

Australians at War Film Archive

William Rodgers (Bill) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:37 **Doctor Rodgers, can you give us an overview of your life, thus far?**

Well, it's been long and happy. And I hope it will continue to be longer. I was born on the 1st December, 1936 in Naracoorte, South Australia. I was the first

01:00 son, or the first born of my father, who was also Bill, and mother Elvie. He was a policeman, a mounted constable who used to look after those small towns in the south-east of South Australia. My Dad was a military man, and had come from England

01:30 and, at age seventeen, went to the British Army of India where he was with the Royal Horse Artillery. He was in fact a signaller. Sometime during his service, in the late 1920s, he was offered a commission in the Australian Army. I presume in the signals corps. And

02:00 he travelled to Australia with a friend of his who was in like straits. He had also been offered a commission. When they got to Australia, it was the beginning of the Great Depression. And of course they didn't want lieutenants in the Australian Army. What they needed was policemen throughout Australia. So Dad was a horse lover

02:30 and the only available horse policing, so to speak, was the mounted constabulary from South Australia. So Dad joined the South Australian police. His friend went to the Northern Territory, which was then part of South Australia. And my Dad went to the Southern Territory, which was south east of South Australia. He met my mother, and I was born shortly after.

03:02 I have remembrances of all those little towns in South Australia. Kalangadoo, Coonawarra, Mount Gambier and a place called Wolseley which was the transshipment point during World War II.

03:30 I, in fact, went to school, my first day of school was at Wolseley. Aged five years. I may have been a little bit younger than five years, actually, when I started school. And I went to a series of schools because my father shifted every few years as a mounted constable. The mounted constabulary in South Australia

04:00 did all the country police work. So there was the traffic police, the metropolitan police and the mounted police. And the mounted actually did all the country police work. Dad actually did a lot of his work on horseback. He certainly attended all the shows. The Great Eastern Steeple Chase at Dompakaringa . I can remember my father leading the horse constabulary,

04:30 who used to do all the traffic work and make sure the crowds were looked after. Dad had his own horse wherever he went. The horses that he chose, usually a mare, he liked mares. He said they were much easier to handle than the male horses.

05:00 I can remember my father was a very, very good horseman. He did the same jump as Adam Lindsay Gordon, the poet, did on the Blue Lake at Mount Gambier. If you don't know what that is, the Blue Lake is a punched out hole in the mountain. It's got cliffs, two or three hundred feet, almost sheer, right the way around, the Blue Lake.

05:30 And there is a road going for half the perimeter of the Blue Lake. That road has a fence on it, and there is about six to eight feet the other side of the fence before the sheer drop. Adam Lindsay Gordon ran his horse down the road, jumped the fence, ran his horse along the six or eight feet, then jumped back. My father was a good horseman and he said he could do

06:00 what any damn poet could do. So he did it as well. Rather foolhardily. Before he was married, obviously. My mother would have never let him do it. Such is Dad. Dad was a fair bit older than Mum. He was an expatriate policeman, but he loved Australia. His only

06:30 connection with England was the British cricket team. And he never, ever barracked for Australia, always barracked for England. Apart from that he was an Australian. You wouldn't tell his accent or anything. My life then progressed. As I say, at Wolseley I went to school. Our next posting was to

Summertown in the Adelaide Hills. Right next to Mount Lofty in Adelaide. I went to

