eight/nine year old you went aware of those sorts of things. I remember Boxing Day parties at my house. My parents used to have, I don't know, somewhere between fifty and a hundred people around and they'd just have kegs on the front verandah and all sot of people would come and drink all day

24:00 and whatever. ... And I can remember going out to properties around Wiluna. I can remember you know catching the train from Wiluna down to Perth used to take three days. And between Wiluna and Meekatharra there was a point where you could get off the front of the train, go out and pick bucket loads of Everlasting Wildflowers and then slowly walk back to catch the end of the train,

24:30 that's how quickly it was travelling. You know things like that I think I can remember. My sisters, both were born there as well in Wiluna. Oh no sorry, my youngest sister was born in Meekatharra because the, the hospital had closed by then – that's about 1953 or something like that I think.

The war was on at that time. Your dad hadn't gone to the Second World War?

25:00 Oh no he went off to the air force and that was one of the reasons after the war we were in a bit of trouble because the bloke that looked after his bus service sent it broke through incompetence. So when he came back from the war, ah in the air force, they didn't go overseas, I think he spent all his time on the east coast somewhere. But then the uncles who were all men from ... They were all farming country people and one uncle in particular who ah,

25:30 ah, who I was named after Maurice O'Donald, he had gone off with the Seventh Division to Crete, not Crete sorry Syria, um and then to New Guinea. He won a Military Cross on the Kokoda Trail. And he was very close to my mother, obviously brother and sister, and was a very good friend of my father's.

26:00 I remember him coming home from the war. We went down to Perth to meet him on the train that came in from the east states somewhere. Ah and he used to spit polish on his boots and shoes and things. And he was a lovely fellow – I liked my uncle. And I think that was the genesis you know the military, you could say the seed was born then. Particularly as his son from a then divorced marriage

26:30 went to Duntroon before I did. He actually finished up being the Chief of General Staff, Laurie O'Donald. I don't know about nineteen eighty-seven or nineteen eighty-eight or thereabouts. I've forgotten precisely when. So I mean that, that was sort of ah ... And I thought I was you know ... I think in those days young fellows used to play war games and you know all that sort of nonsense and I think

27:00 anyone with half an ounce of testosterone in them was thinking about that sort of a job I think. Ah I often used to say to people that I'd got, I'd got my leaving and so forth and I thought I was applying for the nuclear physics at the Western Australia University and mistakenly signed an application to go to the Royal Military College. Years later I said that, yeah.

27:30 Perhaps in the longer term I should have gone to the Western Australia University, but anyway that happened mm

Yeah my Dad was in the 7th Division so I know that story of it. Um what sort of bloke was your dad?

Ah he was a ... I think he felt a bit maligned. I think it was one of those cases in the thirties where the woman was much

28:00 smarter than the bloke. And that, that doesn't matter any more but I think it did a bit in those days. And my mother was always much more capable intellectually than my father and he got a bit grumpy, and I think suffered from diabetes in his older age. And he was a very good sportsman. He could have played really good football um but in those days you couldn't afford to go to Perth to play because they weren't paid anything.

28:30 But you know good sportsman and you know a pretty nice bloke. I think in his later years he got a bit ah ... I think because he didn't have, he didn't go to school. You see he was from a large family. My great grandfather was Italian and I think he had thirteen children between himself and two wives. And one of the children married a Fairhead so

29:00 I don't know what that makes me, one eighth Italian or something. I discovered years later that his, his brother, my great grandfather's brother was a Cardinal in the Roman Catholic Church. And in fact I visited his crypt in Rome, oh a couple of years ago. He was the Governor of the Vatican State. In other words a very senior fellow in the politics – Cardinal Canalli. He was a Catholic but we weren't simply because

29:30 my mother was quite happy to get married in a Catholic church but the Catholic Church in those days said you're getting married behind the altar because you're a heathen so to speak, you know Church of England. So she said stick it up your bum, son and they went across the road and got married in a Church of England Church. So I went to Guildford Grammar School . And he's very rich. There's a story there somewhere.

You said your mum was quite well educated or she was

30:00 **really focussed on your education.**

Yeah, yeah she was. I mean she worked basically to send my to Guildford, to pay for the boarding fees and things. Um and she was a wonderful woman, loved by a lot of people. But unfortunately got breast cancer at a time when country doctors in particular didn't really know how to deal with it. And ah she died in 1964. Quite young. I don't know how old she would have been, late forties perhaps,

30:30 mid forties.

What did she work at? She also worked as well?

Yeah, a school teacher, yeah mm.

Was she a school teacher up in Wiluna as well?

Mm yeah when she, when my father met her he, you know through tennis or something, she was a

school teacher in Wiluna. So it was quite a large, large town in the thirties and forties.

It sounds like a great place to grow up in though running around …

Oh yeah, yeah, yeah I mean I reckon it was somewhere between

31:00 about seven and eight before I saw rain for the first time because you know I think the average rainfall for Wiluna was three inches per year perhaps, and all you saw was the end of a cyclone coming from across the north-west coast occasionally, I think. Um but it was terrific country. Tough country. And you'd go wandering for miles through it you know as a young fellow – barefoot.

And your relationship with

31:30 **the aboriginal people, does it stick in your mind …?**

Yeah well … Well we used to have an old fellow that used to come and do our gardening and I used to sit and talk to him, he was a lovely bloke. Um I think my father was fairly racist. I mean they had trouble because the drink problem with aborigines was already there. Ah it exists sill today in Wiluna today according to somebody who was there just recently. But ah … Yeah and I don't recall aboriginal children at school. There were at

32:00 Williams but not at Wiluna. I don't really know why that was the case. But I used to meet with the desert aborigines – they had little places out in the bush a bit where you could wander around and find them. You know they'd be there with their spears and nulla nullas and so forth. Um it was quite interesting yeah.

When you came down south what sort of things were you into

32:30 **at school? You said you were interested in history and …?**

No academic was never my forte I have to say. I was you know reasonably intelligent. You know I used to be able to pass exams and things. I mean things like geography interested me because they were about I suppose the country and people and that sort of thing, and history. But I hated maths and that sort of stuff.

33:00 I was mainly interested sport and as time went on of course girls as well. Ah you know there was some stage at Guildford there was really a conflict of interest between the attention and energy you could spend on sport and that on chasing young girls. And the academic requirements came a very poor last, yeah.

It was a boarding school was it?

Yes.

What was it like leaving home. How old were you?

Oh it was pretty difficult

33:30 ah, because I'd also been to a high school where … And I'd go to high school by bus. It used to take three quarters of an hour to get from Williams to Naragin where the high school was. Um and it was mixed so you, you … And of course Guildford was all boys, all boarding houses. There were four boarding houses with about four hundred and fifty boarders and only one day house with about a hundred days boys. And most of the boys were from, you know landed

34:00 property people, you know from pastoral stations and that sort of thing. Um you know mainly real fellows and they're all pretty tough and that sort of thing. But yeah, it was a bit hard going and the fagging bit was, was … It was based, a bit like, on Eton, this school, you know boaters and all that sort of business. And you know church three times a day and all that sort of business. Suits to school. Ah fellows

34:30 teaching you Latin you know wearing stiff collars, that sort of stuff. But years later when the bastardisation at the Royal Military College was exposed, we were in Vietnam when it happened so nineteen sixty-nine, nineteen seventy, whenever it was the big kafuffle. And they sacked poor old Mousy Townsend. He was the CO [Commanding Officer] of 6th Battalion, on the first tour in Vietnam of. He was the CO at the College at the time of the Corps Staff Cadets and he got sacked –

35:00 fair killed his career. But I used to say that the bastardisation at Duntroon didn't bother me because I'd already been through it at Guildford on a much higher plane. But there were some fellows that I, you know I was probably responsible for some of them because I became a House Captain, and you really were little pigs as I recall. You know the opportunity for bullies to emerge was definitely there. I mean most of it

35:30 had a bit of a tempering about it but I think some young blokes today are you know … I remember a fellow … I went to a fiftieth [birthday] of a fellow I was close with at school and there were a couple of other blokes came along and one of them had been married and divorced three or four times and his current wife said well he just can't handle what happened at Guilford – there you go.

Kids can be terribly cruel to one another.

They sure as hell can, yeah.

36:00 **Um can you … What sort of form did it take at Guildford the bastardisation [initiation]?**

Oh it was pretty much physical type bullying type stuff. Though what would happen if there was a young bloke with a high sense of spirit and adventure and that you know would be prepared to

36:30 do things that would be considered to be naughty then the Prefects could start handing out what was known as fatigues. And you knew, or lines or what have you, and there was a process that if you got accumulated more than a certain number per week that you'd get beaten by the house master across the bum with a bit of, a big bit of cane. Say you know things like,"So let's nail, let's get this little prick!"

37:00 so to speak, excuse the French. Prefects would go out of there way to, you know, dob the kid in. But I mean there was a bit of physical stuff. I can remember the first week or so at Guildford, Evensong on Sundays, we used to have church services all the time, a huge chapel they had there. Ah and there was a bloke from Williams that I basically knew,

37:30 I've forgotten his name now, and he just said you come over here whatever, fair head or something, and he was wearing boots like you've got on, and he just went bang on my toe, broke it in fact. Now that's the sort of you know nonsense that went on a bit. Occasionally then you'd have prefects who would see this was going on and stop it. It was fairly well contained but the, the, the

38:00 routine you know up at half past five, showers, breakfast, school, whatever, sporting all regiment. So it was easy to go from there to a place like a Royal Military College because the regimentation had already you know been put there I suppose. And the bastardisation was just a bit silly – it was all mind stuff at Duntroon, of course there was no physical stuff, well perhaps a little bit, but most of it was mind,

38:30 it was mind stuff yeah. And it was done for a good reason I thought in our time at Duntroon. We all came from different walks of life. Some people whose father's owned sheep stations, some fellows whose father's were in jail. The idea was to get the class cohesive, under one plane and they did that by bastardising fourth class so that

39:00 you became a unit – you know team work and all that sort of stuff. And it worked. We went to a reunion, fortieth since graduation, in December last year in Canberra ,and you met fellows that you hadn't seen for thirty years in some cases and it was just like the day you graduated. You either, you know there were some fellows you obviously didn't like much or didn't get on with but you still

39:30 associated with them, you had a common ground on matters and and those that were your friends were still your friends. Quite incredible.

As an adolescent who were the major influences on your life?

Oh well most of my adolescence was done at Guildford, you know for fourteen, eighteen, fifteen or whatever, nineteen or something, thirteen, something like,

40:00 no fourteen to, fourteen to eighteen yeah. And I suppose there it was peer group at school, good sportsmen, house masters, one house master in particular, he was also my footy and cricket coach, lovely fellow. Ah yeah and I suppose ah

40:30 people that were in the music industry, you know I was an adolescent when rock and roll started, you know.

What sort of rock and roll do you remember or how did you get involved in that?

Oh I remember going to watch Rock Around The Clock, the Bill Haley original thing [movie] during a country week cricket, we used to all come down from the country at various divisions I think in January. And I came down with Williams Naragin group. And my father

41:00 was most upset because we were out to you know eleven o'clock or something watching this film. I took six wickets the next day. I don't know whether there was a connection. Yeah but I never did like Elvis Presley right from the very start I have to say – I thought he was a slimy, greasy sort of bloke. He could sing a bit I suppose. But I sort of got into jazz at about the same time so,

41:30 but there was a conflict.

Were you playing?

No, no I tried to learn the piano but I was hopeless.

Tape 2

00:41 **So Fred you said that Guildford in some ways prepared you for a military lifestyle. How was**

your first taste of Duntroon?

Oh it's a bit of a blank I suppose. You know so many things happened. I can recall arriving

01:00 arriving there because we got there late. The Western Australians and South Australians we went by train in those days and there'd been an accident at Tailem Bend or somewhere, a place I'd never heard of so we had to spend a weekend in Melbourne and missed connections and that sort of stuff, ah and had a very, quite dramatic time in Melbourne actually. We got into a lot of trouble. Ah but ...

Can you tell me about that?

Yeah well ah we were ... There were

01:30 two other fellows from Guildford came and a fellow who I became very close with, Rodney Curtis and a fellow called Viv Morgan who was from Three Springs up in the country. And we were a pretty good little team and there were a couple of blokes that got on at Adelaide that were ... We said where's the boozer [pub]? And they brought on a box of Coca Cola because you know we really were little pissheads even by then I think. Ah so

02:00 we went out on the town. They put us in some provo [provost - military police] barracks at Royal Park I think in Melbourne. We went out and we finished up at a night club and there was a woman there that ah seemed to be attracted by all these young blokes that you know, in a sexual sense, so we all got sucked into this and went off and she was with a jockey or something. Anyway we went to our house I remember and then it all got nasty because a couple of bigger fellows came in, it was all set up. And I

02:30 think I got the short straw so I was, I was you know with the lady at this time in various stages of undress and, and this lot burst in and, and what they were doing was you know nicking all our money. Well some of ours were already street sense, you know streetwise by then and had our money in our shoes or whatever the hell. Anyway we just fled from the house, four of them did, they went straight over the back fence down onto a railway line,

03:00 you know one of the Melbourne surburban electric railway lines. And God knows where they left, they walked back to Melbourne somehow and myself and the other fellow Viv Morgan stood there to face the music from these clowns. Yeah so that was a pretty exciting experience – you know because we were only nineteen year olds or something, or eighteen or nineteen year olds and yeah.

And what happened?

Oh well they let us go and I think they got money from Viv, I can't remember but

03:30 we got back to the barracks and someone put us on a train and we got to Yass Junction and someone was there to meet us to take us out to college and by that stage the rest of the class had already gone out in the bush. They used to take you out into a place called Point Hut which is now a suburb of Canberra on the Murrumbidgee, and you spent six weeks out there learning some basic stuff – you know how to clean boots and fire rifles and do a bit of drill and navigation stuff, you know really basic

04:00 training stuff, without the senior cadets being able to get at you. And ah then you came back and you were let loose basically. But I was with a group of people and I was in Alamein Company and um most of the fellows were pretty good. You know there's a lot of aggro but you know the time went very quickly I have to say.

What sort of aggro?

04:30 Oh well the senior cadets would ah, could make a real meal of you if you ... You know a thing like at the tables, where most of this happened – it was at meal tables, where you'd have a couple of first class a couple of second class, a couple of third class and probably three fourth class sitting at your table. The fourth class did all the menial things, they went and got the food trays and served it up and all that sort of business. And during the meal would say, particularly the second class which were

05:00 the seniors, the masters of the bastardisation, that was their job, Fourth class what's the regimental of the, of the gun, gun ate? A Gun gate was about a ten minute run from the mess hall dining room. The unwitting cadet would run out there and come back saying, sir it's 661947. The blokes would say, fourth class that was the right hand gun, what was the serial number of the left hand gun?

05:30 He should have obviously taken both you see. And back again ... What that meant was the bloke didn't eat his lunch or whatever. That sort of stuff went on. Ah it was, it was mainly related to, you know fourth class I want you by next week to tell me how to turn the, the Yarra River up the right way – because as you know to the fourth class the Yarra River's upside down, all the dirt's on the top and all the clean water's on the bottom. You know this would come from a Western Australian for example, talking to a

06:00 Victorian obviously, you know that sort of stuff. It wasn't a lot of religious stuff. There were some very crude sexist stuff that went on, um which I won't go into. It was pretty bloody ordinary when you think about it. You know the approach of the corps of cadets towards females was pretty ordinary.

Was that encouraged?

Oh yeah, yeah not by officers but

06:30 within the corps itself. I think our class at least we were a bit rebellious from the rest, we didn't play the party line of this is how they've always done it. And I think our class was the first to really associate with, ah you know, women in Canberra. And a lot of our blokes got married, we weren't allowed to be married, but they got married the day after graduation a lot of our fellows. I think that was some sort of you know

07:00 change in approach in things. Ah, I mean if my daughter Sarah were aware of some of things we used to say and think about females she'd ah you know be actually horrified because she's usually on the feminist side of the business. But ah yeah anyway ...

Why do you think that attitude was so prevalent?

Well I think it was something to do with you know testosterone – it's what you need to shoot Chinese as they come over the mountain. You know

07:30 lying in a weapon pit in Korea in the middle of the night ah, you've got to be tough and that sort of thing and ah, camp followers may follow you to these things and ... I think it was to do with the macho, you've got to be macho if you're going to be a soldier – um if you're going to perform in the footy field. I mean I got into a lot of trouble because at the fourth class boxing, they used to have a boxing tournament, where they used to go in ... the fourth class belt each other. And it was bloody appalling you know,

08:00 some fellows could fight a bit and some couldn't and then they just ... The idea was to see how much courage have you got. But I thought being belted around the head and getting split ears and getting teeth knocked out wasn't a necessary way of showing courage. So the bloke that I fought with we just sort of shadow danced and waited for one of us to get a blood nose and that was it. And we got criticised for being you know wusses or something, or in those days poofters. You know that

08:30 sort of stuff went on. But you see I went out on the football field in fourth class and demonstrated there a lot more courage. Um I think I was only one of the, two fourth class in the whole time I was at the College that played all four years in the first eighteen. Usually it was only to the second, you know your second or last year that you actually got picked in the first eighteen. But ah two of us played the whole four years and I thought that was,

09:00 I thought that was the way if you want some physical courage that was a better way of showing it than ...

Were there any homosexual cadets?

I don't, I don't think so, I don't recall any. I remember homosexual fellows later on, I think, and I never did find out whether they were or not. One of the instructors at the time, he's a dear friend, I don't know whether he ever was really ah but there

09:30 was certainly a warrant officer in New Guinea that I think was. It's quite ironic because he lent me a pistol in Saigon because I spent a night there on the way home, and I felt I needed a weapon so he lent me a pistol and he was with me in New Guinea and he's a lovely bloke. Ah I haven't heard of him since but I rather felt in retrospect that those two might have been but, but they if they were

10:00 they never demonstrated any outward activity if you like. Ah and I don't think ... There are a couple of fellows that might have been and they didn't last because people got kicked out very quickly, ah if they couldn't handle the pace. I mean our class was nineteen eight-four when it started and it graduated with fifty-six. Ah ...

What was it about your character that meant you could handle the pace?

Oh I don't know I

10:30 ah focussed on getting on with life I suppose. Um being tough was being part of the business. You know wanting to be tough. You knew you had to be if you were going to be an army officer I think. It wasn't going to be easy. I mean some of the exercises we did were physically very difficult for me, I wasn't very well built.

11:00 I was only ten and a half, eleven stone something like that – six foot one. I wasn't physically very strong, I never had been. I found all the physical stuff fairly difficult, um but I was going to graduate. And so that was the you know I suppose the character at the end, I was going to graduate. I think as time went on I was also wanting to graduate because of my mother. I mean she was already

11:30 ill by then and I recognised the sort of effort that she'd made for me to get where I was, and I was going to make her proud of me I guess, mm.

Were you able to go home in uniform at any time while your mother was sick?

Ah ... Well no ... Well from ... Our annual leave, you know I mean we used to take stuff home to show our parents what we'd wear and that sort of thing.

12:00 First year particularly, firstly but after that it died off. But I ... Well my mother came to my graduation so she saw that. Yeah and then I had them post me back in Perth waiting for her to die, yeah. Yeah I'd say I

never came home to visit mother other than the leave we had a t Christmas time.

12:30 **So four years of this and, and you then had an engineering degree?**

No, we used to get two years of credits over the four years and then you go onto university full time. I was actually in the diploma class, Royal Military, sorry Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. I opted not to go on, to do full time schooling. Ah I wanted to go out into the regiment,

13:00 largely to become a young officer first and perhaps academically qualified second was my theory. It was probably the wrong theory but it didn't matter. You know in later life it mattered. Today you'd be stupid not to get as many degrees as you can because the amount of time you spent ... When we went to Duntroon it was always with the idea of a Field Marshal's baton in your haversack at some stage, you know you were in for the long, long haul, long climb -

13:30 ah long haul sorry. But um today I think a lot of fellows go in and say well I'll do fifteen, fifteen years and then go do something else. Which is what a lot of us finished up doing anyway. Ah you know in my case it was twenty-five years but a lot of people got out between fifteen and twenty I suppose. I think there's a different approach towards you know having second careers. You know if you went in the army in my day

14:00 you were there forever you thought.

How did you feel about war at that time?

Well we breathed and spoke about it all the time. I mean all the training we were doing was about wars. I mean ah it was our planning how to best eradicate your fellow human being who happened be wearing an enemy uniform, um and that's what you knew you were in

14:30 for I think. Um but we interspersed that with a lot of fun on and off the field so to speak. Um you know there was an awful lot of social camaraderie type stuff went on so the serious bit really didn't start to worry people. I mean couple of fellows it did I recall but most of us we were more interested in you know what we were going to do after football next Saturday night, sort of stuff.

15:00 Um yeah I'd ...

What were the worried guys like? What were they thinking about?

Oh I think you know religious fellows. I mean I got turned off religion at Duntroon. I ah had been ... You know Guildford was High Church of England, you know incense and things in Latin and all that sort of business and I was an altar boy and sang in the choir and all that sort of business. I got to Duntroon and found that one chaplain wearing you know

15:30 one coloured hat as the Catholics say, would say something about other religions and the Church of England bloke would say something nasty about Roman Catholics and it was all very petty and tawdry and you had to go to church on Sundays whether you liked it or not. So you know you'd make up your bed to look like you know you weren't there and get underneath it and not go to church parades and things. But I think some fellows who were

16:00 were still religious saw that the killing bit was at the end of the line. I mean we didn't have ... Korea had finished in nineteen sixty and were about to start getting involved in, well we were in Malaya but you know Malaysia, Borneo hadn't yet started and Vietnam we'd not heard of at that stage.

Did you anticipate what you could look forward to

16:30 **in entering a combat situation? You were training for war but did it ever really occur to you that you were going to be in a war?**

Yeah I think so. Ah I think but in a subconscious way – there was no conscious thinking about it. I think you knew what your job was going to be. If you were going to graduate in infantry you were going to join

17:00 a battalion and go somewhere exciting. It was all of great adventure stuff. It was a bit like something out of Boys Own Annual which was an old English book of the nineteen forties and nineteen fifties, you know where young fellows went off and did adventurous things in exotic parts. Ah and I think there was a fair bit of that attached to the generation of people. Um so we saw it as a ...

17:30 perhaps even an almost glamorous thing to become involved in. Ah we, we were treated to some sides of it to make sure we weren't to cloud, you know cloud nine and pie in the sky. There was a series of films called The World at War that we used to have to go and watch, we'd call it over the hill, where our picture theatre was. And much of it was classified as not available to the general public.

18:00 More of um, um a classification of film type thing rather than a classification of confidentiality. Because there were people being hanged and shot and god knows what else. Stuff that you see on television today at breakfast time was considered in nineteen sixty to be a bit, not okay. And you know Germans shooting Russian prisoners of war and

18:30 that sort of business. But it was all a film you know and that's different seeing things ... Even if you're

seeing death on films it's really not the same. I mean as realistic as you can make training you can't get to the real. It's quite ironical. Some of us at Canungra tried to make our training so realistic in terms of the

19:00 use of live ammunition that we went dangerously close to killing people. My view was if we did, bad luck for the fellow and everything else. But if it saved the lives of another twenty or thirty soldiers because they were more attuned to what combat really combat was about then perhaps we'd achieved something. Ah now I think it was you know it was an incredible approach to doing things because ah you know life is so precious.

19:30 Um ... But I mean that's the sort of calculated thinking that we did. Ah we, we studied wars. We studied the civil war, the Shenandoah Valley Campaigns. And the reason that I've been looking at getting trains and things and go back to America this year is to go and look at some of those battle fields at Richmond and Manassaas Junction and Bull Run. I went to Shiloh when we were in America last year ah which is one of the early battles –

20:00 twenty-six thousand casualties in two days. It was the most ferocious, dreadful bloody war. And yet we studied it for the impact of tactics, at that higher strategic planning level. Ah it was nothing to do with combat so to speak. Very little of what we did was I think. It was more to do with what you'd today management,

20:30 strategic thinking, tactical thinking so that you could lead groups of soldiers at various levels and sizes of levels into successful combat – logistically and in an operational sense. And the bit about the shooting wasn't all that ... Well we did a fair bit of it, I mean we did field exercises where we shot at each other with blank ammunition but it was all

21:00 a bit of a game, you know you were shooting at your fellow class mates so mm.

So when you left Duntroon your first posting was ...?

Ah to Three L of ... Third Line of Communication Signals Regiment ....which was a behind the scenes big communications thing but what's only a barracks in Melbourne. And it had some other stations – ah the long range communications

21:30 of the army – ah Diggers Rest and I've forgotten the other but that was the receiving station, I've forgotten the name of it. And you know but I didn't stay there long, I went off to this, to be an Adjutant Quarter Master of a CMF signals squadron in Perth.