- 07:00 finish my primary school there. I then had to go to high school. There was no high school in the area. Dad wanted me to go to a good school because he wanted me to be a lawyer. A lawyer was the end-all, be-all. Having three other children, at that stage, on a lowly policeman's wage, he couldn't afford to send me to a private school. So he sent me to the Adelaide Boys' High School
- 07:30 which had this reputation, of any of the state schools. I went to Adelaide Boys' High School and found it quite horrible. I'd come from the country with small school classes and a lot of attention from my teachers to a massive school with literally fifty or sixty students in each class with no individual attention. And I was woeful in my
- 08:00 first two years of high school. Luckily my father was posted then from Summertown to Mannum, which is on the river about fifty miles from Adelaide. Mannum didn't have a high school either. Mannum was served by a little high school called Birdwood. And Birdwood was an area school that served all the towns in that general area.
- 08:30 I travelled about fifty to sixty kilometres every day to school and back in a bus, in a school bus. In fact, I started to do exceptionally well, for me, at Birdwood High School. There was only one person in my Latin class and that was me. And I had a teacher, so that teacher taught me and I topped Latin in South Australia.
- 09:02 I had five people in my physics class, and I topped physics in South Australia. I had six people in my chemistry class and I topped chemistry in South Australia. So I had a very good schooling in a very small school, and was very fortunate. That gave me a scholarship. I got a Commonwealth scholarship and a State scholarship and, in fact, I won the
- 09:30 Angus Engineering Scholarship, but my father didn't want me to be an engineer. So I had to give up a very lucrative scholarship. I went into medicine. In the interim, my father being a military man, and not having a lot of money, suggested that perhaps I could go into the navy. I was
- 10:01 very interested at about age fourteen, I think it was, in becoming a midshipman in the navy. Being a naval cadet and a midshipman. That attracted me a lot. I'd always had notions of a military, that is orderly military, navy, not air force, but military. However, unfortunately,
- 10:30 I had a hernia. A little hernia on my tummy. And it had never affected me, but the doctor found it. I didn't even know it was there. The doctor said, "I'm sorry, you can't go in as a midshipman." So I went to my own doctor, who happened to be a relative, and he said, "There's no hernia there." So I didn't do anything about it. And shortly afterwards, I was interested in an army career, also.
- 11:05 And I actually applied for the Royal Military College at Duntroon to become an officer in training. And they also said, "Sorry, you've got a hernia." So, I again went back to my mother's cousin, and he said, "Well, if it is there,
- 11:30 I can't find it." So again, I didn't worry about. Having been rejected, then, from the navy and army, I then told that I didn't want to be a lawyer after all. I would much rather become a doctor. He said he couldn't afford to put me through me through medicine. I said, "Well, I will work as hard as I can through the holidays." You got three or four months holidays at the end of each academic year. That is from
- 12:00 the end of November up into March. So my scholarship paid for all my books and my microscope and instruments. My Dad clothed me. And my scholarship gave me a little bit of money towards my board and things, and Dad made that up. So I trooped off to medical school. I was very young. Dad couldn't afford to put me through
- 12:32 five years of high school. So I only did four. I actually signed up for university when I was fifteen. I think I was sixteen when I first attended. I was born on the 1st of December. I think I'm still the youngest ever to graduate in Australia in medicine. After six years of medicine, I was still under the age
- 13:00 that I was allowed to be registered as a doctor. But it wasn't long, being the 1st of December. I graduated in November, and I only had to wait until the 1st of December before I became of age to practise. Anyway, I then commenced my medical school. Now, the first three years, I found it quite good. I was very young, therefore
- 13:30 I didn't enjoy the university life at all. I was a little inky-fingered swot. I was a country boy. I went home to Dad and Mum in the country every weekend. My grandmother bought me a big motorbike. A very fast motorbike. I had a series of girlfriends at that age, that I used to squire on the back of a motorbike.
- 14:03 I travelled to and from university on my motorbike. And I used that motorbike pretty well all the way through my medical course. I went quite well. I passed every year. I never had a supplementary
- 14:32 and I was fairly well up in the class. Come the end of third year... Up to third year is the pre-clinical years. Meaning we cut up bodies in the medical school and we learnt physiology, and we learnt zoology and botany. And they were all the pre-clinical... By that, we weren't allowed to look at a live patient.

- 15:03 I passed third year, so then in the fourth year we were then let loose on live patients. But the trouble was where I had four months to earn money at the end of first year, at the end of second year, I didn't have time enough to earn money at the end of third year because I had to go back to the medical school on the 2nd of January or something. I had
- 15:30 three or four weeks, but I didn't have enough to put myself through as I had done in the previous years. With what Dad gave me and the scholarship I was able to get by, and what I made myself, which was quite significant. I would say that I worked in almost every job you can imagine in that time. I trapped rats. Water rats. Musk rats, which were in favour then for skins.
- 16:01 When the basic wage was three pound a week, I was getting twenty-five pounds each for a rat skin. I was a chain man to a surveyor. When the chain man got sick, I got took over as surveyor. I surveyed some of the Mannum-Adelaide pipeline, which was a very large pipeline that supplies Adelaide with water. When
- 16:30 we had a whole lot of immigrants to Australia, we called them New Australians, who ate garlic, and which was quite foreign to Australians. I used to be down the bottom of the big pits with them, four or five metres down a pit, with somebody sweating garlic. You can imagine what that was like to a fresh, young Australian country boy. This foreign smell of garlic. But I did that for one holiday.
- 17:01 I was a rabbit truck man, who collected rabbits from all the farmers in the whole area and drove them to Adelaide. I can remember my mother telling me what a horrible job it was. The rabbits were obviously dead, and you'd put their legs through each other. You would then put the pair, as we called them, across saplings across the back of the truck.
- 17:30 And I used to have hundreds and hundreds pairs of rabbits. I would put them from the fence, where the pair was slung over, the farmer's fence, on both arms, then put them on the racks on the trucks. And of course, in doing so, all the fleas from the rabbits would come off the rabbits on to me. They were called stick-fast fleas. So my mother had the awful job of picking the fleas from the back of my neck every night.
- 18:00 as I came back from my rabbit carrying escapade. But that was a good job. It paid well. But what paid better was the farmer's always had a sheepskin over the fence. They killed their own meat and they had a sheepskin over the fence. I became fairly knowledgeable about skins after the water rats episode.
- 18:30 And I could class wool fairly well. I did that at one time as well. So I used to offer the farmer what I thought was a very reasonable price. Then I used to get about three times that price from the skin dealers. So I earned more money from my side business than I did from my rabbit carrying. That was very lucrative. All these jobs enabled me
- 19:00 to put myself through the first three years. That was the big turning point of my life. After successfully passing the third year of medicine, I didn't know what to do. I couldn't earn enough. It was looking like... Dad had other children that needed a lot of his money. So it looked like I would have to go out and work for a year to get enough to come back again. That was hateful,
- 19:30 because I had all my friends there. Anyway, as it happened, in my life, somebody has been looking after me. For the first time ever in Australia, the army developed what's called an undergraduate scheme. They couldn't get any doctors in the army. So what they did was they offered young
- 20:02 successful medical students a year for a year plus a year. That means that they would pay you a wage for your fourth, fifth, sixth year. And a year would give them back a year of military duty, plus a year. So I would give them four years back if they took me on. To cut a long story short,
- 20:30 I was then... I had a girlfriend and I was going to marry her. I can remember General Refshauge , big, tall, beautiful man, coming to South Australia to interview me,
- 21:01 but they weren't that interested in me. They were more interested in my girlfriend. They came and interviewed her. She wasn't a fiancée then, she was only a girlfriend, but they must have sensed that she was to play a part in my life because they said they would like to talk to her. This little girl, this young girl, she was sixteen, she was brought in and interviewed.
- 21:33 She thought they were lovely people. She didn't mind at all. Anyway, they then selected me. I might say, later on, two years later when I was about to get married, they said "You can't get married without military permission." So in fact the general came over again and interviewed her, to see if she was a right and proper person for me to marry, and they allowed me to marry. And I would have been the last of the military.....
- 22:01 In the old days, the Australian lieutenants were never allowed to marry unless the corps let them marry. I was one of the last of the group, probably the last I've heard of, that had to ask for permission to marry and who had to have my wife-to-be interviewed. Anyway, to go back. I was interviewed at the end of my third year,
- 22:30 after successfully passing, I was interviewed. The army came to my aid. They said that, "We will pay you..." I think it was about five pounds a week. It was about the same as the basic wage in those days. I

think it was about five pounds a year, in that year. That was 1956.