What did you think of the signalling?

Oh I knew fairly quickly that I'd made a mistake in going into signals and I did it for

22:00 quite honourable reasons. Having spent four years in a class that I didn't want to be in academically, you know. Because in our first class in our final year whilst we were doing three days a week, nine pm to eight pm at night lectures in engineering subjects, our fellow class mates in the arts class had finished their academic work and they were all out doing extra military stuff – you know out in the bush or you know

22:30 that sort of thing. So they were preparing themselves for what we call combat arms – you know the infantry, armour, artillery all that sort of business, whereas we were preparing ourselves for some combat arms, engineers, technical artillery, but mainly for you know signals, mechanical engineers and that sort of thing. Sorry I've forgotten ... What was that question again? Oh why signals yeah. So

23:00 after four years of that I thought well I didn't want to do but I did do it so I ought to go into a technical corps. That was a mistake and I ... My first mistake was not to resist the Professor of Academic Studies who said, "You'll go into the BC class" and I said "But, but, but..."".You will". My second mistake was to say," I want to go into ... " These are quite tragic mistakes because they've had a huge impact on my service in Vietnam,

23:30 later. I should have said infantry but didn't and I went to signals. So what I did was miss out on about three years of, the critical three, early first three years of a young officer's life in an infantry battalion. And spent it instead fart arsing [wasting time] about with a bunch of drunks at, you know I'm talking about the regular army, we had a bunch of yuppie ["young professionals"] town houses

24:00 at Leederville in Perth and then this stupid course at the Marconi School of Wireless where I spent time playing footy and going to the pictures and visiting every beach in Sydney mainly. And then to New Guinea where naturally they made me the signals officer. And so, and then they made me a captain and suddenly I was an acting company commander. And later on, as we'll probably discuss a later, um that had

24:30 a bearing on ... You might recall that I said I'd commanded rifle companies in Vietnam and this background I think had an impact on that – yeah certainly in one case.

So you wanted to be closer to your mother at this point?

Oh well, I had to get a compassionate posting, yeah. There was no other choice I mean I had to be there and was there. Um and then she died and

25:00 yeah I ah, I lost the plot [lost direction] for a while, a young fellow.

How does the army handle it when a young officer loses the plot?

Well I got a fairly poor report in my first year. It was written by a CMF Major which I think would have impacted on my career if I'd stayed in Signals. I don't know I

25:30 mean once you've matured a bit and you've shown your full credentials I think people start to overlook what happened to you when you were a lieutenant without any supervision, which was my case. There was a captain there but he was an absolute drunk. Ah I mean he had problems with losing wives and things so he was all ... A very depressing place when I think about it. Ah one thing about it, it taught me not to drink in the middle of the day.

26:00 You know I never from that time on would go to the mess for a beer at lunch, anywhere, anytime because I saw so many times that we got so stitched up that by three o'clock in the afternoon we didn't know what time of day it was, and that's just dreadful when I look back at it. But um yeah and I still prefer not to go to lunch – oh occasionally I do but you know. Yeah it's interesting how things stick with you.

What

26:30 **sort of problems with your behaviour do you think the report had reflected, what ...?**

Oh well I just hadn't focussed on the job – I wasn't doing my job properly. Ah I spent all my time running around doing other things or um yeah I think it was basically that, I just hadn't done the job properly. Not that I'd been trained for it which is something that everybody overlooked. You're not supposed to be adjutant quarter master in a senior signals squadron on your

27:00 first posting anywhere. But I went there because the army was kind enough to send me to Perth – it was the only job they could give me. And I lived the SAS [Special Air Service] you see so there was a bit of a conflict there because we were treated a bit like pariahs [outcasts] by these supermen – ah it was the only mess we had to live in. Um and the only friend I really had there was a class mate of mine, he was killed in Vietnam,

27:30 in a training team but he ah ... Yeah it was interesting times when I think about it.

So the SAS were ah bastardising you?

Well no they, they treated us with, you know very deferentially I guess. You know we were just ah a bunch of pogos [raw recruits] that were living in the mess and they wished that we weren't. And you know I, I remember

28:00 having a fight, an argument with the commander one night about ... They were mainly also captains, there weren't many lieutenants in the SAS. Ah and of course they were also like full of dreadfully important, you know hush hush business like what they were doing in Borneo and that sort of business, even then. But they used to you know ... and they were pompous buggers some of them too, they were from another world of graduation from Duntroon and

28:30 they would give the stewards a hard time, for example, about the bloke would serve it from the, from the wrong side of the person and they'd say,"That bloke is the best machine gunner in A Squadron, he didn't join the army to become a steward. For Christ sake give him a go," you know but that was ah ... It was a funny time I think. Yeah and a pretty sad time. Yeah I was a bit foot loose and fancy I can tell you.

29:00 The number of times I'd be home fully dressed in my motorcar in the garage, we had sort of pens, and the blokes from the regiment or squadron were going to work and I'd been in there with the car engine still running sound asleep because I'd managed to get that far and that was you know bad news.

You're lucky that's all that happened.

Yeah that's right, absolutely, mm.

29:30 **So after your time in Western Australia where were you posted to next?**

Well that was to the Marconi School of Wireless in Sydney. We were based at a signals establishment. There were about a half a dozen of us and we went to lectures, you know we caught the train or something and it was an

30:00 appallingly run place and I said you know the only useful thing I did I think was to learn Morse [code] but then not well enough. We spent a lot of time socialising, playing footy in the Sydney competition and yeah having a ball and I decided that this was dreadful, shouldn't be doing this, I should be out learning to become a good officer. So I asked to be taken off the course which was another big black mark and posted to Pacific Islands Regiment.

30:30 Oh they offered me two jobs, one was the Fifth Battalion and I was stupid enough to think oh they'll be there painting rocks for the next ... you know not fully aware with what was happening at the Fifth Battalion because they were the first one to go to Vietnam, well after One RAR, and I would have gone

then. Ah in a way I'm glad I didn't, I went with a I think a much better trained battalion in the Sixth. So I got posted to PIR [Pacific Islands Regiment]

31:00 in Wewak.

So what you were trying to do was get yourself into a position of more action?

I wanted to be in a regimental environment where, you know which where a young officer should be. I used to say that you should never get married until ... You know if the army wanted us to get married they'd issue me with one from the Q [Quartermasters] Store. That's the sort of ... And I tried to talk one of my very close friends at Duntroon into not getting ... His wife wouldn't talk to me for years and years

31:30 and years because he, he was stupid enough to tell her that I'd tried to talk him out of it. But I mean he, he wasn't a regimental type, he was an engineer and academically quite brilliant and things have worked out very well – um and we're also good friends again, ah well at least his wife and I are. Ah and um yeah I just felt that if you were in the army you needed to be regimentally right

32:00 and people in uniform shouldn't be sitting behind desks with slide rules and that sort of things, which again is the basic mistake I'd made when I'd opted for signals. Because I'd done so well at the college ah in the military side of the house I was picked up with my first choice. If I hadn't of ironically I would have got my second choice which was artillery and then I could have just said you know well I don't want to be

32:30 technical anymore, I want to be a field commander. And I would have had an illustrious career as a gunner, who knows. Yeah but these are decisions you make when ... In those days you didn't get guidance from anybody. No counselling, it was all you make up your own mind lad this is a big wide world. Yeah and I suppose that was fairly right in some ways.

So what happened when you joined the regiment?

The Pacific Islands Regiment? Oh yeah it was

33:00 a new environment altogether and ... But you know they made me the signals officer which was unfortunate because I didn't get to speak Pidgin English properly because my job was to teach the, the PI signallers to teach English, speak English, ah and there's no point in me speaking Pidgin to them. They did send me out to patrol within the first three or four weeks with a bunch of literally cooks and bottle washers. And this ah warrant officer that I talked about earlier um ...

33:30 Oh and the intelligence officer from PNG Command in Port Moresby. And we went out searching for Indonesian incursions into the Sepik Valley. At that stage we were shooting them in Borneo and they were crossing into New Guinea – armed, we were all armed. But we got lost a few times and that was quite an interesting experience. I've got some lovely photographs of that patrol and they wrote a very good report which came back from, in those days it was called Joint Intelligence Bureau

34:00 I think. Now it's called JIO [Joint Intelligence Organisation] in Canberra, about the information we'd provided from this patrol, about access points into Indonesia and landing grounds and you know all that sort of good stuff, you know the stuff that you ... Because there were maps in those days, very little maps and that's why we spent a fair bit of time in Indonesia I suspect in saksak swamp, sago swamp. Unfortunately we didn't see any Indonesians, saw evidence of some but we didn't see anything. But ah yeah so and then

34:30 I just got on with you know being the CO's bum boy [sycophant] I suppose, which is what the signals officer becomes. And he was a dreadful fellow as it turned out. Um for good reasons. It was another army mistake, putting a bloke in a job that was beyond him when at the time he wasn't emotionally up to it – you know recent divorce and that sort of thing. And it was a dreadful, it turned out to be a dreadful time in New Guinea. Ah, so although there was a lot of good stuff to be done

35:00 the atmosphere was ... Yeah and in the finish you could ... Yeah there was not a lot of what you might call social life. You know a huge amount of drinking with your fellow soldiers, officers but um that sort of ... You going out and fishing on night division on the reef with hand grenades and rifles but you know ... Yeah it was a funny experience but ah there are some things about New Guinea that I, that I you know

35:30 still cherish, some of the things we did. Ah one of my patrols, platoons found a tribe of natives up in the Star Mountains that had not only never seen a white man before but had never seen another native before, and this is only 1965 – that's how primitive the place was. So there were those exciting bits and pieces to be done but then the war in Vietnam had started so everybody was getting itchy feet, because that's where the place was to be. And ah

36:00 we kept writing requests to be sent off and nothing came but eventually I did, yeah got posted to Sixth Battalion. And that was the start of a very interesting part of one's life I think.

So you didn't fire an angry shot in New Guinea?

No, no. Ah well, yeah, we tried to. We used to ah practise shooting at Indonesian war ships with 106 recoilless rifles.

36:30 But I think we actually did possibly shoot at a patrol once but that was by mistake I suspect. We were more likely to shoot each other. Because I used to ... I wasn't keen to have fellows out in the bush with live ammunition because if you don't treat weapons with the utmost respect when it comes to using them

37:00 for real you tend to kill your own people as much as the opposition because you're handling of the thing is to lackadaisical. So yeah I mean there were some interesting experiences in terms of live ammunition. I remember that the fellow that was, that was destined to become the first commander of the New Guinea Defence Force, as a local I should have had court martialled when he was a second lieutenant. Ah perhaps it would have saved New Guinea because he became very corrupt as a politician later,

37:30 Ted Diro. Ah he'd been up at our ... We had a live field firing range for mortars and he was the mortar officer up in the mountains and ah out of Wewak and he'd been up there for about a month, he was married, and he came back on a Friday and one of his land rovers broke an axle. And so instead of sort of transferring goods or ... And the land rovers were kitted out with

38:00 a section of mortars, two mortars and first line of live ammunition, right, mortar bombs. He just left it there and said "I'll come back and pick it up Monday." Anyway by Monday he'd forgotten all about it by then, that's the way those sorts of people are. And my CQMS [Chief Quartermaster Sergeant} said,"Sir I think we should do a spot check on the track of items for the mortars " and I said,"Yeah that's fine, good Stan, ah check this, this, this and that, that's good." "Two sight missing sir". "Two sights? Check the whole range of mortar equipment".

38:30 Two whole sections missing, there's you know a whole section, two mortars missing. Get Ted Diro. Anyway they found him somewhere, in married quarters. "Ted we seem to be missing a couple of mortars". Oh! And then he explained to me where it all ... I said,"You've got until last light to get them all back here. Take a recovery vehicle and go and I'll think about what I'm going to do with you". And I should have then took him straight off to the CO

39:00 and said,"Look sir this is what's happened". But I knew what would happen and he was quite a good officer and certainly better than any of the others and I didn't want to ruin his career so I, he was duty officer for a long time but, and other things, I punished him that way rather than having an official black mark against his name I think.

How were you getting along with the men?

Oh yeah pretty good.

39:30 Um I made some good friends amongst the ah Pacific Islanders, particularly their NCO's [Non Commissioned Officer] and particularly those from places like Buka, Bougainville, ah the Tali's ... What's it called? Madang, not Madang. Oh it doesn't matter I'll think of it. The Chimbus [highlanders] and the Papuans I didn't like very

40:00 much, they seemed to be shifty people. But we had all mixes of these people and ah yeah I got on all right. When I left there was lots of weeping from the soldiers. I said oh well I'm coming back. I had to go back on compassionate leave or something to Australia and I went on a RAF Hercules [aircraft] straight from Vanimo to Australia with a CMF, or someone during the annual camp, hygiene

40:30 people I think – you know malaria, mosquito people. And I said oh no I'm only going to down for a couple of weeks, I'll be back. Well as it turned out I didn't come back but that was the only way they'd calm down – these are all the soldiers from A Company. But yeah I got on pretty well with the soldiers.

Tape 3

00:45 **Um you said that you shot recoilless rifles at Indonesian war ships can you just elaborate a little bit on that please?**

Ah well we were training to shoot the Indonesian war ships

01:00 and we used to put out forty-four gallon drums out to sea sometimes. You'd need something the size of a frigate to hit it I think. Ah we weren't very good at it I can say but it was all very, very secret. Australia's Northern Defences against the Indonesian Navy, 106 recoilless anti-tank rifles.

Who was the enemy? How real was the,

01:30 **the sort of antagonism between Indonesia and the Australian Army at that point?**

Ah not a lot. I mean there was a lot of intelligence gathering. We had spooks [spies] living in the mess at Vanimo, and there was some down at Wewak from various intelligence agencies.

Who's side?

Our, yeah, yeah, the Australian intelligence agencies. Who were interested in you know all matter of things about what was happening

02:00 on the Indonesian side and that sort of thing. From a military perspective ah, ah there was no doubt there were incursions by Indonesian troops into New Guinea. Certainly to a place called Serkotchio [?] where they were trying to I think enlist the support of the local people in terms of any change in status of New Guinea

02:30 perhaps. Because at that stage it was still very much in the hands of Australia and I think the Indonesians may be looking forward to the day when it became an independent country.

It was quite a tumultuous time in Irian Jaya [West New Guinea] that time. Do you know what was going on over there with the Indonesians taking over and …?

Oh no, I mean this is in the mid-sixties when our concern was in terms of a military perspective

03:00 in, and operationally was in Borneo Australian soldiers and Indonesian soldiers were you know killing each other, you know engaged in combat, in the confrontation sort of thing. And if we ran into armed Indonesians in New Guinea who's to say that they ah wouldn't be inclined to engage the Australians? Because all the officers

03:30 were Australian although all the, most of the NCO's were PI's [Pacific Islanders] and of course all the soldiers were PI's. But you know there was just that … What we were doing was conducting reconnaissance missions, basically as an intelligence gathering exercise for the data bases in Canberra to support any you know possible defence against perhaps an Indonesian invasion or the other

04:00 way around, I'm not sure, I guess against an invasion – I wouldn't have thought we had it in mind to invade Indonesia in those days. We were certainly buying F111's to bomb Jakarta but …

So how was it organised? You were in charge of a group of Pacific Islanders …?

Well the companies would on rotation, particularly the company at Vanimo, send out patrols. And they'd be inserted into all sorts of funny little places,

04:30 with mainly civil aircraft, and they'd do ten or fourteen day patrols or something to go and, as was the company motto or regimental motto was to find a path. Um and you'd be resupplied by army Cessnas dropping out stuff free fall, which is one of the more dangerous things you could be doing, ah and ah be hit by one of those. Um well

05:00 flying with them was probably even more dangerous. A lot of single engine aeroplane drivers got killed in Vietnam, ah sorry in New Guinea. It was the getting home on Friday night syndrome. They'd get into a long valley and the weather would close in and they had no hope and instead of turning back they'd fly on and, into pinos terra firma as someone once said. Um yeah, and I, and I had a prang [crash] myself in a, in a army Cessna

05:30 but that was nothing to do with the weather.

What happened there?

Oh I was going over to an island called Karkar which is off Wewak the large island ah to, to plan an exercise for somebody – I can't remember what the background was, and this ah young officer flying a Cessna, army Cessna one eighty and I took off from Wewak and went over there. And as we were coming onto the approaches I could see ah

06:00 to us what looked like a road running alongside of a, an airstrip. And until you looked at where the white markers when you realised the road in fact was the airstrip and the green part, which looks like an airstrip, had just been freshly mowed and that was the drainage – that's where he landed. Ah I can remember saying" I think it's a bit wetter than we thought" because it had been heavily raining and of course this was about three or four feet of water.

06:30 One wrecked Cessna. Ah one white faced pilot. Um yeah that was interesting. So we clambered out and got somebody else to come and pick us up. And I think he had to stay there, that was his punishment. He's still there.

Did the plane tip over?

No only like this, onto its nose. Well with a one-eighty Cessna you can land it on a tennis court almost so … So

07:00 yeah that was interesting.

He stayed up there did he?

Oh yeah he's still there I think. That was the army's punishment, you stay and defend this airstrip for the rest of your life. No I don't know what happened to him, he was a recovery officer of something.

What did you understand about the role up there in that it was an Australian colony at that time. Were you given any briefing …?

Oh we, we thought we had a quite significant role to play

07:30 in New Guinea in terms of establishing a loyal defence force, a defence force that would be loyal to the government and not some bunch of rat bag people who would run loose in rebellious type ways. And to do that they needed to be educated so we had a very strong education program running. In fact it became a bit of a conflict between the operational necessity that somebody somewhere in Canberra, Port

08:00 Moresby I don't know was saying we need, we need more information about this part of the border or wherever and us being able to provide and the need of the educators, ah you know we had half a dozen army education corp people in the battalion, of them running their school classes, or interfering with their curriculum. So it became a bit of a ...

How did you feel about being used in a fairly obviously political role rather than military role?

08:30 Oh ... Well I think, I think the role was ... I saw the role as pretty straight forward of a, of um helping to train a defence force that would be there on self government day to support the government of New Guinea on the day. There was a conflict always between the army and the police. It was a question about who had the best gear,

09:00 who had the best rations. The police in those days were also run mainly by um the flotsam and jetsam of the British Empire. You know the expatriates who were in Kenya or in India or Malay who just kept moving further and further East ah until ... oh some of them finished up in Solomon Islands – about as far as you can go before you start becoming a French man. And you know so they were all

09:30 ex-Kenyan policemen and those sorts of people. And some of them fairly ordinary I think. The army and indeed in the finish the army after independence the Australian army sent advisers to sort out the, the police very soon. Because I remember it was the commander of Scheyville that went there, a fellow called Paddy Artridge, as a Colonel. But um

10:00 no I think ah you know our role of ah, of ... I mean there was a very thin veneer of civilisation about some of these people. A huge number of dialects. You had situations where you could have a military hierarchial structure, you know a platoon commander, a platoon sergeant, ah a section commander, a corporal but the bloke who called all the shots in the platoon was a private soldier who was the line

10:30 chief from the Chimbus [Highlands tribe] or whatever, you know. Ah that sort of issue had to be sorted out if you wanted to have a cohesive defence force.

How good do you think the military was in briefing you in dealing with those cross-cultural relationships when you went to New Guinea?

Oh the ... It was pretty much hand of mouth. People had been there for time before yet as they say

11:00 would tell you about that sort of thing. There was a book you were supposed to have read. Um and they used to have officer training, but that degenerated into you know learning to speak Indonesian or ah learning about the stock market or something. It really wasn't a cultural ...

How,

11:30 **how separate do you see the role of politics and the military? How wide or how narrow?**

Oh look the principles of war that we were taught, including the political aim, I mean I see no separation at all. Ah, um certainly in my time. I mean this was the bread and butter of what you were taught in Duntroon I think and if you read Clausewitz and all these other sorts of

12:00 books that you were supposed to have read, um the, the military is merely an arm of the government to do, to achieve some political purpose. And political purpose maybe defending the country against an invasion, but you know it's still ... And if you read the histories of World War II when some quite outlandish decisions were made that militarily weren't all that smart but it was to deal with the relationships between Australian and UK{United Kingdom] and UK and Australia

12:30 and the United States and so forth. Or in Korea when MacArthur [US General Douglas] you know was basically sacked because he didn't understand what the political objective was of the President of the United States and what the United Nations were about, we don't want a nuclear war in China. Um and so you know ... I think commanders have to be aware of the environment in which they're operating. And I think the young, the young officers, the regimental officers

13:00 in New Guinea in my time were probably advised about that, that envelope if you like but I don't think we took much notice of it because we didn't really care, you know. You know why would a twenty-four/five year old really care about why the Australian Government wants to do this – you know let them get on with the job.

Who was the perceived threat to Australia at that time?

It was somebody up in the North. Ah somebody called the communists.

13:30 Ah they were going to come out of China I suppose. And yeah that was the ... You see SEATO [Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation] and all those things were set up for those sorts of purposes. But I mean Australia had been involved in little brush fire wars, you know the communist terrorists in ST's [Straits

Territories] in Malaya and then the Indonesians, which is not so much about communism but

14:00 but who owns Borneo really, and the oil. And I reckon the Americans only went to Vietnam because they thought there was oil in the Gulf of Tonkin, Paracel Islands. And when they discovered there wasn't it was time to bring all the troops home – fifty-eight thousand dead fellows later. I mean at that level you didn't really care, there was something about ... I mean you weren't

14:30 privy to you know strategic intelligence assessments that were being made in Canberra and so forth. And I don't know whether there were any decent ones done either quite frankly. I mean your ability to, to um prepare intelligence was even was then, at a strategic level, than it is now. And we see how bad it is now in terms of Iraq, ah of how things can get all screwed up. Um

15:00 I think as the [British] Foreign, ex Foreign Minister ah said the other day, um Cooke, about [British Prime Minister] Blair and [Minister] Hutton and all of that, ah intelligence assessments at best, the best guess of available ... Today it's a bit easier because people like the Americans can use technical means to establish some fairly hard

15:30 things in terms of sound collection, ah from all sort so places and pictures and so forth. But in the sixties it was you know about intelligence coming from people on the ground – "humint" [human intelligence] I think it was called – signals intelligence and that sort of stuff, satellite intelligence wasn't huge, although signals intelligence was and that's why we had a place in Darwin

16:00 and that's why until [Australian Prime Minister Gough] Whitlam came along we used to have a place in Hong Kong too – and they were removed by Mr Whitlam because he saw the need to get into bed with China so to speak. I mean when you've had all those sorts of things ... And I mean the Korean War was still just around the corner and it was a ferocious war the Korean War. The North Koreans are still a bit ugly aren't they?

At that time did you hear much, do you recall

16:30 **hearing much about the Korean War as you were growing up?**

Oh I did ... Oh yeah not really. I mean we heard a lot of anecdotal stuff at Duntroon as cadets because it was only a few classes earlier. In fact some of our instructors had been to Korea as platoon commanders. Um so I mean there was that living people. You know stories about fellows who knew they'd been posted to a battalion in Korea

17:00 would spend a Canberra winter at night living in weapon pit up in the side of Mt Pleasant to get used ... to get acclimatised, you know that sort of stuff. Um yeah um so I mean Korea was there, World War II was not all that far in the distance. Yeah but ah there was a fair amount of that sort of background but I don't think young,

17:30 young people really want to know what the big message is.

Were you keen to get into action? How keen were you to see live fire?

Oh, well I was very k ... I think you have to say that we were all pretty keen to get on a boat to Vietnam. Ah to get into a battalion that was going to Vietnam. I think it's this thing I mentioned earlier about you know great adventures and of course there's the immortality of youth, um so that you know

18:00 you're not going to get killed. Even though before I went I knew a number of people who had. Including one young fellow that I shared a room with at Canungra. And he went off with the Third Battalion and I happened to be in Perth on leave when HMAS Sydney [troop carrying aircraft carrier] called in so I went down to Fremantle and went and visited him. And he had that sort of look on his face about I'm not coming home – ah quite interesting.

What is that look?

18:30 Well apprehensive, ah ... you know when it comes to saying goodbye – this I think maybe the last time I see you sort of without saying it. You just get that ... Anyway that's what happened to [(UNCLEAR)], he was killed by a mine. I went to his funeral at Surfers Paradise.

When was that?

Um about nineteen sixty-six, nineteen sixty-seven – nineteen sixty-seven it might have been. Oh hang on no

19:00 nineteen sixty-eight. Nineteen sixty-seven/ nineteen sixty-eight. Nineteen sixty-eight probably, with the Third Battalion he was – ah in the Long Hai Mountains. But anyway so yeah and other fellows that I'd known. Well by that stage Tony had been killed, Anzac Day nineteen sixty-eight.

He was the training signals guy?

Yeah, yeah.

What happened to him?

Oh it was a firefight with NVA [North Vietnamese Army] or something – I've forgotten really what

happened. But ah I'm just

19:30 thinking ... When the class ... Ah these reunions always finish up with them going out to the, to the graduation parade with the current class you know and it's always on the first Tuesday of December. I opted not to do that but to come back to Adelaide via Forbes which is where Danny is buried, to put a wreath on his grave on behalf of the class. Another fellow had done it on Anzac Day earlier that year. Um ...

20:00 Anyway I did all that and a guy took some photographs in digital so we could then email them back to the bloke that convened the thing and put them on – we've got a web page, the class has got a web page – so everybody could see ... Anyway and he's between his mother and his father – both who died after he did, of course – they were Russians. But I looked at it and I said there's something wrong with that, age twenty, twenty-four, killed

20:30 in nineteen sixty-eight? He would have been nineteen when he graduated – it was impossible. I remember we had the Quarter Bar, the old Quarter Bar at Duntroon had a garden in it with a, with a what we called a yum yum tree, it was a Chinese Elm or something, a bit like the one we were under sitting out having a cup of tea. Ah and tradition on your twenty-first was that you get up there and people just pass beers up until you fell out. And I can remember doing that at Danny 's twenty-first

21:00 so he was obviously not nineteen. So he was probably twenty-six, the figure and that what it turns out to be. It was actually in his twenty-seventh year I think he was killed. Anyway ah so we've now got a scheme going for the war graves people to get it fixed.

He went over with the Training Team, had you heard of the Training Team?

Oh yeah well I had by the time I left Canungra because anybody who went to the Training Team had to go

21:30 through a course at Canungra and my company assisted in you know helping with some of the activities that went on. I became very friendly with the bloke that ran the course.

Had you wanted to go on the training course?

Yeah I had at one stage. Yeah, ah I think to get out of New Guinea I would have done anything probably by the time ... Ah yes I um, I'd applied for the Training Team but ah ...

22:00 Some of my classmates did too but none of them got on it. Ah a couple of them failed the course I remember. But oh you just ... It was a sort of a French Foreign Legion type – you know green berets and Motagnards running up hills, it was that sort romantic vision of war I think that ... and it really was quite the opposite

22:30 to that. Tony was an SAS [Special Air Service] Officer so I mean it was ... If you didn't go up with the SAS and they had a squadron there, um the next thing I guess was to put him in charge of a, some sort of special force, with a special forces unit that the Americans were running in, in Vietnam. I think that's who he was with when he was killed. Um one of those Mike Force things or whatever. Um but yeah

23:00 there was that sort of romantic notion about the Training Team. And I mean the image has carried on with Victoria Cross winners and ...

In the nineteen sixties, nineteen sixty-five and that period what did you know about the battles over there and the history of the wars?

Well we knew all about the IndoChina war, we'd studied that at Duntroon and I did a bit more of it. I got books like

23:30 Street Without Joy . He was killed by a mine – I've forgotten his name, an American author.

That was written after the war wasn't it, Street Without Joy?

Yeah these, these were about the IndoChina war, French and the Viet Minh, yeah and Dien Bien Phu [battle that finally defeated the French] and all that sort of stuff. Um

24:00 what was going in Vietnam in the period from nineteen sixty to nineteen sixty-six/ nineteen sixty-seven I suppose, I'd have no idea, except you'd read the odd paper about this and that happening and alleged incursions against American warships in the Gulf of Tonkin and that America was saying this and that the Australian Army had got some special advisers up there and that sort of thing. But then when you got down to a place like the jungle training centre

24:30 and you found out ah pretty well, because they used to get copies of everything that was coming out so, and in the mess at night I mean it was all jungle greens and beer cans. You know ah you'd come back from a field firing range or ... Mansford and I, that was the bloke I was talking about earlier George Mansford, he lives in Cairns now, he wrote a book too called the Mad Galahs. He was a private soldier in Korea. A corporal

25:00 in Malaya and a platoon commander I think in Vietnam. Anyway he finished up as a brigadier and he's a lovely fellow – he's one of those great characters that I don't think the Australian Army has anymore

because they're too politically correct. Anyway George and I after work would go and get a box of hand grenades and go to this old grenade range and throw grenades for beers. And always won because I used to be a good cricketer and you know could work out how to get this thing through the

25:30 window or the hole in the ground or whatever it was. And ah yeah then we'd go back to the mess.

Were these live grenades?

Absolutely. Is there any other sort?

I mean if you pull the pin out they're going to go bang when you throw them?

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Just on grenades, when you learning to throw these things, especially when throw a live one, it must be hair-raising when you pull the pin out of it?

Yeah well it's ... Well the adrenalin certainly runs and it was done in a very

26:00 ah supervised environment, you know in a bay with an instructor and ... this is at Duntroon of course, the first time I threw a grenade. Um and um yeah you know you had in your hand this thing that could go up but you know after you throwing your first one well ... Yeah you get, you get a bit full of bravado

26:30 after a while with some of these things. I can recall in New Guinea when this warrant officer friend of mine was running a grenade practice and I had to always have a safety officer you see and they always had to be an officer. And we had this tower which you could sit up in and observe things that were going on and say yes and check and all that sort of business. I said I haven't seen one of these things explode for a while so I might watch the – you're supposed to duck down behind a steel parapet – and

27:00 bang. And the base plate, this is the old thirty-six grenade, the base plate I reckon went, oh it sounded as if it was about an inch away but it was obviously further away than that but the whine of it as it went past made sure that I was going to put my head down after that. Yeah so you get a bit blasé about these things. The same thing happened in Vietnam when you did things in your early part of your tour that subsequently you,

27:30 no way in the world were you going to do things the same way I guess. You know I bit gung-ho. I think that's ... I suppose that's the sort of ah people that the army was looking for in a sense. I mean you don't want a quiet studious type in a battalion. I mean it's alright to have these things like Montgomery sitting you know a hundred miles behind the line with the 8th Army in

28:00 North Africa and, and sleeping through battles because he was there to think not to, not to fight and get emotional. But you know if they're not the person who's actually going to lead the company into a bunker system, you know you want people to be get up and go and that sort of thing. Ah as well as well rehearsed in things and experienced I suppose. It's a

28:30 traditional career pattern of being a platoon commander and then a, then something else as a captain in a battalion and then a company commander, you know that sort of thing.

Just pick up on some of the chronology. You were in New Guinea and you came back in nineteen sixty-five was it?

No nineteen sixty-six/ nineteen sixty-seven or ... nineteen sixty-seven I think.

Then down to Canungra for training?

Yeah. I went down there on a course and then stayed there to Join D Company, Six RAR. Who had,

29:00 who had just arrived as the company second in command.

Did you meet any veterans of the Long Tan ...[Vietnamese battle that cost 18 Australian lives]?

Long Tan? Most of them were there. I promoted many of them as company commander some time on. Ah there's a photograph taken that seems to pop up all over the place. On our second tour we raised the cross and the bloke standing either side of it were both D Company fellows. They were section commanders or section 2IC's [Second In Command]

29:30 and things. And they were still ... There was probably still fifty soldiers with the battalion, ah with the company.

How much does the effect of war have on one of your close colleagues – like you had had no experience of battle at this stage but you had, how much does it after a while rub off on you that experience?

Oh well you see ... None of the officers or senior NCO's had ... Oh sorry,

30:00 the acting company sergeant major he was tragically killed in a car accident after his second tour of Vietnam. ... They were all about ah edgy, nervous. I'd decided I was going to be a very cool, calm, relaxed ... I didn't want to be stand up and

30:30 yell and shout and say we'll have a parade tomorrow morning or we'll you know whatever. I said these blokes have been off and they all look a bit shell shocked some of them, they were sort of ...

What does that look like?

Well the way some people speak and don't want to talk about things perhaps or when they've had a few beers they get a bit stroppy perhaps.

31:00 I, I didn't want ... I mean I was keen to find out about you know what really happened and it was impossible. I did find out much later.

What?

About how Long Tan was all you know ready to go. Why it happened? And I did that because I'd become the intelligence officer of the battalion and I needed to know these things. But

31:30 you know obviously it was a famous thing and there were these soldiers that actually fought out at ... But ah they were good soldiers and I didn't bastardise them if you like. You know went probably soft to let them do their thing a bit. I for example, out of my own pocket actually hired a – in those days Surfers Paradise was fairly

32:00 low key. I mean there were lovely beer gardens at the, where the Surfers Paradise Hotel used to be, and the biggest building there was the Sands, The Sands Hotel which was is only about ten storeys. I had a permanent room there, which I used myself occasionally for nocturnal activities so to speak. Um but the soldiers always had it available, well at least the NCO's and if they want to take soldiers with them

32:30 that was fine and they could do whatever they like provided they were back to do whatever duty demanded them to do. Um so it was a fairly relaxed style of ... Because the platoon commanders were all brand new too. They had not seen much and they were nice young fellows. And the 2IC who was a lieutenant had just joined us from the Queen's Regiment, a Pom. He'd arrived in Australia

33:00 wanting to go to Vietnam so they posted him to the Sixth Battalion and at their personnel depot at South Heads in Sydney where he arrived, they put him on an aeroplane to Brisbane because that's where they said, these very knowledgeable people, said the Sixth Battalion was. And the Sixth Battalion of course had moved to Townsville once before. Anyway so he gets to, gets to Brisbane and catches a taxi out to Enoggera where he was told to go, goes into the mess that used to be the old mess,

33:30 the old wooden place, now a Divisional Mess I think, and wonders why it's full of gunners. And he says,"I'm sorry I thought this was the Sixth Battalion Officers' mess I've just been posted to it." And a fellow said,"Oh no they've gone to Townsville" and he said,"Well shall I take the taxi there or should I get another one?" He had no idea how far Brisbane to Townsville was, he was prepared to take the taxi that he had up to Townsville at some huge cost. Anyway. Anyway so here was this bloke

34:00 but he couldn't drive a car so I had to teach him how to do that because he'd never driven a car in his life. So I mean they were all interesting times. There was a funny mix of people and I think we tried to make a lot of humour with these blokes. But there was always a serious side and many of them on their second tour should never have gone back in my view. Ah they went what we used to call "troppo," yeah. Um some of them finished up

34:30 being priests – not that there's anything wrong with that but it's a bit different from being ... you know winning a military medal in a, in a battle somewhere and ...

Long Tan was very famous, it sort of brought attention to the war in a big way in Australia. Can you recall hearing of that in the military and the first time ...?

Ah no actually I think I was in New Guinea, August nineteen sixty-six. Is it nineteen sixty-six?

35:00 Um yeah I was still in New Guinea and really we were getting on with the job in front of us and Australia and Vietnam were a long way away from anywhere. I mean our only communication with people was by radio, ah at Wewak and an aeroplane that used to come up once or twice a week from you know TAA [Trans Australia Airlines], one of the old DC3's [Dakota, transports]. So it was a fairly remote, out of sight out of mind place I guess. And it wasn't

35:30 until one got down to Canungra that you really, suddenly you went into overload because Canungra was full of Vietnam – in all shapes and sizes. I mean almost everyone on the staff had been there, on the Training Team or with a battalion.

What was the feeling about Vietnam then? How was the atmosphere if you recall in the army regarding Vietnam?

Oh well at the junior level I think we were still all very

36:00 keen that this was going to be our war, this is what we were trained for, that's what we're in the army for, um and that was where we should be. Um and um yeah I think despite obviously some personal reservations because every so often somebody got killed that you knew. And ah so ... But it was

36:30 all still this gung ho bit, "Let's go off to war", pipes playing, you know flags waving.

How did you feel about National Service?

I can't remember having any thoughts about National Service at all, at that stage. Years later when I became instructor at Scheyville I become very knowledgeable about national servicemen.

37:00 National Service wasn't introduced because of Vietnam of course. National Service was introduced at a decision the Cabinet made in Tasmania just after, was it Three RAR or Four, I can't ... Probably Four RAR's mine incident in Borneo when we lost about ten soldiers in a couple of days on anti-personnel mines. And

37:30 there was no reinforcements readily available, because we only had three battalions – one in, one in Malaya, ah in Borneo, one at Malaya and you know a quarter of a one back in Australia somewhere. And the quarter of a one back in Australia didn't have enough personnel we're going to have to have more battalions if we're going to do this sort of thing. So they introduced it for that reason. And of course the battalions got to five and six. Six was raised in ...

38:00 No hang on when was Long Tan? Nineteen sixty-six? Oh nineteen sixty-five. Bythis stage of course government people thinking about Vietnam, oh we've got all these battalions we may as well send some. You know it's the old case of if you've got the resources you can join in great adventures. If you don't have them you don't go. Which is the approach I would be taking – seriously. But yeah no National Service and then ...

38:30 Ah a lot of my soldiers were National Service.

Did you do much training for mines and anti-mine warfare?

Ah no, booby traps, we did a hell of a lot of booby traps. In fact I used to run up a demonstration on booby traps in the Vietcong village or Vietnamese village that we had set up at Canungra. Ah there was some booby trap stuff there but not mines, not M16 mines, we didn't know about them.

39:00 Didn't know about them at all. And it came as a huge surprise let me tell you. Many years later when our mines started getting used against us, because of yet again another military blunder. Putting in a mine ... The principles about minefields were that you should never put mine fields out unless they could be covered by friendly

39:30 fire, protected. Ah certainly barrier minefields were short, the ones they put in Vietnam and of course in the finish it wasn't protected or even surveilled by anything. You couldn't even see one side of the minefield from the other in many places because of all the growth that grew up. And ah that's where they got their mines from. Ah I got involved with that, very seriously, in late

40:00 ninteen sixty ... no. When did they land on the Moon? July, July 1969. Yeah, mm. That operation, Mundingbarra it was called. I think, I think some of, I think the pioneers would have done the mine warfare courses but I

40:30 can't recall the general ... But we had to all sorts of mandatory courses at Direction of army Headquarters

Tape 4

00:42 **Can you tell me about specific training you were doing at Canungra?**

Well there were a number of streams. Everybody who went to Vietnam had to go through

01:00 Canungra but some of the courses were quite lengthy. For example preparing people for the Training Team. Every battalion went down through a thing called Sub Unit Training, so that a company would go down there for about a month. And they'd go through assault ranges and grenade ranges and live shooting and exercises at Wiangari State Forest. And we used to provide um either demonstrations

01:30 on how to do things or enemy mainly in the exercise at Wiangari. Um and ah then there was another course for individual people and they did a thing called ah Battle Efficiency I think it was called. Ah where soldiers who were going up as ... Because not everybody went up as form units, only basically the infantry, the artillery,

02:00 I think the arm ... everybody else went up in a stream flow – individuals being posted. So there was courses for them as well. Um but it was about you know jungle warfare and there wasn't all that much jungle in Phuoc Tuy [province in Vietnam] as it turned out but ...

When you were being the enemy what sort of things were you doing? What did the army think about the enemy at this point in the war?

Oh well

02:30 you see the soldiers. Ah this was ... I mean there was all sorts of material to read and so forth. Well obviously we were basing our stuff on how the Vietcong would do things or the North Vietnamese Army.

What did you know of that? How were your practices based around that?

Well there was a fair amount of material that came out in what was called Training Bulletins,

03:00 and I've actually got a couple of them somewhere I think, that talk about enemy tactics and this is all developed from the tour that came back from Vietnam – a lot of people who'd been there previously, battalions and so forth. And we also had soldiers that ah had, had been there and had observed how the enemy functioned and so forth. And they were always ah you know their opinions were always sought about if we're going to do this ambush you know how would

03:30 he did it or whatever. Um, but it doesn't really make a lot of difference, I mean you're entrenching drills I think to people. Um you know an ambushing trucks, you know how do, what do you do, that sort of thing. Um search and destroy operations. The enemy in those cases you were just going to sit there and get destroyed because that was the aim of the exercise was to be able to find us, so concealment

04:00 and so forth, bunkers and once they did they'd attack you and you'd all get deaded, as the enemy. So that was fair enough.

Were you wearing uniform?

Well I ... Ah we just wore ah, yeah we had black uniforms, mm. But we didn't use, we didn't go as far as the Americans did much later with ah

04:30 their training against Soviet aircraft – they had their own Soviet aircraft to train against, at ah various places. But you know I think ah the principles were all sort of pretty right. Unfortunately a lot of the training I'd discovered after having been to Vietnam and going to Scheyville, that too much of the training there had been based on lessons

05:00 learnt in Borneo and Malaya. Ah one particular issue um and I, I had to write to army headquarters to the Director of Infantry to say look we should change this because I can now understand why young officers who come from Scheyville get, get brassed up in bunker systems so often – because they'd not been taught to attack bunker systems. I mean taught to attack armed camps. It's not a hell of a lot of difference

05:30 between the two. So I mean it was all pretty much learning on the road. I think in the finish the Australian army training at Canungra was pretty professional and high class, for the purpose for which it was designed and, and for the people who had to do the job.

What was the public like at this point in time?

Oh I didn't take too much notice. We were a pretty closed shop. I mean to say we worked very hard.

06:00 Um I mean I had some friends in Brisbane. Um I don't recall, ah provided we ate and drank well and partied well, that we talked about the war too much. I remember there was a couple of bunches of doctors I got to know because they used to be locals at Canungra and I used to go water skiing with them. I remember taking up a boot load of plastic explosive because where they were water skiing out on the, what's the name of the river?

06:30 Oxley, Oxley River? No, something like that anyway, out in Western Brisbane, there was a big tree root that was giving them some worry so we did a little demolition job on that. But most of them were residents of the Royal Brisbane Hospital and they used to keep a room for me. And they used to tell the landlady, housekeeper, whatever, oh this fellow's going off to Vietnam soon and he might never come

07:00 home again so could we leave him a room? Which was terrific because I could go up to Brisbane, park my car in the doctors' car parks and use their quarters and you know go from there – didn't have to book into a hotel or something. But um the public ah no I never, I never really took too much notice of what the public was saying until during and after Vietnam, quite frankly. It didn't, it didn't seem to be

07:30 an issue we were interested in. It was probably there but who cares ah what they thought, we were having a good time, you know oblivious to all things – focus on the job and having a lot of fun.

What would have been the most valuable thing that you took out of Kunungra?

Gee,

08:00 that's a difficult question. I suppose the experience in ah caring for a bunch of soldiers. Ah working alongside others. Um, providing an instrument that hopefully would have been beneficial in making people that were going to Vietnam better prepared.

08:30 I just had a lot of fun with these blokes that's all. And then indeed on the way home I'd, I was, I'd fallen in love or something I think. Ah and she had a ... her parents had a cattle station somewhere out at Gympie.It was near Easter I remember. Anyway the company all drove off and they ... in cars and buses or whatever and I didn't ... it took me about a fortnight to get up there.

09:00 And not because I stayed all the time at Gympie but I'd sort of decided that I'd drop off at various places. And the CO was wondering what the hell is this bloke doing? I was just having a bit ... I thought geez I've been working my butt off for the last nine months I'm going to have a bit of a good time so I went to places I'd never been to and met people and so forth. Because I knew once I got to Townsville my days of running an independent company with no directions – you see I had two bosses, one was the chief instructor at Canungra, the

09:30 other was the commanding officer of the battalion in Townsville. If one of them gave me a hard time I'd go and talk to the other one, you know, bounce them off each other. They were quite good friends ah and both Western Australian CO's and both became generals. Yeah so it was a lot of fun you know having your own command and, and being independent of you know regimental life, RSM's [Regimental Sergeant Major] wanting

10:00 to have parades and all that sort of cods wallop [rubbish] which at Canungra we didn't see as being very important. But of course I knew once we got back to, once we got to Townsville, to Laverack Barracks that would all change and it did. Suddenly we were wearing smart uniforms and having parades and you know duty officers and all that sort of nonsense so ...

So how long did you end up being at Canungra?

Oh we ... The CO said you know go down there for three months and you'll be relieved by Five RAR well nine months later ...

10:30 it was nearly we were there, yeah. Ah which I think for the soldiers wasn't a bad thing either because they'd come home from a various arduous tour of duty in Vietnam, a lot of them, and they weren't, weren't really prepared for RSM's and parades, you know that side of the army. Because it's a narrow minded side, ah and these were fellows that were into you know let's have a swinging time – and they did. Um

11:00 yeah so ... But as I say that all changed when we got to Townsville. Regimentation took over and other people were telling you what to do all day and every day.

What did you think of the health of these men?

Well they could drink, they could drink themselves silly under water I could tell you so they were, they were fit physically. I thought they were mentally all right ah because I wasn't

11:30 trained to recognise ... I mean there were sometimes that I had to go and talk to the doctor about.

Such as?

Oh they were personal things related to soldiers that were worrying them and hurting their jobs and the doctor wouldn't reveal what was wrong with them but I said I need to know because you know how do I manage a bloke that can't get his wife pregnant because he's um whatever, and they want to have children and that sort of things

12:00 so I needed to know these things to deal with them.

Was this due to chemicals or was this just an ordinary marriage sort of ...?

h a genetic thing, ah yeah. Chemicals weren't much we talked about. I mean we had chemicals everywhere. Forgetting about Agent Orange [toxic American defoliant] I mean we were using smoke grenades and white phosphorous grenades ... I had a couple of blokes who were both at Long

12:30 Tan ... one's now dead, he died of cancer and the other one was toured in his second tour of Vietnam, and we got some old Vicker's machine guns, you know old World War II and Korean things. Once we'd found a supply of .303 ammunition that didn't come from India because I'm damned certain they put curry powder in the bloody shells they were so bloody useless. But we used to fire just over the head of these people as they went under barbed wire and exploding charges and there were smoke generators and you know

13:00 I mean that's ... none of these things are a healthy environment. Or falling into the, whatever the name of the river was at Canungra, you know full of mud and slush and God knows what else. Ah but that was part of the training program um that we felt was important and so on, I think.

What were you hearing from your men that sounded appealing about Vietnam?

13:30 **Did they talk about the good times?**

Oh yeah, but soldiers are soldiers. You know I think they're rat bags really some of them. I mean they did a bit but I mean we were so busy at this stage. It wasn't until I went to Townsville I think and took over the intelligence section and a couple of those were, one of them had won a Military

14:00 Medal at Bribi which was a huge battle that doesn't get a lot of recognition, a Six RAR one. I mean yeah they used to talk about you know trips to Vung Tau and so forth and the things that people got up to and you know that sort of business a bit. But the rest of the soldiers were all brand new and they didn't know what Vietnam looked like or ever where it was half of them,

14:30 but they learnt.

So you were transferred to Townsville and with any of the men that you'd been with?

Yeah the D Company all went there but I, I was only the acting commander and a real live major took over D Company when it arrived and I went off to become the intelligence officer at battalion headquarters.

How was that leaving the men?

Oh well it was inevitable, it was going to happen and I mean I was,

15:00 I wasn't going to get a company, a rifle company and I mean I used to see them and you know played sport with some of them, um and met some of them in various pubs around town. You know just like the old days sort of stuff and, and you know many moons on when I commanded D Company some of them were still there, um in Vietnam. ... But anyway I knew that was going to happen.

15:30 It was a nice life, new people.

And as intelligence officer what were your primary roles?

Well the first thing ... I think the principle thing I wanted to do was get a data base of knowledge of the enemy as the enemy were on a day to day basis in Vietnam. So that when we went there we had a good handle on who and what and where. Um the topography.

16:00 Ah I used to get all the After Action Reports and so forth, we'd get them in and look at the maps all over the place and look at things and perhaps write things for people to read. Um and the other thing was to train an intelligence section and it was quite a big section because ah not only did we get the rifle companies and their duty was not

16:30 only to be somebody that marked maps and look at material and say this means that, we also needed interpreters so we sent people off to language courses down at Point Cook. Um so we had quite, quite a lot of people and we all went off to do courses. We came over here a whole lot of us for about a month to Woodside where the School of Military Intelligence used to be. It's an oxymoron isn't it, military intelligence? Um but that was good because I got to see a bit of footy

17:00 and ah I was here in Adelaide and that sort of stuff because I hadn't seen any for a long time – you know New Guinea, Townsville, no real football. So ah yeah so that was ah ... But we were always a bit under the hammer because we had to do, you know if there was going to be a, an exercise we would have to prepare a lot of the material for it and that sort of stuff.

17:30 And we had an operations officer who was a bit of a mongrel, I have to say. Um he used to give us a hard time. Um he was, he was disappointed because he reckoned he should have been in command of the battalion and he wasn't even 2 IC. He was 2IC when I arrived but then this New Zealand fellow arrived that took over the 2IC's second in command's job so ... So yeah there was a conflict and it got to the stage where we had a stand up in one of the exercises at the training area, where the adjutant

18:00 came between us because he could see what was going to happen, and I wouldn't be the loser. So I was counselled by the CO and he said "If you don't pull your finger out I'll send you somewhere else, you know like Canberra." So anyway there was a consequence to that as it turned out in Vietnam, to that ah argument. Interesting. Um ...

What had he done to annoy you?

Oh he was just a pig. You know he was just being

18:30 belligerent and giving us tasks to do that were either clearly unnecessary or be ... couldn't be anywhere near done in the time frame and quite ... I mean taking things into the scrub to reproduce [Vietnam] on a bloody old whatever they were, mean spirited, that sort of nonsense, in order that everybody could have a copy and read it. I mean we knew that wasn't going to happen in Vietnam, and it didn't. Because the blokes in my In Section some of them had

19:00 been there on in the section in Vietnam and knew this was the way things were going to be. So it was frustrating that we were getting tasks to do that were unrealistic I suppose and time frames that were just absurd in some cases, ah ... So anyway we, we bundled through that and ah we all got to Vietnam in one shape and because we'd done our sums right and we knew what we were talking about, but nobody believed us.

19:30 Because the CO would only take what he'd got from the operations officer because I mean he was operation ... you know responsible for everything operationally to the CO, after the first operation, or half way through it, ah we started having contacts with an enemy that nobody knew anything about – well at least anybody except us. I'd say I know who these people are, this is Thirty-three NVA [North Vietnam Army] Regiment –

20:00 they were last seen at such and such a place at such and such a time and did this that and the other thing because I could remember reading about it da-de-da-de-da. And the Task Force fellow would say what do you mean thirty-three, they've never been ... well I'm telling you they're here now. So they got

the spooks on the radios to do some work and sure enough that's who it was and suddenly it was a new ball game. And because we'd read the tea leaves right I suppose um we suddenly became heroes. And this operations officer went from

20:30 "Get this done by tomorrow morning," to "Look Fred if you've got enough time in the next few days and you can see your way clear to produce this draft In Summary I'd be very pleased and you know thank you." Incredible. Yeah anyway that's what people are like.

So you were leaving Canberra now. Was it from Canberra that

21:00 **you left for Vietnam?**

No Townsville.

Sorry Townsville that you left Vietnam?

Yeah we had a farewell parade, yep, mm.

Do you remember what you were taking with you other than your army gear, any personal items you took?

Oh I took some civilian gear because I had planned ... I had a young lady that I was in love or lust or something with who had gone to Europe. We'd been engaged and the engagement broke up because her mother, her parents didn't want another army officer in the

21:30 family – they'd already had one marry her older sister. And they were these backward, bloody, neo-fascist people from a cattle station in Western Queensland. So that had broken up but we still kept in touch and that sort of thing so I thought well I, I wanted to go to the Commonwealth Games because my youngest sister's fiancee or something was competing in it and I thought well, you know in nineteen sixty-nine or nineteen seventy you could get on an American aeroplane and

22:00 go see some of the world because I'd never been overseas except for New Guinea. So I took some civvie gear [civilian clothing] with me, and I took my copper goblets with me I remember, obviously, and a suit that was subsequently pinched in Australia – it was a battalion grey silk. Oh and some books, but that's about it, that was about it,

22:30 you know yeah.

Photos?

No, no I don't think I took a photo.

No good luck charms?

No I took a hip flask, which I didn't use and it's still got the Napoleon Brandy in it that I put into it in nineteen sixty-eight, and it's sitting over there somewhere or in my drinks cabinet. I reckon the brandy will be lovely one day. So it's been there for a while.

23:00 Yeah that's all I took, I think. Yeah I reckon.

Can you tell me about the farewell parade?

Oh a bit. Ah we all lined up and marched through the streets of Townsville and even the uni students came out and, of course by then everyone had recognised they had a problem with this war, but they all clapped and cheered and waved flags because they reckoned it wasn't our fault I suppose and we, we'd got pretty close to the community, I think in

23:30 in the time we were there. Ah we weren't the ogres that perhaps some people thought we were and we certainly provided a lot of money to the local community.

How many of you marched?

Oh the whole battalion, ah six or seven hundred. And ah ... I've got a photograph of that because in the front row of the company I was you know support company. I think I'm the only survivor from the front row, there were about five or six. Um but yeah then I think we had a,

24:00 we had a party and a booze up and all that was happening. But I mean we were more concerned about making sure that when we got to Vietnam we knew what the hell we were doing I think – my group at least. And we went off in an advance party – we flew to Vietnam.

Did you ever get that data base together?

Ah well I think we had a fair amount of knowledge and that's why we were able to peg who these people were in this first operation, that they weren't ... They were a group of ... No-one

24:30 in the task force had ever seen before but we were able to identify from documents that had been captured off some of the early casualties that who the hell they were and what their organisational structure was. Um and I was able to say to the CO B Company's attack, contact, was with the heavy weapons company of Thirty-three NVA Regiment. And the ... I remember the Task Force

25:00 Senior Intelligence Officer nearly fell off his chair. He said how the hell do you know it? And I said well one plus one equals two basically. So he went away and checked and yeah that's right. So um well it was lucky, we you know I think had a bit of luck on our side too. Ah but we did do a lot of sitting in our room at Townsville thinking about the enemy and thinking about who they were and where they might be

25:30 and how they were structured and why do they do things in certain ways – in our patch. You had to look a bit beyond the patch into what was happening in other corps and where they were coming from. Particularly the NVA who'd come down the Ho Chi Min Trail and whip in through Cambodia to um to our area, or near our area. Where the hospitals were and that sort of stuff. Yeah and I think we were pretty heavily focussed on that and,

26:00 and, and plus the very heavy social program that was going on.

You'd spent a lot of time trying to figure out what you needed. What do you think of your CO, he was obviously not directing you in that area?

Oh yes I think in some ways he did. I mean I had a fair idea of what his requirements were. Um because if, if I got

26:30 it wrong he quickly told me. I mean he, he was just keen on getting everybody properly trained I think and he did that in a pretty good way. I think ultimately it proved itself. I think we were the only battalion that didn't kill one of its own soldiers, through an accidental friendly fire thing. We went bloody close a couple of times though but you know I think we had a lot of luck. But I think we were the most well

27:00 prepared battalion that's ever been overseas, and he's got to take a lot of the credit for that. But he was a hard task master and he was a parsimonious bloke in may ways. I mean I've seen him since. I don't want to seem him again though. I became much more friendly with the 2IC, after the war – Neville Wallace the fellow in New Zealand, but unfortunately he died last year, late last year. But .

27:30 it's interesting, ah why people do things. I mean they can remember things that I can't and I can remember things that they can't so ... I mean we've been to a few reunions together and ah he hasn't changed, to get the adjutant's and the adjutant's now a brigadier to go and organise the officers to meet at a certain bar after this parade sort of thing, ah nothing had changed. But old world people. You know these were, these were

28:00 the people who grew up during the Second World War and who fought in Korea and their attitude towards things are different – they didn't know about rock and roll and the Beatles and all those other things that had been our bread and butter I suppose. And that happens between generations, we've got a difference in generations now and that's how, that's how society goes I guess.

Can you tell me about your arrival in Vietnam? How did you get there?

We

28:30 went up on a Qantas 707 [airplane] via Darwin and Singapore and we had to take our uniforms off to get off the plane at Changi Airport. .. We had to take our civilian shirt or something with us so that we could get off and not be seen as soldiers transiting through Singapore to Vietnam, because the Singapore Government didn't want that to happen. Ah we got to Saigon, off loaded, phuh into the

29:00 tropical air. It smelled of Asia which is totally different to anywhere else. At Ton San Nhut [Saigon airport] which was one huge American air base. I'd never seen so many military aircraft in my life – it which just enormous. And we were taken to some transit type lounge type place at Qantas and sat around and ... I can't remember what we did there but we waited around a long time for two buses to

29:30 take us down to the alpha pad or whatever it was called where these, all these C130's and C123's [transport aircraft] were all lined up. And we arrived there just as they were offloading six green body bags into an ambulance, off this C130. They then got a hydraulic, a hose and washed it out and we clambered on board. It had just come down from up country and there were sixteen dead Americans being taken

30:00 off to the morgue. Ah and so I thought to myself ... No I said this to one of the company, I said "Jesus that's a bloody good start to things". Ah and they were just duckboards [planks], no seats and we sat on it armed with pistols – that's all we had I think, about sixty or seventy of us and away we went to Nui Dat. Nui Dat, wearing polyesters and you know caps and God knows what else.

30:30 And we arrived there and all these fellows in jungle greens came and picked us up. Because the battalions they were fairly ... the hand over period, the advance parties we were there two or three weeks before the battalion got there, ah learning the tricks of the trade and where things were and doing orientation training so to speak. Helicopter flights around the province and that sort of business. And being briefed by our opposite numbers and then

31:00 eventually we would take over the briefings and, or whatever, and then they would quietly slip away and go home. Yeah and you know big parties. I remember the first night we were all in the mess, all jolly. Because it was a pretty safe place Nui Dat, I mean it was ... It was the only place where we ever drank

too. We didn't drink in the bush at all. And ah I don't know it was about nine o'clock at night and there was boom-boom-boom-boom-boom-boom-boom, shudder-shudder-

31:30 shudder-shudder. It sounds like a twelve point seven heavy machine gun. No it's a B52 [American aircraft] strike fifty, fifty miles away. And those bangs were thousand pound bombs. And there was ... Part of my orientation was to go out to my friend's battalion, the Ninth Battalion, this fellow Rod Curtis who consequently became my best man at our wedding. And there were all sorts of things going off at night – bangs and tracer and it was all

32:00 very exciting and very new. Ah but you know it was Vietnam, here we were dressed in our combat kit and we're going to war.

What was your accommodation like? Where were you in Nui Dat?

Oh well you had you know the perimeter obviously where the rifle companies were and other things. And then there was a space between them and other companies and battalion headquarters naturally way back. You know I mean we had

32:30 ah I mean the CO had a hut as big as this room, with fridges and God knows with own private shower. We had a tent each, which as I served as an officer at the back part of it was a bed thing and a weapon pit out the hole to jump into if they started shooting at you which they did one night with rockets. Um, and a sort of an office place, desk sort of thing, a place to put your gear. Showers, toilets and a mess, dining room, bar,

33:00 that sort of stuff. Ah, oh it was pretty, fairly, you know fairly civilised. I mean you were always keen to get back to it I can tell you, after you'd been out in the bush for six weeks, ah without a shower and all that sort of stuff.

What about toilet facilities?

They were just long drops [pit toilets]. Yeah they were pretty basic. . I mean that was, that's what you get used to. I mean that's what the infantry did

33:30 ah you know um you lived a bit like Neanderthal Man, that was the way of the infantry. I don't think they do anymore. I think if they don't get portable toilets, porta loos brought in they get upset or something. I mean if you could have a mobile phone to ring home to say look I'm just about to get into contact here ... It's quite incredible. But yeah it was ah, it was an operational environment I think

34:00 but a fairly safe one at Nui Dat, once you'd settled in a bit.

So what, what were you doing in those first few weeks of arriving in Nui Dat?

Oh just confirming what, what we knew and how, how processes and procedures between us and the task force. We had to do duty officers stints down in the ... You had a command post back there as well as well as one out in the bush. You ah went to task force briefings. Ah,

34:30 ah I remember going on an orientation tour with the CO and the company commanders I think and I had the map and the headphones to say that where things were and I could tell them where things were without looking at the map because I'd studied the map so much that I recognised places and said that's where that happened or that's the Catholic village ah where we suspect that such and such or whatever. And ah you know

35:00 fitting into the task force routine I suppose. I don't think I visited Saigon – no that came later. I think we may have gone down to Vung Tau.

What was the task force routine?

Oh well you know when they had briefings and, and ah, ah their approach ... how their command centre worked. Um how they communicated with you. Ah what sort of filing

35:30 system – what were the paper war requirements. Um how were you going to received intelligence briefings, both in Nui Dat and out in the field? How the cipher communication systems worked and the funny little code words that we used.

Could you give me a run down of that stuff?

One of the ones I was taken away in a closed van to be briefed on was the signals intelligence –

36:00 you see this was terribly secret. Ah how they worked and where they worked and how they, and how task force report them. They used, this are the days of Poseidon [speculative nickel mine] and, and the mineral, ah stock market boom. So they used to use stocks and shares as the way of sending you advice, even on the cypher phone, based on, I've still got them written down somewhere I think, ah which unit

36:30 was located where from the point of view of where its aerial was, where its radio was transmitting. And of course Charles [Vietnamese communists; Viet Cong] wasn't dull, we called him Charles in our battalion because we thought we were a couth and cultured battalion, not Charlie which was what the Americans used, and we soon discovered that Charles wasn't stupid because he'd discovered that every

time we put up a big aerial and transmitted something a B52 would come and drop bombs on him, you know. So you'd put the

37:00 aerial on one place and put the radio some place else and just link them together with remotes and ... So they'd find out where the aerial was but the unit itself might have been some distance away. Ah you certainly did that in the mountain areas, we did that. So we took it all with a pinch of salt but it used to be part of a little charade that we used to go through once or twice a day. IO [Intelligence Officer] you're needed on the whatever phone, I've forgotten what they call it now, ah you're wanted on such and such. And I used to

37:30 volunteer for the, when we were in the bush, the three-thirty or four o'clock whatever it was to six o'clock in the command post as duty officer so that I could ring around the task force, the other units. You'd get information you know that had been gathered over the evening or night. Because they had to give morning prayers at seven o'clock I think it was, the briefing the Intelligence Briefing of the day – what had happened, what was likely to happen, what was the

38:00 enemy up to as best as you understood it.

In the morning you had to give that?

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

And you called that morning prayers?

Yeah, morning prayers. There's a photograph of me somewhere doing that.

So you would gather the information from who, from support bases or ...?

Well yeah back, back from Nui Dat, from the task force headquarters you know you'd get, ask what's going on.

38:30 Occasionally you might ring up another battalion that you'd understood had had a contact and ask their duty officer how are things, what was happening there, and so and on Christmas Eve you'd get things about sighted three figures with lights moving towards the star, yeah and that sort of nonsense. But yeah I mean most of it came in hard copy

39:00 something or other. Ah and almost every day the task force group would visit. You know the commander with his intelligence officers and that sort of thing and ah ... I mean we had a couple of exciting minutes about all that too. I was reading one of the letters, I used to write to Di from ... in the second part of our tour probably you know March onwards when we had started a relationship I think, ah I ah

39:30 I used to write from five support bases and they'd go back to my In Sergeant and they'd go back in a brown envelope and they'd go with the hospital visits officer down to Vung Tau where Di was and the thing would come back the other way. And she kept them all. I read one the other night and it was saying that something had happened on this operation that ah only the CO and I knew about and it would take ten or twenty years before it came out in the open, or something like that. And I remembered because the CO had forgotten all about it ah until about a year or so ago when he'd wanted to

40:00 write an article. He wanted to start ... not rewriting military history but getting it right. Because we all wrote books when we came home, a battalion book about this tour and everything that happened on it. And some of the incidents were just given a fairly cursory thing, you know such and such happened, B Company did this, we captured some documents and away they went, they were very important.

Tape 5

00:39 **How did your first impressions of Vietnam differ from what you expected to see?**

Oh I think the size and scale of everything that was going on was much bigger than I thought it would be. Um

01:00 you know right from the start I mean the task force was a huge, sprawling conglomeration of things with all sorts of add on that you weren't aware of. Um American's and things. Um the fire power delivery, particularly by the US Air Force was a bit awe inspiring. Um the climate, the and all that sort of stuff,

01:30 Uthe topography it was you know all unexpected I think. Okay my serving in New Guinea was useful in that sense that you know recognised the tropical environment fairly easily and of course we'd been in North Queensland for a couple of years anyway so ... But I think, I think the scale of ah what it was all about yeah.

When did you first

02:00 **bump into I guess the difference between the Australian way of doing things and the**

American way of doing things in Vietnam?

Oh that was a slow process because we were a fairly selfcontained. Um you know the Australians operated within a fairly defined area and ah pretty well with their own people. It wasn't until you got ah I suppose American ... Well until you start operating with American units and that was very much later in our tour. We had American artillery support

02:30 but I mean they were just another bunch of gunners that were somewhere that hurled big bricks when you wanted them. Um all our armour support and air ... rotary wing support was basically Australian. Um and if aeroplanes came and dropped bombs well you know they came and dropped bombs. They were basically American but ah when you started

03:00 to work alongside American units, um as we did with the brigade of the First Infantry Division, the Big Red One .. that actually went from Nui Dat to Cambodia that brigade, they were appalling I thought. They were badly kitted ... And I went,

03:30 I also went on R&R [Rest and Recreation] with an American. I'd read about a place in Taipei that I thought might be useful to, I read about it in the Playboy Magazine, but I hadn't been to ah that part of the world and ah it turned out quite interesting, although it wasn't quite what you think it was. ...

You might have to explain that for us because people

04:00 **in the future looking at this won't know what you mean.**

Well yeah. At Ton San Nhut where we were waiting to catch the Panam [Pan American Airways] 707 or whatever it was, and I remember it was because it was the day the Americans celebrate in November, um Thanksgiving Day, and this American came up to me and said,"Excuse me sir are you a captain or a three star general?", because you know we had pips [shoulder badges] and they don't, and I said,"No I'm the same rank as you son". He turned out to be a company commander of this infantry division

04:30 and when he explained over a few beers and things just how he got to where he was it was absolutely frightening – the lack of training. ... And the way that they did their replacement of units it was all trickle flow. So he said when I get back not only will I not know all the company commanders in the battalion I probably won't even know some of my platoon commanders. And we'd trained together for two

05:00 years. I mean we lost people early for whatever reason, they got transferred or in some places got killed or wounded and that sort of thing but basically we stuck together as the same team that had been for such a long time. And they didn't take that approach at all and .... I mean he just fought by the seat of his pants and really didn't know what he was doing. He wasn't even a professional soldier - he came up through their ROT [Reserve Officer Training] system. Um

05:30 and you know I didn't have any, much time for the United States Army I have to say after that, and they recognised that. Years later in Honolulu you know in, in ANZUS Exercise Planning Sessions they would say how the United States Army had to really go through a huge change to get back to where it ought to be and it's gone further than that now of course it's ah I think it's

06:00 ah, from what I see and hear, it's probably in huge shape. But it wasn't then. The US Air Force was a bit different, they seemed to know what they were doing. I think they used Vietnam as a, as a great big trial area for all sorts of weapon systems that they subsequently were able to use with great affect in the Gulf War. Um, the US Navy we saw a bit of them. I've never trusted naval gun fire

06:30 and, and nothing I saw in Vietnam got me to change my mind about that. On the USS Oklahoma I remember I was commanding B company with all the armour in the task force and we were doing a giant armoured sweep into the next province. And somewhere south of Phuoc Tuy Province, or it might have been the next province along, somewhere along the coast, near the coast there was allegedly a, an enemy position of some sort

07:00 so I went up in the possum, the little Sioux helicopter we, because it travelled with us and we used to camp inside the armoured vehicles, I was up there and we were about ten thousand feet and we could see this eight inch cruiser out there going whack and all the flames and smoke and so forth, and we looked at the target, nothing, and went again, looked at the target, nothing and out of the corner of my eye I saw five thousand or ten thousand metres laterally away from the target a hill of similar size

07:30 being thumped. Ah yeah just a bit off. But um yeah um I suppose ... We ate American rations ah a lot but ... Yeah there logistics were fantastic ah but their fighting people in Vietnam in the US Army at least I thought were very ordinary.

08:00 **When you first arrived what was your greatest fear as an officer commanding men to battle?**

Well in my case because of my position as the IO , I was concerned that I you know might have read the wrong tea leaves [prediction]. My opinion about what the enemy was and what and how would be drastically wrong and we'd get you know a bloody nose out of it as a

08:30 result. Now that didn't happen. Ah I felt no concern for safety for my fellows. Ah I mean they were either at Nuidat or in a fire support base or at the company headquarters of a rifle company. They

certainly weren't out with a lead platoon ever. I mean obviously the fellows out with the companies I was a bit concerned about. I mean things happen so quickly. We were always on the

09:00 run it seems in terms of doing this and doing that. But ah you didn't really think too much about those sorts of things. Um I mean I did later when I was commanding rifle companies but that's different – you know you're almost a staff officer as a IO. But I mean I used to go out myself with the companies and fly into all sorts of places. And I remember going out with

09:30 A company I think it was. They'd found a big bunker system, or tunnel – they weren't Vietcong tunnels they were Vietminh [resistance against the French] they'd been there since the Indo China War. Full of barrels and Vietminh documents. Quite big, I mean as big as that door, those two doors. And anyway ...

Can you just describe that for us because we can't see that on camera.

Okay. Ah we went into you know a hole so big and it became a room as big as this room I suppose.

Well again can you just give us

10:00 **a dimension.**

Three or four metres by three or four metres, two or three metres deep and that led into a tunnel from that, you know a couple of metres by a couple of metres I suppose so it led in to another cabin that was full of forty-four gallon drums, full of ah documents and so forth. It went off the same size tunnel ah for some considerable distance.

10:30 And myself and one of their platoon commanders were there and all we had between us I think was a pistol. And about two hundred metres along I said where's this tunnel taking us to Billy? I don't know there was an exit, well anyway another entrance and up we went and suddenly we were well outside the company perimeter. The company was you know basically a circle with sentries and machine gunners on and we were well out beyond that

11:00 you see so we came in from the same direction. Anyway the problem was that we were more likely to get clobbered by one of our blokes than we were by one of them you see so ... Anyway we didn't though.

You went down into one of those tunnels? Is that the first time ...

Oh no they'd been cleared out by engineers – I wasn't the first into it. Ah but I just wanted to see what it looked like and have a look at some of the documents because they said all these documents were there so I said

11:30 well I'd better come out and have a look at that. So flew out with the company and took one look at them and recognised that they weren't Vietcong that they were Vietminh.

They would have been quite historic documents I'd imagine.

Probably, yeah. They were on what was called um Slope Forty I think the Vietminh call it. They ambushed a huge amount of French forces in Phuoc Tuy Province on Route Two. Slope Forty was a slight salient at the forty metre contour line – that's why it was called that.

12:00 And they had a lot of obviously positions underground there that they used to ambush the French convoys and things because the French didn't have helicopters and all that sort of stuff so they were basically road bound and quite vulnerable to you know ambush and that sort of thing. So yeah and I vaguely remember the grid reference.

What happened to the documents, do you know?

I have no idea. I think, I think we blew the tunnels up and kept moving. They're probably still in there. They might have burnt them, I don't know. But I mean we didn't want them.

12:30 These were the days before paper recycling. I mean we weren't environmentally conscious at that time.

Ah but did you personally wonder how you would perform under fire and leading men?

Ah yeah I think so. Um I don't know I think you know we'd be trained that well that we anticipated we'd do all right. When it actually came to a

13:00 few shooting things I was ... I didn't panic but I was a bit knee jerking, you know, ah I think. Ah you know initial reaction but then immediately settled down to a more settled approach I suppose, yeah.

What is the thing that sticks in your mind that really, the first thing that really,

13:30 **really brought home to you that this was not a training exercise, that this was the real thing, this was ...?**

Oh well I suppose from the very first night when you know the bangs you heard were not you know something that were ... They were dropping them on a Vietcong regiment – a B 52 [heavy bomber] strike. They'd killed a lot of them in fact. I think when you start to see bodies and ...

Do you recall seeing the first bodies that you saw ...?

14:00 Oh yeah, yeah. Yeah most of the early ones were you know long dead, or wrapped up in something or what have you – whether they were theirs or ours. Ah or you saw fellows being loaded onto helicopters and things. I think in the early, in the very early stages because we were, I was in a fire support base, with the battalion tactical headquarters,

14:30 you know you heard everything that was going on on radio so in the first, we had a huge amount of contacts in our first operation. We had you know half a dozen fellows killed, I think. And we got brassed up by the Air Force too.

Can you tell us about those incidents, they're quite significant. From your point of view. What are you what are you hearing what are you seeing when those notifications of those casualties are coming in

15:00 **or you say your were getting brassed up by their Air Force.**

Well one of our companies did – it was one of the New Zealand companies. I don't know I think it was all,"Bang, get on with your job, we've got a job to do and ..."

What was that job you were doing, personally what were you doing as that ... Take us back to those particular incidents ...

Well I, well I was trying to evaluate what the enemy – who they were and what were they up to and what were they going to do next and where were they going to go after they done what they'd done so

15:30 to speak, um which is fairly important. I mean we had five rifle companies swirling around the countryside that could be picked and moved and block you know enemy withdrawal routes or, or to move off to a flank or whatever. Um and what the CO needed was advice. I hesitate to use the word intelligence because intelligence is basically information that can be used ... you know

16:00 can be used to plan on without fear or prejudice in many ways. And to convert information into intelligence requires a whole raft of factors and figures and sometimes they were educated guesses. Ah you tried to think well if I was doing it, which is a trap you fall into, I'd go this way and of course he didn't think like us at all – we did sometimes I suppose.

16:30 But um yeah it was a question of providing the best advice and, and going outside the battalion to prepare notes, with what the task force was receiving from other sources.

When those six people were killed how were you collecting that information?

Oh they were our people. Oh well that's you know Whisky Company gets into a contact and, and bang, bang, shooting, da-de-da-de-da and when all

17:00 the shooting stops and the Company Commander comes up and says you know," I've got one KIA [Killed in Action] and two wounded and ..." Well you get to be hearing it on the administrative net because they'd be calling in for dust off [rescue] helicopters. So you knew that people were getting hurt – our people were getting hurt. Ah, ah on the night that B Company or the afternoon that B Company walked into the heavy weapons company of Thirty-three NVA

17:30 and um that's when Dajo, you might have heard of him, he was the, the front man for telling Australia how close we were to chemical and biological weapons during the Olympic Games, brigadier. Anyway he was a platoon commander then and won the Military Cross that afternoon. And the company commander was shot, ah wounded by a sniper. So he was taken out

18:00 and the company 2IC was to command the company for the night. And then adjutant who was back with us was going to be promoted and go out to be with the company commander. And ah the CO rang up, I remember, and he said "Oh I want you to go to, to ... I want you to take over Call Sign Two for the evening and ah make sure it's all ship shape and are you okay?" And I said,"Oh yeah, yeah that'd be fine."

18:30 What he didn't know was that Dougie [the company 2IC] was about three metres, by this time it was pitch black, three to four hundred metres away from the Company at a pad where they'd be taking up the casualties, by himself with a radio. So he just picked up his radio and walked back to the company, you know no problems. Through the dark, staggering around found the company yeah. We didn't know that until much later. Dougie was either thick

19:00 or very brave. I know he's a brave fellow because he won a Military Cross in Borneo. Um he now runs a jail somewhere I think. He's a born again Christian and runs a jail at Mabalong or Tasmania or somewhere I can't remember. . I mean there were sort of sad periods when you heard that somebody that you actually knew ... I mean a lot of the guys that were killed you didn't know them if you fell over them because they were you know in other companies and

19:30 you may never have laid eyes on them but some fellows you did know and you sort of felt oh Jesus what a bummer and then you'd go back and do what your job was.

Who was the first person you knew who was killed or wounded in that way?

Well wounded I supposed was the company commander of B company. Ah in Whisky company, it would have been our second operation, when it started to happen

20:00 in some force.

Can you tell us about that day and what was happening to you?

Well it was probably the worst day I spent in Vietnam. It was the day that man landed on the Moon and this is why you can never get away from it because ah two things will continually remind you. One, it was a public event in terms of "One step etc. etc. for mankind...", which keeps getting replayed constantly and it reminds one of what you were doing ... It's a bit like what were you doing when John F Kennedy got shot?

20:30 Now everybody can remember that. Well what were you doing the day man landed on the moon? Well what we were doing is ah trying, trying to pick up the remnants of a, of a rifle platoon that was decimated by mines. And it started with the platoon commander that who I'd commanded at Canungra – he was in my company then and he transferred to A Company when we got to Townsville.

Who was he?

A fellow called Peter Heinz. Ah, a nice bloke.

21:00 They'd found a mine field and they had actually engineers there taping, clearing, doing all the right things and they were there protecting ... And he'd been across to the engineers to listen live through American Radio Forces Vietnam to the landing on the Moon, alright, and he was walking back to tell his platoon that this great feat had happened and trod just inside the mine tape and hit a mine, trod on a mine, M16, which blew his backside off and

21:30 wounded twelve or thereabouts fellows. It took all day really to get all that fellows, people out, oh until mid-afternoon I guess and it had happened at about ten o'clock in the morning. Peter died and they were taking his ... ah the CO and the doctor were carrying his body out last

22:00 with the only surviving NCO, who was a fellow called John Needs, who I'd played football with in the battalion football team. He was from Western Australia and he was a good centre half forward. And the doctor thought he'd take a souvenir for the day and saw a mine marker, a Vietcong mine marker on a fence, a bit of fence, you know a bit of wire – it was a skull and cross bones basically were their mine markers, grabbed it

22:30 and it was trip wired to a another M16 and it went bang. It blew him all over the place, blinded him and broke most of the bones in his body, he lives today as a leading psychiatrist somewhere I think in Victoria. The CO was fairly badly wounded and Johnny Needs who was a hundred metres away took one piece through his back and through his heart and it killed him. And that night there was ah bad news. Poor old Neville

23:00 Wallace who was the 2IC New Zealander was ... you know had to be shuffled out in the gathering gloom to the fire support base to take command of an Australian battalion. And I think I was more worried about looking after him than I think looking after myself – you know in terms of these fellows that had been killed that day. Ah and it get worse as the thing went on, that operation. They tried to kill me with a mine,

23:30 because I used to snoop around the villages. I became obsessed about finding mines. And we found somebody that had been into the mines collecting them and discovered how they were doing it. So we actually went into the mine, well I didn't the engineer officer went into the minefield. They were lifting the mines at night and then storing them in a bunker in the middle of the minefield and when they wanted one they went and got it and took it out. And ah ... Anyway I'd discovered that there was

24:00 some activity going on on a village on the edge of the minefield, a small hamlet, that I reckoned was very suspicious. And ah we were in there snooping around and were shot at by somebody, we weren't quite sure what. We think later on it was probably one of the local forces, people shooting pigeons or something but we weren't going to hang around to find out, there was only two of us or three of us in the vehicle. So I went over to Province Headquarters and discussed with the Province Chief and in front of an American adviser, and that was the problem, the Americans ran the politics because they

24:30 had all the money. And these Vietnamese, money would be, you know bought with anything. Ah if the Americans paid them enough money they'd do exactly as the Americans said, whereas we were actually fighting the combat operation, so it was a pig's breakfast [mess] in that sense I thought. It was the sort of war that you could only win if you owned the population – had ownership of them in a, in a civil military sense, um and we never did, the Americans did. And

25:00 anyway they decided that just because this woman had sleeping beds for, ah spaces for about ten people and there was enough food to feed you know a whole lot of people, when it was only her by itself and we knew that her husband was the head of the local guerrilla movement, that they'd take the French approach well she's only doing what she's supposed to do as a wife, you know feed her husband, what else should you do? Well you know we would have put her in jail or something or you know whatever, taken her away and interrogated her

25:30 or ... So anyway so she stayed there. I was still not letting this dog lie down so I wanted to go back to interrogate her a bit and ah ...

How did you do the interrogation?

Oh well I had interpreters and Vietnamese interpreters and some of my own fellows too who knew enough

26:00 to know that what he was asking was actually in the lines of what we wanted without you know them carrying on a discussion that we had no idea what they were talking about. Um when I'd been there the first time we were just about to investigate a hole in the hedge that had some fresh diggings that looked a bit like a weapon pit. . So we went off and when we came back there was bodies all over the place at this gap, all civilians. They'd put a mine in it

26:30 and they reckon the mine was for us because we'd been in and out of that place every day for several days and the diggings we saw were actually a grave, a newly dug grave. A funeral party went through it and hit the mine and there were I think seven dead – bits and pieces all over the place. Oh well that was pretty ordinary I thought.

Did you hear that explosion?

No, no, no it had, it had happened just before we got there.

27:00 Um and a couple of days later I was down near the same place and this Vietcong came walking across, because part of the minefield was phoney, you could actually walk across it, um and this was in the paddies and the water's up to your sort of waist, and this bloke walking, I said,"That's a bloody Viet ... "It turned out to be Vietcong company commander. And you talk about people being sexist, let me tell you this story. His wife had apparently been having it off ... Well let me ...

27:30 He came in and the first thing he did was," I'm Commander of C2 Company, D445 Battalion", to the interpreter. Boy we've got a beauty here. "Where's the company? Where ...?" Map. Fortuitously our battalion commander was up in the air in a helicopter, so he was able to immediately direct artillery. And we could see enough for him to say no a bit further that way and I could tell ...

28:00 Whether we hit anybody we're not sure. You know we went out the next day and had a look, all that afternoon but there wasn't much around. But I thought to myself,"Why the hell is this bloke who'd been a Company Commander was then quite happy for the enemy to shell his troops? " And as it turned out his wife was one of the troops and she'd been having it off with most other people in the company except him, so it was question of you know,"If I can't have her nobody else can"

28:30 and it's the old dreadful business. Anyway he became a very useful supplier of information for us subsequently. But ah where they'd been out there apparently they'd stashed mines. So I went out with a, it was a New Zealand patrol I think from memory, yeah I think they were Maoris. Went across ... oh with about half a dozen blokes or something, section patrol size, across, across the paddy [rice]

29:00 into this place we called The Long Green which was a big strip of covered land about twenty kilometres long. And we found where they'd been, ah no mines except the one I trod on and it was one of the two in that operation that didn't detonate. Sometimes they have a faulty initiator switch, rusted or something and all it went was shhhh. But I didn't know that so I made a bit of a mess of

29:30 myself.

What do you mean?

Well I lost control of certain functions – peed my pants I suppose. But fortunately it was all wet, I was all wet up to here so the soldiers didn't notice I'd done that and I was able to crack bravado whilst a bloody absolute shaking wreck inside. ..

How did you know you'd stepped on it?

Oh felt it and looked down and thought,"Shit!" and it didn't do anything. Because what they did is they had two explosives,

30:00 one that went bang immediately and the mine then came out of the ground and when it was about that high it detonated, that's why they were so vicious. Um if it didn't come out of the ground it wasn't going to detonate basically.

I've heard that if you put your foot on it and hear a click and if you ... you can move your foot or are they actually ...?

No, no that's, that, that might be an old M14 type mine. But these M16's these were

30:30 the modern up market version of the, that famous German jumping mine they had in World War II.

Can you describe what you can see on the ground ...?

Well you can't see anything The mine's about that big, a cylinder that sits in the ground and on the top of it is a, is a rod looking thing and it's got three little spikes on top of it. Now if you touch one of those it

causes ah a secondary explosive to detonate which lifts the mine out of the ground and then detonates the mine. Um so I mean a New Zealand Maori fellow went up a week or so earlier but most blokes who trod on them didn't live to know that they'd done it you see. Every time we hit a mine I think the average was

two dead and five wounded or something. And I mean we lost more New Zealanders in that one operation that they did in the whole of the war put together. And that made Neville very sad because he was commanding the battalion.

What was that operation called?

Mundingburra. Route Forty-four. It was very interesting. I mean I spent a night living with Vietcong in one of the villages. I know they were Vietcong, but you know they said they weren't but they were,

trying to solicit information with a wad full of money that the Americans had given me. I carried fifty thousand US [dollars] in my pocket to buy people. This was a, a, a peripheral thing to Phoenix, the Phoenix Operation.

I'd like to get onto the Phoenix Operation just after this but can we go back to that, that fateful day on the twenty-first of July, it was the twenty-first of July here rather than the twenty-second I think,

nineteen sixty-nine.

Yes, yes that's right it was the twenty-second ... It was the twenty-first here, twenty-first in Vietnam, twentieth in America.

Yeah um were you listening to that landing?

No we were briefing the task force commander at the time on operations and we used to do where the CO had his little day thing, a little briefing tent. And ah we used to have a

sort box between the command posts and a sort box here and it said,"Call sign 13 has hit a mine, struck a mine." And the CO thought oh use of terminology, we knew the minefield was there so they've obviously you know found one. But they didn't mean that at all, they'd trodden on one or hit one, detonated. And then you know five minutes later all hell broke loose with people running off in all sorts of directions ...

Yeah poor old Three Platoon they had a lot of bad luck because everywhere they went they got clobbered. So much so that when we had reunions Three Platoon used to go and have their own room somewhere and ... And the other thing about that day that ah makes it difficult to forget, beside the Moon [landing] business, is that they wrote a song about it called I Was Only Nineteen. And the reason they did that is because a fellow called Mike Stauren, he's here in

Adelaide, he was in Three Platoon, he was wounded, one of the wounded, and the bloke who they sing about, what's his name, Frankie, ah he was a real bloke, they were mates and I think it's Stauren's sister married the bloke that wrote the song ... Um ... the Red Gum singer yeah.

He became ... Tried to become a Democrat and beat [Foreign Minister Alexander] Downer in one of those Federal Election up in the hills. He missed out, just missed out and then, and then realised what rabbits the Democrats were and ... Oh God I saw, I saw him he was on the piano when we had peace marches against, against going to Iraq. We had a hundred thousand here and I, I went with my daughters

and a few others and I saw him that day. Oh it will come to me. Bucket or something like that his name was. Yeah but anyway Red Gum and of course you hear that occasionally and so forth ...

What is the connection between that incident and that song? I mean it's a very well known song but ...

Well it was about that incident.

And he, this Frankie was a real person?

Get the battalion book and I'll tell you what his name is. He lives in New South Wales somewhere I think on the south coast.

He was one of the twelve wounded?

Yeah, yeah I think there was about fifteen wounded. He was one, Mike Stauren was another. Ah and there were two killed in, you know in the finish. And I can't remember the names of the other blokes that were wounded but if you go through the battalion book you can see in A Company all the fellows that were wounded – a lot of them.

Um Frank ... People used to think it was Frank, Frankie Hall but he was killed a couple of days later – that was Bushy Hall on a mine – he was an assault pioneer. Frankie Adams? Frank Adams I think his name was – something like that. I could find it it's over there in the book. But um yeah that was a huge

loss.

36:30 Morale was very bad. And as I say things got probably worse because people were being blown up all over the place, and we couldn't do anything about it.

How were the people evacuated from that incident?

By dust-off helicopters.

How did that work on that particular day? Like how many helicopters did you need, how did they ...?

Oh I think they had two on line and they were just taking them in and out and in and out because they were, they tried to

37:00 give some sort of first aid on the spot before they could get them into the helicopter. But that was only to allow them to survive between there and the hospital where they would get you know ...

What did they do when the incident ... I mean they must have been horrific injuries? I mean what are the medics doing in the situation ...?

Oh they're trying to um, to stabilise the patient I suppose –

37:30 drips, bandages, shell dressings. I mean their own, their own soldiers would have put on ... everybody carried ah shell dressings you know which were for putting on large wounds, strap that up.

Morphine?

Yeah well the company medic would have had that stuff as well and the doctor went out with his kit bag – because he was the first out there with the CO – he went straight out.

Did you go out in the helicopters when they were coming in?

No, no. No I didn't go

38:00 anywhere near Three Platoon that day – um no, no, just sat there and listened to it.

Is that worse in some way?

Oh Christ yes. But then after a period of time when you recognise that the CO had been wounded and was going out, he's being evacuated and that you knew you had a new CO coming in that you had to then say ,"What the hell's this all about, what's going on,

38:30 how can we change things, how we can go and find these buggers?". And that's when I went a bit, I think we used to use the word choppo, I went off in search of mines and you know as I say did a few silly things. Um, going into minefields and treading on mines and all that sort of ... I mean poor old Neville didn't know anything about this, because he was obviously in New Zealand and trying to organise rifle companies and all sorts

39:00 of things and the pressure of that so I just kept telling him that you know we didn't find any mines but we found two hundred anti-lift devices – they hid them in a, in a crypt in a cemetery next to the minefield, where ... Most of these mines had anti-lifting devices under them – an M26 grenade with a lip tip off switch so that when you lifted the mine up if you hadn't of kept that down the grenade exploded. And the Vietcong lost

39:30 a lot of people discovering that before they worked out how to get over it, and they had a piece of bent wire that they put down the side of the mine to keep the flap on the grenade out, take out the mine, put a pin in through the grenade, pin through the mine, and they had one of each – they used to store them separately I think. Anyway that meant, I mean the intelligence about that was, is that we knew they at least, they had at least two hundred bloody mines. And if you're losing two fellows,

40:00 two to six or seven wounded on each mine incident that's a lot of people you see so we had to take it seriously and not just say this is some isolated use of ah, use of our mines. Yeah interesting. They actually got rid of the bloody minefield by the time we'd left. We were down there again when they did that. Um by this stage I wouldn't travel anywhere in a Land Rover without

40:30 steel helmets, flack jackets, sandbags on the floor, never off the roads – ah that was about six months later I think. Um but they had an ingenious way of how they got rid of the minefield which I thought was good. But yeah we lost a lot of good fellows because of some clown's strategic thinking that if we put a minefield here it will stop the enemy from getting into the rice basket of Phuoc Tuy

41:00 Province for supplies. You know I said minefields stop nobody unless they're covered by fire, you know people with weapons twenty-four hours a day. And that didn't happen so it was so dreadful really when you think about it. Yeah so that was the twenty-first of July and ah I, I did have a bit of a reaction. I didn't really get worried about all these things until I got quite old,

41:30 you know when I saw old into my late fifties, early sixties. And it's interesting that a friend of mine who was in Vietnam, Five RAR ah Harris Bennett, he downgraded and became a lawyer and he's now a

barrister in Sydney, he got clients who were in concentration camps during the war coming out to Australia as young people and becoming very successful in business and so forth and almost the instant they retired the concentration camps came back to bite them. So I think

42:00 you know these things are probably always there in the back of your brain.

Tape 6

00:43 **That minefield, sorry, where was it? It ran down the back ... the north, the south-east corner of Nui Dat didn't it?**

Oh well I can show you in a map.

Oh if you can just describe it.

Okay. Ah Nui Dat was sort of

01:00 central in the province – you know for a reason, because we could you know move to, around the whole province and it was near a major and that sort of thing. To the south-east of Nui Dat there was a place called the Horse Shoe which was a, an extinct volcano – small. And there was an outstation built on that and a company occupied it all the time because it was immediately above a village called Dac To, um which was quite a sizeable village and it was the intersection of route forty-four and route twenty-three.

01:30 Route forty-four went down to the sea to Long Hai. And that, that whole area was the rice bowl of that area of Vietnam. Quite wealthy and so forth and a lot of people. Now, they decided to separate that, the populated areas, from the bush areas – this went right all the way up to the north-east of the province to the Nuinato Mountains [?], and across several large rivers,

02:00 mainly the ah Songri River ah where all the enemy bases were. They had some inside the Long Hai Mountains which were inside this area but in deep tunnels and things – caves and so forth. And the theory was they'd put a minefield the Horse Shoe and the village on the sea, ah to stop the enemy's ability to move and get supplies or transit into the Long Hai Mountains

02:30 where they could rest up. Because I mean we put B52 strikes on there like you've never seen and all it did was give them you know nasty ears, I think. They were you know hundreds of metres under the ground somewhere in limestone caves and things. Ah, so um that was the theory about the minefield. But when it was built you know, how far was it, a hundred and fifty metres I think, something like that.

03:00 Um fences either side, posts with you know machine guns and things. But they were occupied eventually by the local forces, you know the regional force people who were part-time incompetent people who didn't really care. Um and nobody bothered about the maintenance of it so stuff grew into it. You couldn't see across the ... You couldn't see through the minefield, so

03:30 you had all bananas and God knows what else growing in there and that's what Charles got in there and dug bunkers for Christ sake – you know bunkers as big as this part of the room, that deep, ah and stored his mines in there. A seventeen year old girl she was or eighteen who I stumbled over up near the Horse Shoe. Fortunately I had my Vietnamese interpreter who immediately recognised that this girl was a mine lifter and wanted to what we know as hoi cha,

04:00 come across to the other side. It wasn't money in her case because she had a boyfriend who was in the ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] and they had a unit based in Dac To – that's the South Vietnamese Army. And anyway she showed us how she did it that night, you know in there with the fingers, feel the prongs, out with the hairpin ... That gets rid of that problem. Anti-lift device, take it out, another hairpin, put them either side, keep going. And then somebody else would come along and pick them up

04:30 and put them in the bunker. Ah, so anyway she went and married her ARVN bloke and ... I got back to Australia and I asked, I've forgotten what her name is now, it's written down somewhere, how is ... A fellow that had been up there and was now working in customs,"Whatever happened to her?"" Oh about a couple of months after you left the Vietcong went, went by one night and threw a satchel charge through their bedroom window –

05:00 boom, both dead." But that's the way they treated their people. Um all's fair in love and war, didn't somebody say that – dreadful. Yeah um so where were we?

Oh that minefield ...

Yeah, yeah. And it was you know we didn't have the people to defend the damn thing, you know and obviously no-one else was going to so the decision was made to get rid of it.

05:30 And ah they tried a lot of ways and hurt a lot of people before ... They got an APC [Armoured Personnel Carrier] which they reinforced and had a great big, a bit like a cultivator, you know a farm plough off to the side but they were big truck wheels or something going out about,

06:00 and they just went through and round and round in circles and the mines were just detonating ... Then I think they took bulldozers in and swept over the top. But yeah, yeah those that were still left God knows where they are – still I reckon they would be all over the place, I would think. But mostly in the south of the province yeah.

Can you just, just for the ...

06:30 **This is the first time you said you'd run into the M16 mine. Just for the archive can you describe how it worked and why it was designed the way it was?**

Well as I said early it's, it's a variation on the, on the Jumping Jack Mine that the Germans had during the war, Second World War that the Americans perfected. Um it's a cylinder about that round and about that long ...

But the actual ...

07:00 **Why does it actually ... Why does it jump up in the air and why ...?**

Oh because if, if ... Because the old M13 anti-personnel mine, one bloke trod on it and had his legs blown off. One casualty. This thing would leap out of the ground and it was surrounded with ball bearings and God knows, a bit like a Claymore mine but vertical. And it would just decimate anything within, well Christ up to a hundred metres if you were unlucky, the shrapnel.

07:30 **How did that chap survive ... The booby trap, the doctor, he survived that ...?**

Well it would just depend I suppose which way ... The blast probably threw him backwards and the mine might have tilted. I don't know, but yeah the CO in the front of him took the thing to the back ...

And what, what can you hear on the radio when everything's going so badly wrong? Is it just mayhem or is it ...?

Oh no, no, no, no not really. Occasionally ah

08:00 when you hear somebody's put their switch down to tell you what's going on and the action's actually happening, you can hear things going on then. But usually it was people picking up the phone and saying ah you know "Call sign one two has taken three casualties", all you know pretty ordered and controlled. Ah but you knew what was going on I think – you visualised pretty well. Particularly if you'd been to some of the places that some of these things took place.

08:30 Um yeah. Um, what was the other thing? Mines. .. Yeah we weren't the first battalion to get into trouble with them because Nine RAR had been down to the same spot before us and they had ... and that fellow I ... Oh he might have trod on an M14. But ah they were quite an efficient device let me

09:00 tell you. And they were our mines which makes it even sadder – yeah. Um but then we, we moved on. We got out of that spot thank heavens and the next operation was back out in the boon docks.

And you mentioned Operation Phoenix just also coming into that story. I just wanted to ask you about that ...?

Well it was one of these mongrel CIA [US Central Intelligence Agency] ah

09:30 things. The enemy had you know obviously field units, Vietcong, that needed support from the population in terms of money, weapons, reinforcements, you know whatever. They could only get them from the people. Now the Vietcong didn't go marching in with bands and bugles playing to recruit people, they had people within the community

10:00 that did that for them. So the local battalion, B445 Battalion, which this company commander I spoke about earlier was from, they'd have people working in all the villages for them and they were called the Vietcong infrastructure. And the Phoenix Program was about assassinating them. That's the only word can use, assassinating people – not armed but

10:30 fully sympathetic with the, with the Vietcong cause. They killed large numbers of them through hit squads by and large. Especially trained, armed and, I've forgotten their name, they used to wear tiger suits long before tiger suits were fashionable for young people to wear to rock concerts – you see them these days, yeah.

Does that ... When you see them does that remind you of ...

Oh,

11:00 it reminds me of these grubby, bloody Vietnamese people, yeah.

How were you personally associated with that? Did you come across them or you just knew it was happening or you knew ...?

I'd met some of them, the operatives in various places, in various villages, because my job was to go an liaise with you know the local people and try and establish what was going on and what the Vietcong

were up to etc. And um

11:30 So you know I ran into a few of them in Long Phuc Hai where I spent a night and got stitched up [drunk] on I think it was vodka, God. And during it all the CO rang up and said," I want you to go and brief B Company and what's happening at ... because they went off to do a separate operation." So I got the helicopter and went up to about ... take me about as high as you can go for about half and hour so I can sober up. Oh geez. But Nick Harris I'd been drinking

12:00 as soon as I got off the helicopter and started talking.He said,"You're pissed [drunk] ."

Who were you drinking with?

I reckon one was CIA, ah one was probably Vietcong and the other were local people – the local mayor and ...

You'd probably been trained in fairly conventional way, this idea that suddenly there no front line but a strange relationship with the enemy in a sense and you don't know who the enemy is, a seventeen year old

12:30 **girl or ...**

Sure but that, that was, that was in terms of the Vietcong and the local population. Away from all of that in the remote areas of the provinces that wasn't a problem because out there was basically the Vietnamese Army – you know informed units so it was you know almost conventional warfare if you like – a patrolled war, a patrolling war, we patrolled against him and he'd patrol against us and that sort of thing. There

13:00 was no great, I don't think, except when you got reasonably close to villages, any blurred lines about who the enemy were. But once you got into the villages and around the villages yet it was ah, it was bloody hopeless. And especially as we had really no control over the civilian in Fuktri Province – it was my observation, certainly nineteen sixty-nine/ nineteen seventy.

You were with a CIA ... was her civilian dressed or was he ...?

Yeah, yeah.

13:30 Yeah, but there were lots of Americans around me because you know they all had money, all sorts of people, they were Air America. They made films about Air America – well it's a CIA private airline. I mean they were popping in and out all over the places. And we had our own spooks I think out there a bit so it was ah, yeah it was a bit spooky the whole thing – that was the name of an aircraft incidentally.

Did you ever use old Spooky or ...?

Yeah we had a very interesting experience in fire support base Diggers Rest. I remember it was the day of the Western Australian

14:00 National [football] League Grand Final because I'd listened to a bit of it on the short wave radio – West Perth and East Perth I think. We had a radio intercept message that a battalion of an NVA regiment was passing our wire on its way to Route Fifteen I think it was, to ambush an ARVN convoy going to Vung Tau or whatever, I've forgotten.

14:30 And as luck would or wouldn't have it a Forward Air Controller – the Americans, they drove[flew] these push/pull [twin engined] Cessnas, was in the vicinity because they read all the traffic going backwards and forwards, he said, "Anzac Zero Alpha this is J Nine, I have two F4's [fighter planes] on line with Grape

15:00 at your service sir." Stupidly the Operations Officer, who I became friendly with as time went on, thought oh well why not. So these Phantoms [F4s] came in and dropped napalm [jellied petrol]– that's what he was talking about.

That's grape is it?

Yeah grape. Dropped napalm. And by this stage it was getting dark and the napalm fell on some huge bamboo

15:30 clumps, you know this is bamboo this big, which started to explode. And on one of its last runs the aircraft went through and of course sparks of the bamboo were going up and he reckoned he was being shot at. There's one thing you didn't do in Vietnam was to shoot at a United States Air Force aircraft and get away with it. That was about seven o'clock at night. At about four o'clock in the morning we managed to turn them off. They just went on all bloody night, including spookies [gunships]

16:00 going around the fire support base, .., you know the jungle sort of all disappears and we had shrapnel flying across the fire support. Everybody had steel helmets on and in their holes [trenches] the whole bloody night. All because, we reckoned because bamboo igniting was misplaced as tracer being fired at the aircraft.

What does Spooky look like when it's operating?

Oh it was a C130 [gunship] in those days, black

16:30 C130 with ah, ah Gatling [machinegun] they had then. Now I think they've got cannon and even 105 millimetre howitzers in them.

What could you see ...?

Oh you'd see the aircraft and this stream of tracer you know and this dreadful sound, brrrr, like that, and of course it was sixty round a minute or something – incredible. Anyway I don't think we hit anybody. You know there was probably twenty million dollars worth of

17:00 ordinance spent that night or something, I don't know, for nothing.

What else were they throwing at it? Was it just ...

Oh high ... Oh you high explosives, weapons and

From the aircraft?

Yeah oh yeah all F4's or I think there might have been some F105's [jet fighters] in amongst them but all US Air Force operating out of Phan Rang I think, or they might have come from Saigon or Ton San Nhut, I can't remember.

What does napalm look like?

Oh nasty, yeah.

17:30 Yeah but I mean when you first see it I mean you're just staggered you know - you've not seen it before so this is ... It's like being near a B52 [high altitude bomber] strike for the first time which I have done you know three thousand metres away. Um and it was just bloody awesome. The jungle just disappeared. I mean these were five aircraft, hundred one thousand bombs each,

18:00 or something like that. A huge amount, all coming down as if they were machine guns – one thousand pound bombs. We saw a few of those and impressive firework displays.

When you first see it is it like a terrible beauty in a way would you describe or it is just is it really something that you think,"Boy, I don't want anything to do with that?"

I said," God almighty

18:30 look at that!" And as far as we're concerned I mean it was a little fire support base that ... Ah well we fought the battle , myself and the battery commander because the CO had disappeared back to Nui Dat, and there's just us two in an armoured command vehicle, a section of a eight inch artillery, a section of 105's and some Americans. And anyway the Vietcong had a run at a little armoured post,

19:00 and we were providing fire support through American advisors, and this went on all bloody night. The next day this lot had retreated and we reckon they were near a river thing in bunkers. And you know some aeroplane had seen bunkers with people in them. Anyway up comes a B52 and it was only two or three thousand metres away, and you know across our front like that, not coming towards us, and there was just you know

19:30 this bloody, well the earth just erupted. Ah I suppose in the early stages it was just one of these exciting events you hadn't seen before. And then down at the next big operation, which is this one down in the minefields thing...

What was that operation called again?

Mundingbara. We had a B52 strike on the Long Hai Mountains on a beautiful clear day and they were about

20:00 I don't know five thousand metres from where we were, the foothills of them they went up quite high, so they were up there. And the first thing you saw was the five aircraft up there and then you heard their sound and then you saw shock waves coming out of the earth like that against the sky, going up into the atmosphere – huge. And then tumbling over the front of the

20:30 hills towards you were the black/red explosions coming down the hill and then a few seconds later the rumble, the noise of the explosions. It was quite fascinating really, if you didn't recognise what the hell they were but I mean ,we didn't, we were up with the enemy, he deserves everything that he gets ... ah sort of thing. You know what I mean? So

21:00 yeah I mean all those things were new. But that went on for about six months I suppose you know and things were new and exciting and then you started to get weary of all of this.

That napalm, this is a weapon that's not used by the Australian army ...?

Well the Americans ... We used ... Australia has used napalm, um ...

I don't think the Australian Air Force as far as I know used it ...

21:30 Well they may have in Vietnam. I know they had Canberra bombers, whether they used napalm or not but we certainly did during the Second World War. I mean it was a popular thing amongst the ... I mean it was a huge to a great extent. And in fact I'm sure we did too in Korea against massed infantry.

Could you, did you specifically request napalm or did they, the air force would just make up its mind when it was required?

Yeah the air force like

22:00 artillery select the ordinance best suited for the job. What you've got to tell them is what is the job. I think it's probably the best way of describing it. I mean napalm over bunkers might be useful depending on what sort of geography the ground was or topography. Because I mean high explosive bombs to get their bunkers were ... I've seen craters you know as wide as this room and as deep and a bunker a

22:30 foot either side, not even ... not even cracked, because they were built so well, they knew how to do it, by the enemy. Who only used it in sleep in too, he didn't from in it, he fought from behind and ... Um yeah so I mean it's a selection of ordinance I suppose ah ...

What was the name of the fire base?

Well they, they ...

Yeah but there was one that you particularly mentioned that you ...

Oh the one, the one about

23:00 the all night bombing thing was Diggers Rest, fire support base, Diggers Rest. These are all marked on that map that I've got. The one down at Mundingburra was called thrust. I don't know where the name came from, Nine RAR picked that name, we don't know why it was called that. Um yeah, we tended to use either New Zealand names or Townsville suburb names – that's where Mundingburra came from, it's a suburb in Townsville,

23:30 where most of the married quarters were. Ironical isn't it? Yeah.

Diggers Rest, how was it organised? How was ...?

Well most fire support bases were pretty well similar. You had a central nerve centre which was a command post, dug in obviously, all underground. With ah perhaps smaller command posts off, sometimes joining

24:00 underground, depending how long you were going to be there. These were built by little bulldozers. They'd fly the bulldozers in and they'd dig the holes and take them out again. And I used to have a hole for my group nearby and ah the CO would have a thing and so forth. Ah and around it you'd have ah a battery of artillery or perhaps two batteries – one of ours and an American. Ah we'd have a platoon and mortars.

24:30 Um, ah and we'd ah have the assault pioneers, a tracker platoon, perhaps somebody else's defence in various positions. We'd have a ... usually quite a large helicopter landing pad. Ah which would take water bladders and God knows what else. Some of the fire support bases had showers brought in, um and that sort of thing. And they were usually in amongst vegetation

25:00 so there was shade and that sort of business.

Were you flying everything in by air or was ...?

Yeah, yeah. The very odd one we moved stuff by vehicle.

Were you also using those Sikorski Sky Trains? They now call them Elvis I think.

The Jolly Green Giants we had ah they used to use the big D9 bulldozers and bring those in, yeah. Chinooks [helicopter] would bring in most of the stuff, the equipment. And they'd have pallets ... The ammunition usually ... The gun ammunition was brought under a pallet under

25:30 the Chinooks. We saw one go down one day at ah Diggers Rest, same place. He came in and aborted the landing and kept going up and then he turned on his back and went down. And as he was turning over the torque of the rear propeller was such that it snapped off. And I was standing behind the mortar team watching all this and this lazy thing sailing through the air towards us

26:00 and the closer it got the quicker it got you know and then suddenly whack and it cut a mortar straight in half.

A what?

A mortar, you know 81 millimetre mortar. And there were bloody soldiers diving for cover everywhere. That's the sort of velocity/momentum that it had.

What had caused that?

Oh what had happened is that he ... The Americans used to have these little um, ah what were they made out of, coffee cups are made out of ,

26:30 they were brown coloured. I've forgotten what they were made out of. Anyway they used to have these things and one of them ...

What are they, they're a weapon or a ...?

No, no coffee cup.

Literally?

Yeah a coffee cup. Um and it had got stuck underneath one of his rudder pedals so he couldn't use the rudder and it ... he probably over compensated and flipped over backwards. And he had a pallet of mortar ammunition underneath it which was now suddenly on top and it went down on top of him –

27:00 everything. I mean they were killed instantly, the crew. And then we had fires and bloody mortar ammunition going off everywhere. I reckon there were a dozen US air force helicopters sitting in our pad within, or army, sorry, army helicopters within a quarter of an hour, because this bloke had obviously hit the mayday button and they all came in to help – from everywhere, all sorts of ... you know Cobras and

27:30 Hueys and Chinooks and God knows what else – we couldn't get them off the pad. If Charles had of come wandering past it at that time with an RPG70 [rocket propelled grenade launcher] he would have had a field day, because we were I think still establishing the base when it happened. Although it had been there and used by a battalion before us. Um, so but we were still I think in the process of moving in from memory, yeah.

Were you able to do anything to get out there to

28:00 **see if the crew was okay or ...?**

No, no, we sent the tracker platoon straight out but there was nothing they could do.

What is the tracker platoon?

Well they're, they are ... They used to be platoon in the battalion that was the anti-tank platoon and then in Vietnam we equipped them with ... We took ... We didn't give them ... well we had anti-tank weapons but the Swedes wouldn't give us the ammunition, the [(UNCLEAR)] stuff. So we had some 106's but we didn't really use those because I mean Charles didn't have any armour so why did we need anti-tank weapons?

28:30 And they became a tracker platoon. They would go out and track. And they had dogs. And they'd go out and search for the enemy with dogs that could sniff, trained ... Um and they were good for a quick response. Ah they were you know another infantry platoon with dogs basically but they had ah ... Our blokes had done a lot of work with the SAS [Special Air Service]. Ah they'd gone out on ...

29:00 Some of their guys had gone out on some patrols – not long lengthy patrols but some patrols so they used to camouflage themself like SAS and you know move at the same speed as SAS which was about you know one mile a day. Ah whereas we were usually, you know we'd do ten or fifteen or twenty.

They'd really creep around, the SAS guys?

Oh well they had to, there was only three or four of them. Christ I mean they just can't be detected. And the only way you don't get detected is to move very slowly and

29:30 very carefully I guess, yeah.

The helicopter there. Did you adapt fairly quickly to its use?

Oh yes, yes. Ah we'd never, we'd never been used to so many I think but we'd done a lot of helicopter training, ah

30:00 in Australia. Um not so much with the heavy lift stuff but I mean that's you know neither here nor there. We did a lot of ... I did a lot of sorties and gun ships, not gunships, CNC ships [commander control] ships. They had ... They used to have one 'Huey' kitted out with ah ... These are for air landings, air assaults, where you put a rifle company down on an air assault on a thing

30:30 and you'd flight preparation first, you know bang-bang-bang-bang, drop bombs and whatever the hell and then send in a rifle company.

Did you go up in the helicopters when they did that?

Yeah well I used, I used to ... The CO Commander, the battery commander and myself used to be the CNC Party.

And sorry that's in the little Sioux Helicopter?

No, no these were'Huey', Iroquois Helicopters which had the Iroquois squadron commander driving it because it was his helicopters that were moving our soldiers

31:00 and we would ah, the CO would then discuss with him how the helicopters would land and the company commander and so forth so ... I mean the air force would quite often change their minds at the last minute as to where they were going to go. And I'll tell you a funny story about one of those, it's ah when I had D company. I used to sit there and monitor the company net, the fire command net, the battalion net and the task force net, ah by just

31:30 flicking switches with a sort of headphone so I could keep the CO informed of what was going on everywhere else and do whatever he, he ... I was his staff officer another words. If he wanted something, a message passed to somebody then I'd do it for him. Um but you were up there with all the shooting and stuff that's going on and ah, and then the company would go in and clear it and take control and ...

This is a coordinates search or a search and destroy ...?

Well it may have been the start of one of those, ah to get the fellows into the bush.

32:00 You know you'd move them from Nui Dat out twenty kilometres and pop them down after you had a fire support base within gun range.

Can you tell us that D company story you mentioned?

Oh yeah, yeah. We were way over in the east of the province and ah, ah on the lee of the Mai Tao and the company used to be picked up to move, I think over the top of the Matowers from memory and they'd had ...

The Mai Tao were a sort of range of mountains ...?

No huge mountains up in the

32:30 east of the province which were an enemy strong hold that we wiped out in ah December nineteen sixty-nine I think it was – that's where we found all their hospitals and munitions factories and God knows what else. But ah the company had had problems with the Air Force saying that they were going to land on the east side of the pad or the west side ... Some of these things were you know four or five hundred feet across so if they changed their minds blokes with full equipment had to move across to where they were

33:00 to get on the bloody helicopters. So we ... To stop this from happening there was a road and so we said well we'll use that as the pick up point. Now put out two panel markers – you know these red marker things you put them on the ground – and I said now tell the airborne Commander that the area between the two um, ah ... I think he was mumbling about where he was going to come, that's right, so I don't know whether I went ...

33:30 I said tell him that the ground between the two markers has been cleared of mines, alright. And you could almost hear the Air Force bloke thinking "Clear of mines, where are the other mines? " So in they came, nose to tail, blokes looking out to make sure the tail bloody rotor was inside the thing exactly where our soldiers were sitting and they got up, got aboard and left. So I mean you had to resort to those sorts of little tricks occasionally

34:00 to get them to land where you wanted them to land as opposed to where they wanted to land. And I mean they're aeroplane type reasons as to why they wanted to go somewhere else. It may have been wind direction or whatever, I don't know but yeah sometimes it made life difficult for soldiers.

Um Fred how much did things change for you once you started with D company?

34:30 D company, you mean in Vietnam?

Mm.

Well D company, was it the first one? Yeah ... What way do you mean change?

Did your job?

Well I only went out for a couple of weeks each time. I think yeah D company was the first, yeah. Ah that was in the Nui

35:00 May Tao Mountains. I actually had ... that first time although it was probably in retrospect the most dangerous of the operations, ah because some our fellows were getting hit, ah including the D Company which was out there. And ah but what it meant to me there was that we'd been searching

35:30 for a major hospital facility called K76A and I knew it was in, I believed it was in a certain area for a whole host of reasons which don't matter, and the CO had divided the mountain up into section search areas – all mountains along fifteen kilometres I suppose. And we were next to Victor Company which was one of the New Zealand companies. .. We'd found ah

36:00 what looked like a dental post and what also looked like a, not an outpatients but a sort of administrative area where patients would be registered and that sort of thing. And not far away from it there was a huge weapons repair place.

Can you tell me how you knew it was a dental ...?

Oh well just you know dental kit, chair, dental records, that sort of stuff. And the administrative area had

36:30 you know registration areas where you could see that people had been checked in and out and you could see units being mentioned. Now this was good because I had a rifle company as the IO searching for me as the IO not as a company commander. Ah this was the first time I'd actually had some resources to do something that I thought was you know interesting and exciting. We found a weapons repair shop that had a huge cache of ammunition and weapons.

37:00 Hundreds of thousands of things. Obviously when people came into the hospital they had damaged weapons, they were taken off and repaired so that when they left the hospital they'd pick up a weapon and go back to wherever they had to come from. So with it all starting to make sense we headed towards it and they reckon it was where Victor Company, the Kiwi company had been to. And I remember one night about eight o'clock at night when we used to do evening prayers, this was when the CO would talk to each company

37:30 in turn about what you'd done and what you were planning to do. And ah Victor Company's call sign was three because it replaced our Charlie company. So I followed him and when he said oh look I've searched there it's definitely not in this sector purple, one and three or whatever the hell they were called. Okay so I said well my feeling is that you know sector purple, one, two and three is probably the most likely place for it to be and I'd like to mousetrap, which was

38:00 a phrase we used to use taking somebody else's area of operations over for a temporary period, into call sign three's area and go in there tomorrow and have a look myself. He said yeah that's fine. Good. About five minutes later on my own company internal net, that the battalion couldn't hear,the Victor company commander came up and see why do you reckon, why do you ...? So I said," da-de-da-de-da-de-da," you know all the things I'd just said to you about dental posts

38:30 and so forth and he said "Ah!". So quick as a flash ah it comes up on the battalion command nets, "Oh this is Three, look I've changed my mind about ah sectors, I'd like to go and have another look". Well I said ,"I don't really care who finds the bloody thing provided somebody does." Anyway ah we'd said we'd move up onto the boundary and I reckon we were five hundred metres from the boundary when out of the cave

39:00 in front of us comes a figure h in dark uniform with a sweat scarf around the head carrying an AK47 [rifle]. And a couple of fellows then started to engage and I said hey, hey hang on it's a Maori. You know clowns, they were absolute cowboys some of these blokes – you know he was dressed up as bloody Vietcong. He'd gone through a cave system and come out the other side of the spur line. His company was on the other side and ah that's when I said ah

39:30 " I'm going to somewhere else, I'm not going to do this, we're going to kill our people here today if we're not careful." So we just sat back and let ... and they found the hospital. Um, um yeah so it was a hugely successful operation in that sense. So then we all went home as I recall and I went down and took over A company. And on New Year's Eve at the Horse Shoe I decided we'd have

40:00 a fireworks display. We had one tank, three artillery pieces and two mortars I think so we fired the bloody lot including some fifty calibre machine guns out into the general area where the enemy were, thinking that's a lot of fun and then we watched a film and all went off to the farter so to speak. About three o'clock in the morning there's this ... krump!. So we woke up saying ,"Jesus ah ..!". We had a harassing interjection fight a targets would go on all night, we'd fire a few mortars at intervals at certain spots.

40:30 So if they were moving around at night they did so with a certain degree of danger. And you could hear these mortars going krump-krump. And then heard krump-peeeeuh. And I said," Jesus Christ that's us we're being shot at." By the time I got down to the command post, I was wearing an air force ah pilot's ah, what do you call, flying suit, that's a good way you know to go to bed because you can move around. The company sergeant major was down there

41:00 fully dressed, all his combat equipment on, weapon at hand, ready to go. And what was happening was that there was, we thought there was a local post down the road with an American advisor and they were actually shooting. So I sent someone up to find a mortar, and it was an 82 millimetre and it was only which is only used by the enemy. And they'd actually said,"Okay you can do all this fireworks we'll show you how to do it better". So they got into the middle of the village of Dac To and fired twenty rounds of something, packed up their

41:30 bloody mortars and disappeared into a hole in the ground somewhere – just to keep us excited. And I've got a report that the journalist wrote about it, because he rang me up from Saigon the next day when I went to the battalion for ah drinkie-poos [drinks]. We used to do those sorts of things.

Tape 7

00:44 **So do you think you could tell us on tape about body counts and the importance to different forces and, and perhaps tell us about the story of your experience being sent to get a body count.**

Yeah I mean ah

01:00 one arrived with the expectation that how many you know enemy you killed wasn't all that significant except in an intelligence sense that you knew if your assessment of the size of a unit was you know four hundred and fifty and over a period of time you're fairly sure that over a number of units that perhaps a hundred of them had been killed. Well that has a ...

01:30 unless they've got reinforcements it told you something about the capability enemy. So I think that's, it's important to know those sorts of things. But what happened was that it almost became like a competition as to you know who had the largest number of a, of kills so to speak. A bit like what happened I guess to air force fighter pilots in all wars where they used to put

02:00 kills on the side of their aircraft and then they became aces if they got more, if they got a quota – ah twenty-one I think was a top ace or something, that's a Korea figure, I saw something on it the other day. And I think that sort of crept into it all so ...

Where do you think that came from?

Oh well I think it was something that the Americans used because all the Intelligence Reports and Operations Summaries always tend to

02:30 emphasise you know the results of the contact and that sort of thing. And indeed all the Contact Reports were written that way to ... And I guess for the reasons I said right at the start that there's an understanding of the enemy's ability or impact on his ability. But I think the Americans took it to another level ah where it became you know something almost attached to promotional ah possibilities, potentials. Um in our case

03:00 I think it also became a bit of a competition. I think you'll find that people of about same peer group who are in command of battalions for example, and if they'd been competing against each other as cadets at the Royal Military College they were still competing against each other. Not in an unfriendly way or an unpleasant way, but still there was a competition and I think that's what came into it a bit. I don't know but I, I know I was ... I could see I was required

03:30 to keep a running, ah as the IO at least, of enemy casualties by platoons um which I kept. But as a sobering thing I also kept our casualties at the same time so that you know if there was a need to balance the two um ... But then as I say this business about being sent to Longbin to interrogate prisoners to see how in

04:00 the previous contacts with various units what the real outcome was. Because so many times in our contacts you knew you'd hit people um but they were then dragged away or ran away or crawled away and all you were left with were blood trails. They just disappeared into the jungle. So you really didn't know whether you'd killed anybody. That's why it was called body count, you actually get to put your foot on them to say you know that one's dead. Um

04:30 it was interesting because I went to the, to the ah um prisoner of war camp at Long Binh Compound which had some of our fellows in it as well of course because it was for both armies. That's where that you know nasty young man from C Company whatever Tropic Lightning Division, Tropical, what was his name Kelly, the Milo Massacre Man, he was ensconced there for while. Anyway they'd had a riot,

05:00 or something was going on so the prisoners weren't accessible so spent a couple of days ah wandering around seeing the sights and ah spending time with the Special Forces Group at Bien Hoa, where I met a man from Okeefenokee and he couldn't understand me and I couldn't sure as hell understand a word he was saying. My friend Rodger Wickham from the Task Force was with me and he did the interpreting. Yeah

05:30 Okeefenokee – you know down in Florida in the Everglades, yeah God, yeah.

What was this POW camp like?

Well Long Binh was just a massive American base. Ah logistics ... That's where the major hospitals were. That's where we ... If we had ... If you had head injuries or burn injuries they went to Hospital in Long Binh. Um a lot of people ah and you know there was a prisoner of war compound

06:00 in amongst it all. It was the nerve centre for you know a lot of American activities. That's where Macvee Headquarters was, the Operational Headquarters for the Americans in Vietnam was there. And they had you know huge officer clubs and you know it was just like being in Honolulu in some ways.

What did the POW building actually look like?

Oh ah you know army huts with barbed wire around them. You know a compound with barbed wire and

06:30 the various securities things that you'd have. Ah, ah not as sophisticated as ah what's it called Camp something in Guantanamo Bay.

Camp X-Ray.

Camp X-Ray. Oh a bit like . Have you been to the concentration camp at Baxter [Australian internment camp for illegal migrants]?

No can't say I have.

Well you've seen photographs of it. Well that's what it looked like, without the razor wire because we didn't have razor wire in those days I don't think.

07:00 **So quite basic?**

Mm.

Did you ever interrogate prisoners there?

Not there, no, no. No interrogated them in country, you know in Phoc Tui Province.

What were your instructions on interrogation?

Oh none really. Um I mean you treated people as you expected prisoners to be treated. But if you could find out ... And we didn't take too many. Um

07:30 most of the ones that we interrogated were in fact people that had come over voluntarily. Because they could get huge amounts of money for saying ... There was a scale. If they could tell you where there was mortar cache hidden they got x amount dollars, y amount for rifles – you know there was a sort of sliding scale. And what was happening we suspect is that

08:00 some would come across and tell us where huge amounts of equipment were or obsolete and not being used anymore, be paid off a huge cheque, then go off to Paris or somewhere, enjoy themselves and then go back and go across to the other side again and establish some more stuff and then come across and get some more money. It was almost a little game for some of them I think. But um I mean the criteria were to, you know Geneva Convention and all of that but if you could talk to a prisoner and

08:30 and they were willing to tell you they'd come from this unit or that and what they'd been doing for the past few months you know we did that.

So no physical coercion?

Not in our time there wasn't. No I don't, you know I don't think really except for that case that everybody talks about, the water torture business early in the days. You know this business about dropping people out of helicopters, I mean the Americans may have done it and I knew the Koreans did but we didn't.

09:00 We ... If a soldier behaved badly in that way he finished up in jail, you know that sort of thing. I'm not saying that there was no brutality out in the heat of battle and so forth, there probably was, but ah not in the ... You see I remember one bloke ah, after the fellows had been lost on mines down this Mundingburra Operation,

09:30 as they were going past an APC [Armoured Personnel Carrier], he got out an M79 grenade launcher and went bang in frustration – I don't think it hit anybody but he was ah charged for unlawfully discharging his weapon and finished up doing seven days in the stockade or something at Nui Dat. Because you know we believed we were more civilised and better trained and disciplined that doing things like that. Ah because

10:00 if you, if you were prone to doing stuff like that you'd finish with a My Lai Massacre, when people just lose their marbles [go crazy].

What did you know of that massacre?

Oh we knew a fair bit about it. Um, um I think, I think we ... Or am I starting to lose my plot here too. Was it after we got home that we learnt all about it or was it during the ... I can't remember now. I thought William Kelly was

10:30 was charged,and then he got a Presidential Pardon didn't he, from Mr Nixon?. Yeah I think so. But anyway I don't really know I suppose. But we didn't have a great deal of experience with prisoners. I think the hospital they had more experience than we did. But I never ... And I don't know whether the intelligence people went down to talk to them –

11:00 we certainly never did. Because we'd often send our ... If we had a prisoner that was wounded we'd send him off in our own helicopters down there.

What did you know of Operation Phoenix?

Ah well other than a CIA operation, covert operation against the Vietcong infrastructure to eradicate them usually by means of assassination

11:30 by a team of a what you might call a hit squad at various places. Um and, and I knew some of their,

some of their targets. We may have in fact unwittingly given them some of their targets.

How?

Well you recall that woman who had the ... was obviously accommodating and suckering the Nigou they were, the Nigou Guerilla Unit

12:00 on the edge of the Hoi Cue Village or hamlet. In the process of talking about that in intelligence circles, that this was happening but she was allowed to get on with life, and the CIA got mention of that and bingo she um, she was ah possibly became a target for them. Ah for that, for that procedures, although she was small fry. I think you know they were after bigger people than that, that had had some influence on ability

12:30 to support the Vietcong, with either you know human resources or financial sources or whatever – logistic resources.

What were your rules of engagement with the enemy? You said the Geneva Convention was important but were these things ever actually found frustrating. Were your rules of engagement tight or ...?

Well

13:00 it varied. There were, there were no fire zones. There were areas where you had to positively identify your target as enemy before you were allowed to engage – and that was obviously in areas close to the populated areas where ... They used to go out and collect wood in areas where you knew the enemy had been so you had to be sure about that. Then there were areas that were free fire and if anything moved

13:30 um and you were sure that it wasn't one of your own then you would generally engage it. And I think in that process we probably, we may well have killed people that weren't ah you know Vietcong armed people. But um that would have been by accident rather than you know a deliberate thing I think. But I mean we didn't see too many civilians because we spent most of our time out in the boondocks [remote areas]

14:00 and there were none out there.

When would you suspect that you if you had engaged civilians when would you suspect that might have been?

Oh there were some operations that were sort of going backwards and forwards ah sort of between populated areas and I think some woodcutters and so forth might have got mixed amongst couriers ah which ... Oh we killed a few of them I know

14:30 um, um because some of them were carrying money, large amounts. And of course they weren't soldiers in the sense or they were civilians working for the enemy I suppose. Um but you know there was, there was the odd conflict that got close to civilian areas where perhaps sometimes civilians got engaged. I can't recall any ... One of our

15:00 close Nui Dat patrols I think might have engaged some woodcutters and killed one, I think. But ah that would have been the only one I think.

This wasn't common?

No. Oh no, no not with our lot but we weren't ... I mean Phuoc Tui was a fairly sparsely populated areas in the sense that what population it had is contained in a fairly concise area and the top three

15:30 thirds of the province was you know, except a few little hamlets, was civilian free so to speak. That's why it made it a place for the enemy to operate out of against other provinces. Because they didn't use the same provincial arrangement that we did, they had a different ... Ah they called Phuc Tui Barlong Province for example which I think is what it's called today um and it encompassed areas of the provinces on either side of what the South Vietnamese Government called so

16:00 they had a different political, geo-political arrangement than we were used to so theirs was a bit different.

Could you tell me an operation, an example of the kind of operation you were doing in the Phuoc Tui Province? What was the average ...?

16:30 Most of them were about a month to six weeks. And at fairly, fairly well established routine I suppose you'd, you'd send in a fight ... ah people would secure an area for a fire support base. And that was quite often was by armour and that sort of thing. And once you've got the artillery on the ground and so forth you could then air assault rifle companies into various

17:00 areas of the area of operations. Um, um and then they would commence doing reconnaissance in those areas. And as, as information from, from those picked up you could then get a picture of perhaps where the emphasis ought to be and you'd move companies around to, to go against perhaps specific targets that had been identified in terms of enemy units operating in the area. Um, ah

17:30 sometimes are we had people walk into enemy bunker systems very early in the piece and have quite substantial contacts. And then you'd spend a lot of time with people following up that you know contact in the sense that not only going after them that way you then pick up a company from somewhere else to block, to hopefully ambush you know withdrawal routes of this

18:00 group of people. Um I mean we did one of those, and that was our last operation, Operation Townsville, up in the north of the province where we'd ah engaged the headquarters of their, their equivalent of the Task Force Headquarters I suppose, to put in those sorts of terms. And ah they'd broken

18:30 away and then we quickly moved a platoon to ambush them successfully and that was when we then went back to the original place and found these bags of ah of ah radio codes – that was April nineteen seventy. And um I actually went out in an APC to look at this stuff and as soon as I saw what it was I got on the radio to Task Force Headquarters

19:00 to my friend Rodger Wickam and said you'd better get out here in a helicopter as quickly as you can, I've got some material that you wanted to get hold of very quickly. And he did that. As soon as he saw it, he knew what it was too, so he took it straight to Saigon from there. And the Americans were able to, at the document evaluation centre, read the codes and therefore hold down

19:30 the enemy traffic, radio traffic. And we suspect very strongly that that allowed the US to invade Cambodia against the ah, the major enemy headquarters called the Central Office for South Vietnam which was in Cambodia in a place called the Parrot's Hook, Parrot's Beak sorry. Um and that's basically why they went in there it was to clean that up.

20:00 Um I think all I did was to create a situation for genocide in a Cambodia as it turned out but ah they certainly made it non operational for a while but I mean it's like chasing hares in the forest.

Were these NVA mainly that you were engaging or ...?

Out in those areas, in the you know remote areas for population they were a,

20:30 a mixture. Some of the, some of the VC [Viet Cong] regiments for example, as they were called, had in fact a lot of North Vietnamese Army people in them and the basically wore green uniforms with helmets. I mean ah they weren't wearing black uniforms the NVA. And they had sort of artillery units, you know which fired rockets, 107 millimetre rockets and things. Um

21:00 yeah um they ah, they were NVA in our time. That might have been a phase in, sorry, their operations.

Were they all men?

No, no there were a lot of women, a lot of women. Particularly the Vietcong had a lot of women. Ah ... Well when I saw a lot you know a lot more than we had I guess.

21:30 But there were female enemy soldiers no doubt about that. And you know we treated the same way as the men, in whatever way that was.

It didn't present any unique problems?

If they were carrying and AK47 just because they were Lumpies, as they were called, no they were a target for,

22:00 for being eliminated just as much as a bloke carrying a AK47 was. And certainly in the heat of ... I mean you don't have ... Half the time you wouldn't know they were females until ... unless you'd killed them and then you'd discover that you know Christ this one's a woman. Um ...

Did that ever happen to you?

Me personally? No. No. Happened to ... well

22:30 one of the platoons I was commanding at one stage I think had a contact that included a woman. But it was, it was not uncommon so it wasn't anything special. I mean if they wanted to be patriotic, members of the patriotic forces well that's their business I suppose.

Did you ever see any evidence of any Russian activity?

No. No I think there was lots of rumours about Russians but ...

How do you feel about those rumours?

Baseless

23:00 I reckon. The Chinese and the Russians weren't on good ... on talking terms at that stage and then subsequently neither were the Vietnamese and the Russia ... the Chinese of course but ah ... No I think, I think Vietnam ... I mean Vietnam may have got logistic support from whoever you know, Russia, whoever had a dollar. I mean I wouldn't be surprised if the United States companies weren't selling the Vietnamese equipment ... just as they did during the

23:30 Second World War. There are some people that will sell anything for money. And the gun running

industries out there, and it's very big, very large and very nasty in my view, so I mean where they got their equipment and ammunition etc. from would have been a whole range of sources probably including Russia – obviously the AK47's came from there. Um but then everybody's got an AK47 haven't they? Um, so ... But as for a a direct presence

24:00 I don't know, the Americans might have had something to do with them in terms of air defence around Hanoi but I don't know. I mean the Vietnamese had managed to do over the French by themselves. I think they saw that they were quite capable of doing the same thing to Americans, and whoever else came along with the Americans.

What

24:30 **are the, if any, are there instances of combat that you regret decisions that you made?**

Yeah I think ah it goes back to that story I told you about being in the wrong class at Duntroon and not ... and being an engineer rather than an infantryman. As a result of that I wasn't a platoon commander in the infantry. Ah some fellows I know had done six

25:00 years as a platoon commander before they you know got to command companies and that sort of thing. So here I am out being a company commander and there was an operation going on up the north and I'd come back with B company from our big armoured corp Swan, to the west or the east or wherever it was, and um we'd got back and cleaned up and did the usually think of drinking as much beer as you could, in as

25:30 quick a time as you could which wasn't very long and not very much beer because you'd be so exhausted after these things that two or three beers and you're on your ear. Anyway half way through this sir rings up from where they were way out on the top of the province saying he wanted me out there at first light in the helicopter because he had another job for me. So I did that and the job was that Signals Intelligence was telling us that D445 Battalion was going to cross through to,

26:00 to the Binbar rubber plantation that night and I was to go out and ambush them in mounted in armoured personnel carriers. So on the way back to Nui Dat I, directly on the way, it's not far from Nui Dat this place. And ah so I did a reconnaissance, up and down and flew around a fair bit and decided that of the twenty kilometres that this rubber plantation occupied north/south, that about a kilometre and a half of it would be

26:30 where he would cross if he was going to cross anywhere so that's the area I'd basically ambush. And I worked out a little plan and went back, gave some orders and we got in the APC's and away we went at four-thirty, last light being about half past five. And as we were about half way there the APC came over and said we're not staying with you tonight we've been ordered to go back to base for another job. I said shit

27:00 what'll do I do? Because we were in APC's I'd spread the platoons out to cover as wide a area as I could because I'd had a guess as to where these people were coming to come across. So we were now ... So we were being dropped almost simultaneously and I said Jesus should I pick up this platoon that I was with and move up to join this one and then to up join the other one so we're altogether and that sort of thing. And I was humming and hahring and it was getting dark and I thought Jesus no we might you know run into bloody people

27:30 at night and ... I was very confident about doing what is a tricky of RV-ing [rendezvous] platoons. The regular company commander I think would have done it but then he had confidence in people's ability to do various things, and I didn't have those, I was you know just filling in. Um anyway of course the inevitable happened at three o'clock in the morning the northern most platoon

28:00 who I think and I suspect had not mounted an ambush properly but had just propped on the ground in a fairly unwieldy sense, operational sense, security sense, reported movement of several hundred people. So whilst I was elated about having picked the right spot I was now very downcast about the fact that what the hell was I going to do about a platoon that couldn't, wouldn't

28:30 open fire because they'd obviously run the risk of being overrun. Should I pick this platoon up now and move forward quickly? Ah pick up the other platoon that was half way there and, and get in and have a go at this lot? And again I didn't feel confident ah about doing that. So what we did is we engaged them with every artillery piece that was within range um and they scarpered across and disappeared. And

29:00 used to have nightmares about that, not, not, not getting up and doing what the company should have done. I think I was concerned about losing soldiers and I wasn't confident about my capacity to do this very tricky operation at night with artillery falling all over the place. And um so next day we chased them.

What kind of impact did losing soldiers have

29:30 **on you?**

Oh I think at that stage of the tour which was I think about March nineteen seventy and we were going, they were all going home at the end of April, that I think there is a natural tendency to avoid doing things that you know expose soldiers to dangers that had been exposed on too many occasions already

and had managed to survive. And inevitably

30:00 these things happen and I mean we had a platoon commander in A company killed and he ... He wasn't the platoon commander, sorry he was the forward observer from the Artillery Battery with A company, and he was and he was, he was [(UNCLEAR)] away from an RV with armoured personnel carriers that were going to take him back to Nui Dat with the company and that was the end of the war for them and he trod on a mine and was killed. And that was very depressing for a lot of people. Um, so I think you know

30:30 that was now in the back of your mind. But even so ah you know from a military career point of view if I had of picked up those platoons and charged off and say knocked over twenty or thirty of them, which you know we may have been able to do then my military career would have taken a different direction I think. Um I might have been in a better position for career advancement as for example being a commander

31:00 of a battalion instead of being a 2IC which is what I finished up as. Um, although I did have a chance later but then I decided with our family circumstances were such that I wouldn't command a battalion. Um, which was when David was very ill. But ah yeah, I've often wondered about that and I, and I sort of think about well it really does go back to not having ... you know some of decisions of ah, ah

31:30 going into a technical corp where I learnt nothing in those formative years as a young lieutenant. Whereas my class mates were up in Borneo in battalions fighting Indonesians you see so ah they were far better equipped to deal with that sort of situation than I was. And you know why the hell the commanding officer gave me the job every time I don't know because there was a perfectly good Infantry Major that had been a platoon commander for many years sitting back at Nui Dat

32:00 commanding the administrative company. He blamed me for all of that, didn't talk to me again because you know he thought that he should have got that job. And I think he was quite right so he should have. But the CO, that CO had personal likes and dislikes amongst people and that's how it panned out.

Towards the end and we're talking about this stage which seems to be a common occurrence where soldiers are getting

32:30 **towards the end and their commanding officers don't want to put them in harms way, and they also don't want to be put in harms way when they're getting very close to the tour, did you want to leave? Were you looking forward to the end of your tour?**

Ah well yes and no. I'd got very weary and very tired of all sorts of things and I was sick of this bloody war. Ah although I can recall talking to the CO one night, oh about February, we were sitting in a hole and I was saying what the hell's going on here? He said this is the only war we've

33:00 got, we'd better make the most of it. And I thought that was sensible statement at the time but obviously it wasn't. But the other thing was that of course by this stage Di and I were you know having a sort of thing and um, ah so whereas I'd had enough of sitting around fire support bases ah, ah you know I was ... boredom was as much as anything

33:30 but I think this came from a weariness about what we'd been doing for a long time. I mean unlike World War II where battalions went and fought a very fierce and horrible battle for a couple of weeks like El Alamein, they'd spend the next nine months then organising themselves to go and do another one somewhere. Whereas we did it for ten and half months out of eleven or twelve and I think

34:00 everybody got a bit weary and run down, ah both physically and mentally. And I think then you start to think about you know what the hell are we doing, why are we doing this and ...? But um and that's how I think I, in the letters that I wrote to Di I ah, said a few things like that to her. But I certainly in the finish was you know pleased to be home. But ah I ah

34:30 remember being asked by somebody at my sister's place at a party she held for me, what was it like? I said it's the best war I've been to. That's what a bloody idiot twenty-nine or twenty-eight year old says. And ah several years on I said what a stupid thing to say. But you know that's the nature of the age I guess. Um ...

Were you seeing men around you who weren't coping physically and mentally by the end of their tour?

35:00 Oh yeah I think so, yeah.

What sort of signs were telling you that?

Oh well you know grumpiness and people going off their handles, you know short fuses, getting upset with people unnecessarily. I mean I remember going on a short fuse when ... The other job I was doing at the finish was the operations officer so that the operations officer could go and write the battalion book. And ah I remember

35:30 really getting up the nose of a duty officer in the Task Force because with two days to go they wanted one of our companies to go and retrieve material for them from a fire support base the Americans had built and left. Inevitably what happened was an APC hit a mine, two of our fellows were hurt, not seriously as it turned out but you know that was potential was there and we got very angry that these

buggers you know sitting back with the beer and the gear as they say ah would ah

36:00 wouldn't argue a case for why these blokes should not be involved in doing this and you go and find somebody else. So yeah and we just got tired and cranky and ... I was only nine and half stone when I came home from Vietnam. I'm, to give you an idea I think I'm about eleven and a half at the moment. So yeah, yeah we were weary and tired,

36:30 but I had a girlfriend so that was good, yeah. It sounds like her in the kitchen.

Were there any instances in these kind of climates where tensions are building, people are tired, etc. that fragging took place?

Ah we didn't have any in our battalion but it certainly happened in other battalions ah

37:00 and certainly whilst we were there. Ah I can recall a young platoon commander at Nine RAR being killed by a bloke putting a grenade on his mosquito net in his tent, which meant that it sagged down so the grenade went off on his chest basically.

Did you know the circumstances of that?

Oh well the platoon commander was a bit of a pig and ah, as the story goes, he was a bit of a Teutonic type fellow that liked to tell soldiers to go jump in the

37:30 lake just for the sake of jumping in the lake and one young fellow just couldn't take it anymore. Um and so he did that and went to Boggo Road Goal for twenty years or something in ah Brisbane. So there was a bit of it. I mean there was a sergeant in the ... Our battalion mess had joined a ah a compound from which the transport company operated, and I think it was around Christmas time obviously, you see we didn't

38:00 have a lot of alcohol because it was reason a lot these things happen, and um and some bloke was full as a boot and grabbed a rifle went and shot three people in the sergeants' mess I think. Why I don't know, he was drunk. Yeah so, so we didn't ... We supervised soldiers getting drunk, which they did very easily because they were so tired, by this stage

38:30 their weapons weren't with them, they had no ammunition. Um ...

Why not?

Well we took it off them when they arrived back at the base so they could do those sorts of things. I mean there were some people on duty obviously that were armed but those that weren't weren't wandering around with live, you know live weapons and a can of beer, that's, that's a dangerous thing. That's why the Banco Club was a brilliant idea I think from an army point of view. That they'd go down there and put everything away and do what they like for you know two or three days.

39:00 Um but the alcohol and weapons have never gone hand in hand.

Did you have much insubordination when people were drunk?

Oh yeah, I think there's a bit of that in companies.

Is that something that you ever saw?

Oh yes, yes I saw a bit of it in B Company. But you know this is just in some ways a fellow letting off steam. And ah good officers I think ah understood that the soldier wasn't really genuine

39:30 about his actions, that it was the beer talking and, and that tomorrow he'd regret what he said. But if you provoked him any further he was likely to get really stroppy and then you were going to have to deal with it. So that was a question of judgement I think. Um but the problem was to make sure that you weren't as pissed as he was, I think. So you're always on duty in that sense. Um I remember being up at a company one night and one of the company commanders was having a really tough

40:00 time for all sorts of reasons. Um and he was drowning his sorrows and I happened, happened to call in for some reason and so joined in. And then I got back to do some duty officer in the command post which you know Nui Dat was usually sit down and read a book and go to sleep until somebody said that there was something happening. And something did happen and so I staggered up and

40:30 the rest of the people were watching films so I managed to work between the power point and the projector and pull the cord and the projector. Good evening sir. Task Force Commander send a reaction company somewhere tomorrow morning at you know four o'clock or something, I've forgotten what it was. But I was lucky to get away with that because the Response Company

41:00 was in fact the company commander I'd been to and he got into a lot of trouble. Because ah obviously he was not you know in a fit state of mind to take orders from anybody at that stage, but ah very sad.

Tape 8

00:43 **Sorry just Binh Bah was a fairly well known incident and there was ah in the press there was reportedly civilian casualties there. Can you just sort of ...?**

Well I think I mean obviously someone from Five RAR would be better able to talk about it. But we, we

01:00 were conducting operations against Thirty-Three NVA I spoke about earlier from a fire support base I don't know about ten kilometres north, fifty k's [kilometres] north of the Binh Bah Village. And the enemy had established a battalion I think of, I think the First Battalion Thirty-Three NVA Regiment to ambush one of our resupply convoys which was usually perhaps up to you know twenty vehicles, with armour. But some trigger happy fellow

01:30 with an RPG grenade launcher fire at a lone tank that was coming back to be repaired or something, I've forgotten the circumstances, and anyway he hit it and as it turned out our CO was in the air at the time, all these reports had happened, Task Force responded with the Reaction Company, which is way that things happened, at it was D Company Five RAR. And our CO then coordinated the original, the initial deployment of that into the village

02:00 and then handed the control of the battle over to Five RAR who got engaged a lot of armour. And armour firing Splint X Rounds [?] at the enemy who are hiding under bunkers they'd built or weapon pits that they'd built under houses and things and inevitably what the Americans call collateral damage happened. But

02:30 I think ah there was no choice to sort of say okay all civilians out, in we go. Ah so it was a really vicious and nasty event. It didn't last too long but you know a lot of shooting and high powered shooting went on that afternoon, and they cleaned up. And this lot they'd scarpered and it's the lot that we then you know ran into a few days

03:00 later. Um so they got knocked all over the place this NVA regiment and I don't think they ever came back – in fact I'm sure they didn't.

What did you hear of that battle in Binh Bah? Did you know it was going on at the time?

Oh yeah, yeah, oh yeah, yeah.

How far away were you?

Oh about twenty kilometres, fifteen kilometres or something. I'd have to look at a map to tell you.

What did you hear of civilian casualties at that time?

Oh well there probably were but

03:30 you know we were more interested in enemy casualties and if a battle takes place in a village you expect other people to get hurt I guess. Um but I mean the enemy had occupied the village and fortified it and was going to attack ah our people and our people got into them first. And I think most of the damage was done by armour, by tanks I think. They just went through the village and blew things away.

04:00 **But were you aware that there were civilian casualties there at that time?**

Oh I can't remember, I can't remember. Ah no.

Just quickly on a couple of things. You said they were using stock market codes. Can you just give us an example of that? You did talk about it but I was just wondering ...?

Oh well you'd say ah, ah Poseidon ah twenty-

04:30 three dollars and forty cents or something and that was related to a grid square you see, for a certain unit, Poseidon. I think I've got it written down in one of my little black books. It might have been Headquarters 274 VC Regiment. And you know other you know companies would have a different unit assigned to them and, and the, the ah prices were in fact grid squares,

05:00 they weren't sent over cypher. That's how security conscious people were about using signals intelligence. Ah and very few people ... I was the only person allowed to answer the phone on those matters. And it was person to person, you know it wasn't you know a clerk or something it was the intelligence officer of the task force. It was probably a bit overboard but ...

05:30 **You met your now wife there, can you tell us how that came about? You did tell relate it in the life part but was it one of those moments of eyes meeting across the room or was it a ...? How does one go about courting a lady during a war?**

First of all it was a fairly casual meeting at this Nine RAR officer's farewell party. The Battalion 2IC introduced me to Di.

06:00 You know there were a lot of ladies they'd brought in for the party and then they'd fly out again. I think I'd seen Di down at Vung Tau at some stage and I wondered who this attractive young woman was. And

anyway we were introduced and had a bit of a chat and ah that was it. And then, then I think what really happened next was that Neville Wallace, who was the 2IC, and I were going down to Vung Tau together between operations or

06:30 something and he organised, because he used to go down there quite often because one of the jobs the 2IC did was to visit the hospital, our patients, you know soldiers and that, and ah he organised to go out to dinner somewhere and I took the Red Cross girl and Neville took Di. But at the dinner I actually talked to Di the whole night I think and that's when things started to ... yeah.

Love at

07:00 **first sight?**

Oh I think so, yeah it was something like that. Not quite, there was lots, lots of letters were exchanged.

That's amazing you were able to stay in touch under those circumstances.

We actually used to make phone calls too occasionally because I could, I could ring through various exchanges and you knew that everybody was listening – you know US Army exchanges, our own exchange, US Army and then there was another US Army and then there was own of ours down in Vung Tau and so forth. But we did write and that was fairly easy to

07:30 do because you could ... you know on a daily basis because you'd just you know every morning a Possum would come in with mail, usually military mail, but you could put an envelope for the IO in there with a letter in it you see and it would go back the same way to my intelligence sergeant, who was a lovely fellow, and he'd send it down with the Hospital Visiting Officer. In fact the envelope's there. They say via Six RAR HVO [Hospital Visiting Officer]

08:00 and Di sent it back the same way.

And how often were you able to see one another?

Oh a few times. I, I got a bit sick at one stage. You know I think it was more exhaustion than anything else so, that was during one of our last operations I went down for a few days and then at the finish I saw her a fair bit because I was backwards and forwards to Vung Tau when I was rear details officer

08:30 seeing that our equipment was getting down to there and that sort of thing and signing off on stores and so forth. Then when I came home ah Di came to Saigon and we had a few days up there together before I caught the plane home.

Did you go home before her?

Oh yeah, yeah I went home in May and she came home in June. So I came home, saw a few people and bought a car, drove to Adelaide, I think I put my car on the train

09:00 that's right, got it at Port Lincoln, drove to Adelaide and met Di's parents and her sister and her brother-in-law who were visiting from Melbourne.

This is before she'd come back?

Yeah.

Why did you come over to see her parents?

Because, because I was going to Sydney to pick her up and I wanted to pick up some clothes for her. I wanted to meet her parents too and they wanted to meet me. So I went through a couple of hours of interrogation by various people. And ah then went off and picked Di up and we then went back to ... By that stage

09:30 her parents had gone to Melbourne. It was Wimbeldon, Melbourne Spring Carnival time I think or something in Melbourne, I can't remember. And ah, ah on the way down we stayed at Canberra and went to a restaurant that subsequently became the Chinese Embassy and that's where I asked her to marry me. And then when I got down to ah Melbourne I spoke to her father.

10:00 **Before you left Vietnam there's just one other story that you did mention earlier on. You had a run in with a guy in Townsville and you said that it later came back to you in Vietnam that incident, the bloke you'd had a fight with in Townsville. Or the consequences of that or did you cover that?**

Yeah I think so what I was saying there was after our first operation when we'd established our credentials that clearly we knew what we were talking about

10:30 and were able to contribute to the battalion in a proper way that his attitude towards me became ... Although we did have another fight right at the finish. I wrote a draft chapter for the battalion book, the enemy part, and he made some substantial changes to it. You know as the editor I suppose he's allowed to but all I said was,"Don't put my name on the bottom of it and if you do I'll sue you."

11:00 Which is a stupid thing to say because my name did finish up on the bottom of it and I didn't sue him.

But I was a bit cranky about some of the things that he took out.

Why, was it edited ...?

I think politically yeah.

What did you say that was taken out?

Oh I think things like ... I've still got, I think I've got the original draft here still somewhere. Things like the impact on our operational ability to seek and close with the enemy when his,

11:30 his the enemy's support was being run by Americans in collusion with South Vietnamese officials and you know provincial chiefs. Now provincial chiefs weren't people elected by the people, they were army officers that, that the previous ... It's a bit like US ambassadors, they're mates of the President, you know they went to school together or in the same company or they own a football team together like the current one here does with Bush,

12:00 or was it a basketball team, I've forgotten. Um and the provincial chiefs were the same, they were Vietnamese army officers and you know they were bloody dreadful people. So you weren't going to get any mileage. What we needed in there ... I mean the books, the manuals will say that in that sort of war you should have civil affairs units operating alongside the civilian authorities

12:30 to do a number of things. One is to make sure that they are doing the right thing by their own people and secondly that you become a conduit for information to the operation arm so you know you could do your job better. And that wasn't possible. I tried to set up a set up like that and I called it ... I've forgotten the name. I don't know.

13:00 But it didn't work because there were too many corrupt people who were prepared to take money for anything and the Americans will ... I mean the fact that you're a liaison officer at a provincial post meant that you weren't one of the better officers in the United States Army. You know this was a pretty dead end job so the quality of officers there, the American officers, was pretty ordinary too I think. And I think it was those sorts of things that were taken out that ah I thought were

13:30 pretty fundamental to writing you know a backdrop to how difficult it was to fight a war and why we did things in certain ways I guess. But anyway it's history.

How had you changed from the person who stepped off the plane in [(UNCLEAR)] towards the end of your tour, your last operation?

Oh wearier and wiser I suppose. Um I knew more,

14:00 a lot about military operations, the meaning of life ...

At that stage did you believe it was winnable, in however you like to determine that?

Yeah I think if, if ah they had of done ... we won the war in Phuoc Tuy Province pretty well. There were enemy who were local people on the banks of the Songri only half a day's march from

14:30 the villages who were starving and eating bamboo shoots and things because we had closed them down. And if we had of continued I think in that vein we would have been able to say Phuoc Tuy Province is free of ah of enemy. But that wasn't the case up at the ... where the big people are, up in the top end where the Americans ... That was about the Vietnamese army and the American army taking on NVA in large numbers, a real you know head on

15:00 shooting war. And once the Americans decided that they were not going to be part of it any longer that was the end. I think if they had of stuck it out they would have won it too but what was the purpose?

At the end of your tour before you left what were the losses on your company?

On the battalion?

Mm.

Oh I think we had twenty-one killed. Something like that. I've got the books, they're in the books, they can tell you that.

How does that affect you,

15:30 **men under your command getting killed?**

Oh it's not good. I think ah ... You haven't got time to dwell on it at the time of course. It's years later when you know you have reunions and things ... Like the Vietnam Memorial Day which we went to in Canberra. I refused to go to the Welcome Home Parade because I reckon I would have thrown things at Bob Hawke, because he was there as the Prime Minister. Because I remember what he was

16:00 doing when we were in Vietnam. He was making life very difficult for us by union troubles ...

Can you give us an example of that in Vietnam and what you knew of the situation here in Australia?

Well the reason the Sixth Battalion flew home without its battalion stores was because HMAS Sydney could not be made operable because of union strikes created by the head of the ACTU [Australian Council of Trade Unions] who was a fellow called Hawke.

How were you finding out that

16:30 **information?**

Oh pretty easy, you read the newspapers.

Um, I'm not saying this is the case but I put it to you that you know you also could be subject to being media manipulated and you're vulnerable to it.

Oh no, no. I mean the military explanation that the unions of Garden Island had walked off the job because of something and that HMAS Sydney would not be available to bring home the stores so they all had to be brought home by ship. We

17:00 had resupply ships that were supposed to bring up goodies not turn up because the Maritime Unions decided that they weren't going to do it as a protest against the war. Now that's fine you know and I think they have a right to protest but not at the expense of the soldier at the front line.

How does it make you feel at the front line?

Ah ... I mean we were pretty pissed off about it and you read all about the moratoriums marching and so forth but we thought oh Jesus I mean let's get ... I mean we've got a job to do. I mean we'd like to have thought we were pretty professional

17:30 and we didn't let those things worry us too much. But when it came to the same circumstances many years later I was not ... I wasn't going to help appease Hawke's conscience, that's why I didn't march you know. I don't think I would have thrown anything but I ... So I went to the AFL [Australian Football league] Grand Final instead. Ah but ah years later we went to Canberra for the dedication of the

18:00 Vietnam Memorial and it's then when you see ah you know your battalion marchers, I don't know we had three hundred and there's a flag for every fellow that was killed and you know who they were, then you start to think about them. I think it's those sorts of circumstances. Ah you know the memorial services and so forth. And unfortunately we only really ah worried about the dead

18:30 and out there there's the sick and the maimed and the insane and we write them off the books – unless you happen to walk into or run into them. I mean a regimental ... Ah there's no regimental headquarters for the Royal Australian Regiment but if there was there'd be a network of people to go and look after old soldiers who get into trouble. I mean I know a lot of them have gone downhill – drunks and that sort of thing. I mean they were private soldiers and what have you.

19:00 Or particularly the senior NCO's who all their life were used to having somebody tell them what to do during the day and at night they'd get pissed, every night in the sergeants mess. And some of them are in real bad shape. You know not only do they still drink but they don't have any aim or purpose in life. But you say well," Christ what am I going to do, become a welfare centre?" I mean there is a DVA [Department of Veteran's Affairs] and so forth and Veterans Affairs and you know. But um

19:30 yeah we're not, we, that's not encouraged I think ... like it is in the British Army.

Was there a difference between regular soldiers and National Servicemen in terms of how ... in your experience at the end of the tour how the Nashos were dealing with things?

I couldn't tell the difference. Perhaps the only difference would be is that a lot of National Servicemen only did a brief tour, some regular soldiers may have done two or three tours, full tours. So there was

20:00 that difference. Ah I mean there was National Servicemen going home every three months.

On the ... back to when you said it was your worst day in Vietnam in that mine incident. Were there National Servicemen involved in that as well ...?

Oh yeah Three Platoon yeah, yeah.

Does it affect the regulars if the Nashos got in harms way or are people just the same?

Oh no. I couldn't see any differentiation between the two. I mean when it all started I felt there probably was about Nashos and you know there were crude jokes and things but

20:30 by the time we'd done all our training together and went off to war together you know ... A lot of the National Servicemen were far better soldiers than a lot of the regular soldiers so to speak because they were more educated and better ... you know more intelligent, um because they'd been dragged out of things that they'd done. Um we were doing ... You know some of the regular soldiers had been drop outs and joined the army because there was nothing else to do.

21:00 **Do you think National Servicemen should have been in Vietnam?**

Ah well it's a difficult question because as I said earlier my understanding is that National Service was

introduced because of our commitment to Borneo some years earlier and having got a National Service scheme and a desire to go to Vietnam we were able to send more people than perhaps we would have been able to without National Service. Perhaps

21:30 we wouldn't have gone at all. Um but ah it was interesting I used to ask the cadets at Scheyville, I used to give them in their second term a lecture about counter revolutionary war or something before we got into field training and I used to ask them a few questions and one of them was ah who believes that we should have a system of National Service? And if there

22:00 were thirty students in the class twenty-five of them would put their hands up and say yeah I think it's a fair idea. How many with your hands up agree with the current system? And most of them would put their hands down. And that is the barrel, you know the marble in the barrel thing you see and they reckoned that was a miserable way of doing things. There should have been some other criteria ... Like in the original National Service everybody did it, in most countries everybody does it. If you've got a system everybody does it not just you know somebody's name that comes out of

22:30 a barrel. It was interesting. I'm not sure in terms of the memory of the Vietnam War and its impact on Australian society overall we would have been far better off not having National Service because like in America if we had of sent the same sort of army we sent to Korea where people hardly remembered we actually had soldiers there, and we lost more men in Korea than we did in Vietnam. Ah but they were all

23:00 regular soldiers or dead beats and they emptied the gaols out and said,"You've got a bit of record would you like to go and kill Chinese, here's a weapon." Now if we had of stuck to that lower educated, less intellectual component of our society, so to speak, in Vietnam the hysterical controversy about us being there would have been a lot less.

23:30 I suspect and um ... But because you know National Service meant middle Australia with educated people and people who'd done there university degrees were suddenly hauled off and put into uniform and sent to Vietnam I think that created division, helped to create the division in our society. So yeah it's an interesting but it's hypothetical so it doesn't really matter.

Were you in any way superstitious

24:00 **on your last operation there?**

No, ah it was a bugger of an operation. We just went from one little fire support to another chasing people that weren't there but which other people said were there. And we lost a few people on mines and yeah it was bloody dreadful. I think by that stage we'd had enough, enough of this bloody mopping around business. Get somebody ... It's somebody else's turn

24:30 we thought – we'd done our bit.

How were you feeling more generally about the war in Vietnam at that stage? Whether Australia should be there or not?

Oh I don't think I had a view on that until I was sensibly informed, ah through reading various things many years later, ah as to how we really got there and why.

25:00 But I am suspicious of the political motive of engaging in great adventures. Ah Margaret Thatcher [British Prime Minister] did it in the Falklands. Little Johnny W Howard from Kirribilli [Australian Prime Minister] has done it in Iraq. It doesn't really solve anybody's problems. And this nonsense about you know defeating terrorism by belting the hell out of an

25:30 Arab nation these are so absurd. Anyway that's another issue.

I happen to agree with you. We'll have to wipe that off the tape.

That homecoming, can you take us through the departure and the arrival as you remember it?

Well I'd had a couple of very happy days with Di in Saigon and I remember going to the airport and ah

26:00 Darrel Howe, he's the fellow I've been talking about on and off, ah who was in New Guinea with me, I borrowed a pistol from him, from the training team, I handed his pistol back and said good luck or something and waved goodbye to Di and got an aeroplane with two other people from the battalion – one of the CQ messes. He was a lovely fellow called Billy McCutcheon who had fought in World War II, Korea, Malaya and Vietnam twice, and now he's unfortunately dead from cancer, ah and he was a lovely

26:30 bloke. Had a young officer who'd won a Military Cross called Rodney ... who was from here, from Adelaide, from Glenelg. So the, I remember the trip, we had a bit to drink and then slept a hell of a lot.

Did you write any graffiti on your tent wall before you left or anything like that?

Oh no, no, no, oh Christ no.

Did you go around and say goodbye to all your platoon commanders and ...?

Well they'd all gone, for me. You see, I stayed on for another month after everybody had left.

27:00 Ah, so I was sick of going backwards and forwards down to Ton San Nhut, not Ton San Nhut, Luskot Fields, the Nui Dat Field, you know saying goodbye to people who were leaving. Ah and then there was just the three of us and we stayed on for another week or so I think – I can't remember. And I spent a fair bit of time trucking forwards and backwards and forwards to Vung Tau you know because there were helicopters going backwards and forwards ...

And that's where Di ...

And that's where Di was. And letting young

27:30 Chandler do most of the work. I mean he was the assistant adjutant and that's what his job was you know to see that all our files and things because of this problem of having to send them home by merchant ship – had to be put in the sea containers and things. And then ah ... Yeah ... I mean were a lot other soldiers on the aircraft, it was a charter aircraft, because there was a huge cheer when we hit Sydney airport. But Billy McCutcheon's parents

28:00 or family were there and they were lovely people so we all went off and had a few beers together at the airport.

Who else was there to meet you?

Nobody. Not for us, not for myself or Rodney because we weren't from Sydney. So Rodney you know had a few beers with Billy and his family and the we jumped in a cab and went to some hotel in The Cross [Kings Cross].

Were there any press there to meet you or ...?

No. I don't recall any.

Did you have much to do with the press while you were in Vietnam?

Yeah a little bit. I nearly shot one of them.

28:30 I remember saying,"If you don't get out of this battalion's area of operation you're going to get shot fellow" – and I won't be telling you who it is. He was such a poisonous shit. I've forgotten what his name was.

Can you just briefly tell ...?

Oh well he used to tell lies. You know he'd go and report on things and say you know we're doing this, we're doing something else. And they were blatant lies. I've forgotten what paper he worked for, The Courier Mail I think – something like that, I've forgotten. I didn't have a lot to do with him. Ah

29:00 the CO was very cranky. No there was a bloke up there who I'd been to school with, or when I say went to school I'd knocked him over in the footy field a couple of times, he was from St Louis. Um, um and he was the bloke that rang me up at Nui Dat from Saigon after this mortar attack on New Year's Eve and I gave him the story and he printed it in the West Australian. I actually went into the library here the other day and got a copy of it – ah well not the other day, a few

29:30 months ago, to remind myself of how appalling the, the report was.

That's when that general ...

No, no, no on New Year's Eve when we'd fired a few salvos off and the enemy had mortared us from that day – he'd heard about that so he'd rung me up at the officers mess the next day. And um I gave him you know a pretty good story but he got it all half cocked and said things that were quite ridiculous in it. But you know

30:00 Austthat's what the media did – half right was good enough for most of those people. I mean he was a nice bloke. He became a cricket reporter for the, for the Australian years later and went off on a couple of tours. Don't know where he is now. Um but other than that we had our own PR [public relations] people bring people out all the time and there was always bloody visitors.

How strange is it going from that combat zone to downtown Sydney in one, one ...?

Well

30:30 it really was we just booked in and slept and got up at four o'clock in the morning and went out to the airport and so it was ...

Still you're out of it, you're back in Australia. How ...?

Oh well we didn't think anything about it then, we were just too tired and so forth. I mean then I flew home to Perth then that's when the party started. Um yeah and then you now Dad was there and my sisters and sister's husbands at that stage I think yeah and we had a few parties and ...

31:00 **We've only got a short time left. I'd like to cover the PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder], your PTSD experience. I mean we did talk about it at the beginning briefly but um would you care to sort of explain in your own words ...? How did it come upon you ...?**

Well it started to appear I think when I was starting to get a bit tired, you know late fifties

31:30 weary about working so bloody hard that I had done so for so many years in a job that was becoming less satisfactory everyday here with the South Australian Government. It was about the time of the Olympic Games and I was doing a lot of work with the security training for counter terrorist training, in terms of having to write and umpire exercises. And all of them of course had Police Assault Groups, the SAS Tactical Assault Group

32:00 and there was lots of shooting and carrying on and that sort of thing. That was starting to worry me a bit and I wasn't quite sure what it was.

Were there any particular things that would trigger you, remind you of your experience there?

Oh yeah fellows, you know, shooting and explosives and things like that. And then ah, ah I started to get some bloody serious nightmares. I used to wake up yelling and screaming.

Where were you going back to in those nightmares?

32:30 Oh Christ knows. Somewhere in Vietnam, somewhere involving Orientals dressed in black so I guess it was Vietnam. Um oh yeah and the mind things and that sort of business. And ah why the hell didn't I pick up Four Platoon and charge after D445 – we might have saved some of our soldiers that got killed three weeks later by the same group. Ah

33:00 and work was becoming ... And I was getting very difficult to live with.

Were these things following you into waking hours, the nightmares?

Ah no but the side effects were – you know I was grumpy and cranky and so difficult to live with. So I went off to see the Vietnam Counselling Service people, you know I took that decision. But that didn't help much.

Is that a difficult decision to take to ...?

Well it was if Di said she was going to leave me,

33:30 so well ... She didn't say that but I think she was inferring it – things had to be sorted out. So I did that and that helped a bit but not a lot. And then I had this ... a couple of incidents at work that really pushed me over the edge and that's when I went and saw a shrink. And then ah they gave me sick leave and I haven't looked back since.

Were you reacting violently to people at work or was it more just ...?

Oh in a, in a, not in physical sense

34:00 although I was getting close to the stage where the head of the department was set in my sights because he was such a useless bastard.

But you were obviously self aware enough to know that ...

Oh it's self discipline yeah.

You also knew something else was happening that ...

Oh yeah, yeah I, yeah absolutely, absolutely. And then so ... I mean it really ... the final blow came when I was actually driving between Whyalla and ah Cleave, I think we were at Cowl, no

34:30 we were at Cleave. We were driving to Cowl, sorry, from Cleave. And ah this all happened over telephones and things, the final straw as far as I was concerned, and ah I actually rang my GP from there to make an appointment for the next day when I got back from Whyalla, myself and my colleague. He gave me a couple of weeks and then I went ... I had already organised to see a shrink, that was coincidental. So I went and saw him and he gave me three months and then six months and in the finish

35:00 I just was decided I'd take all the leave that was owing to me which was eleven and a half months sick leave. So basically I had a year off. And then ah I resigned and ah you know things have been pretty right since. I think having taken all the stress off, the depressions all gone as of about I think December, you know my shrink [psychiatrist] who's a Kiwi um said. And ah I still have

35:30 the occasional thing. I mean it was interesting the first night we were in Canberra for this reunion, and we'd been out ... or we'd been down and a had a few beers and a nice dinner and you know we were all a little bit stitched, and then at about two o'clock in the morning I woke up yelling and shouting and screaming, which is interesting. I mean I'd made contact with some people who obviously reminded me of something, um but that's the only night it happened, it was right after that. And I really ... I mean I was falling out of bed

36:00 and doing all sort of bloody things. But that's all ... You know drugs helped restore the, the balance of the chemicals that you need to ... And um I've got plenty to do which occupies so you know things are going all right. But they weren't for a while, and I wouldn't work again.

Did you talk about your experiences in Vietnam with your children?

No not really, no. I mean the girls were

36:30 with us when ... I mean for many years I was still in the army and they don't really want to know about armies and things and yeah, no Vietnam's just another ... it happened, Daddy went to war, mm. They have trouble remembering who I was with. Sarah actually went ... She actually went when she was doing researching at the War Memorial in Canberra, went into their

37:00 film archives, I've got the video here somewhere, of both myself and Di in Vietnam at various things.

There is archival footage of you and Di in Vietnam?

Yeah, yeah, yeah and she brought it home.

Oh that's great.

She said I don't know whether you want to see this. I said oh yeah what is it? Because at this stage I was having my troubles. Ah but there was one, I was the, I was the um ADC [Aide De Camp] to John Gorton when he was Prime Minister when, when he gave

37:30 the Presidential Unit Citation to D Company for the Long Tan – which I means that I stood on the parade ground and read it out, but I also looked after him you know for the celebrations. There's that and then there's some pictures of me in Vietnam pointing at the map or something briefing, I think he was a Commanding General of Two Field Force Victor. And then some of Di sending Christmas, Christmas messages home or something. Yeah.

You've already touched on this a few times and it's a

38:00 **general question and we've only got a short time left and I don't know whether you'd like to comment but war generally and I guess Australia's and what happened in Vietnam, how do you feel looking back on it now and how perhaps that ...**

Yeah I think, I think they're stupid things. Um it's not so much what happened there to us, and the action and the fights and so forth, it's what you see happen to people subsequent to the war – the denigration

38:30 of human spirit that can occur. What we did to the Vietnamese people, you know we shouldn't leave that out of the equation. And I just think it's done to resolve ... in the twenty-first century or whatever century we're in, to go about using gunboat diplomacy to resolve differences with the communications and so forth that we've got today. And I'm very cynical about the politicians who are now using

39:00 defence forces as a means to bolster their own political position in whatever way. I mean America's classic – the opportunity arose, ah just like it arose for Howard with the Tampa [ship carrying illegal immigrants] and children overboard lies and so forth, all because it was reported to a cocktail party. Oh God. Anyway, no I just think wars are dumb.

39:30 It was interesting Di and I went on our reunion, one of the things we did was did a tour of the War Memorial and Steve Gower who is a friend of ours and runs it had some escorts for our group, um and Di and I chose not to, we went independently but finished up with our group at this display they've got with the Lancaster Bomber, which has now been restored. But they've got this dreadful film, flashing lights

40:00 of raids over Germany, and Di couldn't handle it. I walked out and then Di came out in tears because all of those things falling out of those aeroplanes were killing people – ah in those cases they were bloody civilians.

And they'd made it into an amusement park.

And they made it an amusement park. I haven't spoken to Steve but I will write to him and due course and say look I think it's a dreadful thing. Um it really is an amusement park and we didn't like it.

We've got very little time left. Um a couple of

40:30 **questions. How do you feel about the future, optimistic or ...?**

What ...?

Australia and the way perhaps the current [Iraq] involvement and the way things ...?

I think we're going to have to be very careful about the strategic direction that Australia goes, in a political sense. And I think there's a good light on the horizon with Latham [Opposition Leader] in the Labor Party that may be able to redirect Australia away from this confrontational ah sort

41:00 of neo-conservative approach to problem solving that the Liberal Party seems to be hell bent on doing. And solving differences with countries which is more about getting oil reserves for the United States than it is about anything else. I mean Saddam's an evil bloke but I mean why didn't they knock off many other people around the world like Idi Amin and so forth and they didn't bother. I haven't got any tea leaves to look at about the future but

41:30 ah yeah I think Australia’s looking all right. I just wish we’d sell the defence force.

INTERVIEW ENDS