- 23:03 January the 1st, 1956, I think that was the day I signed up. As a lieutenant, medical student, in the Australian Army. Previous to that, my only real service experience was as a cadet. At the Adelaide Boys' High School I was in the cadets. So I then,
- 23:31 went back for the fourth, fifth and sixth year. I got married at the end of my sixth year. I successfully passed each year. I got several prizes on the way through. I topped obstetrics and gynaecology in my final examination. Which was a great joke to everybody, because I was only young. My mate,
- 24:00 Rod Carter, who stayed on in the army, also, Rod got the prize for athmonology [?], I remember, and he was as ribbed just as much. Now during that fourth, fifth and sixth year, my contact with the army was only ever at the end of the year, and the army expected me to go along
- 24:30 to the School of Army Health, which was located in Healesville in Victoria. And to learn all about the army, learn how to be soldier, and how to salute and how to behave properly as an officer, and what the army was all about. How the army was structured and what was expected of one. They were very good courses run by the army. Being young fellows
- 25:00 we were quite mischievous, and we were the bane of the commanding officer. The commanding officer, in my time, was a legendary figure by the name of Wally McClellan. And Wally had been a bit of a boy in his young days so we couldn't put anything over him that he didn't know. We thought we did. There were dining-in nights where we taught how to dine properly. How to formally dine.
- 25:31 How not to leave the dining table during dining hour when speeches should be made. And we learned the niceties of the army, the courtesies of the army. Which, in those days, was very, very rigid. I liked that. It was a very structured life. I did well in all my
- 26:01 examinations that I had there. We were examined. I can't remember how well, but I know that I did well. I liked the life, I liked the uniform, I liked the structure and I liked the discipline. I graduated in November, 1958
- 26:32 having done six years. I then did my intern year at the Royal Adelaide Hospital. We only had two hospitals in South Australia. One was the Royal Adelaide, and one was down at Port Adelaide.
- 27:00 I was lucky then that I was selected for the Adelaide. You had a choice. It was a matter of how high up you graduated, what you were selected to be. So I more or less had my choice. And I had a very happy year based there. We weren't called interns in those days. That's an Americanism. But we were residents,
- 27:30 resident doctors in our first year. I might say that because I was importuneous, I had to go to work between the time I graduated and the time I started at the hospital. So in those three or four weeks... I think you started at the hospital in February, remembering that I wasn't allowed to
- 28:00 practise until I reached twenty-one. So I had a month or two that I was allowed to practise. So I went out and earned money. You can imagine having six years as a medical student and suddenly I became a doctor. And suddenly I went out to earn money, because I bought a car, I did all the right things.
- 28:30 Although I had money with the military, it was important that I had enough to put away something. Anyway, my first patient, this was at a place called One Tree Hill, just north of Adelaide. I think it was called One Tree Hill because there was only one tree left on that hill. But he was a big Irishman. A big, strong red-faced Irishman.
- 29:02 And he looked at me and he said, "You're not my doctor." I said, "No, I'm doing a local for Doctor Blogs." I said, "What can I do for you Mister Murphy?" Or whatever his name is. He said, "I've got a toothache. Would you pull my tooth out?" During those days we did dentistry when we did medicine. So I thought I was pretty good at pulling teeth out. We didn't learn to fill teeth, but how to pull teeth.
- 29:31 And so I said, "Okay, Mister Murphy. Just hang on and I will give you a little needle to deaden the pain." He said, "Don't want no needle." And I looked at him and he looked at me, and he said, "No needle for me." I said, "Mister Murphy, that's a big double tooth at the back. It will hurt." He said, "Never had no needles before. Don't want no needles."
- 30:01 So I put the forceps on, and you rock the forceps back, you push down, you fit the forceps over the teeth and you push down, then you rock until you feel a crack. And that crack is the tooth letting go from the bone. And once you've got that, you gradually then wiggle the tooth out, because the gum actually sticks to the tooth a little bit.
- 30:30 And you wiggle it out. Let me tell you, as I leant on Mister Murphy, and as you can imagine Mister Murphy's tooth was an absolute whopper, and as I leant with all my strength I felt the first crack, then I felt the second crack, then I felt the third crack, because it was a three root tooth. And Mister Murphy, I was watching his eyes as I did it, he did not
- 31:00 bat an eyelid. He did not show any signs of pain or anything and I nearly fainted. I got his tooth out and Mister Murphy said, "Thanks very much, Doc." And that was my first patient. From then on I went to a

practice, a very sad practice. The doctor was a chap named Alan Cherry. And Alan

- 31:32 had been killed tending a patient on the road, by the roadside. A casualty, and he had been doing it, and another car came around the road and killed him. His brother was the head of the practice. His name was David Cherry. And I went in to take over that practice to take over from a very well loved doctor in that area. It was Port Adelaide, one of the rougher areas. And I thought the patients were marvellous.
- 32:00 They pressed their money as soon as I saw them, which is unlike anywhere I've ever been. But they were nice people. Good honest people. I had about three weeks of that. Up until then, I knew everything. That showed me that I really didn't know much at all. Anyway, I finished that practice a very much chastened and wiser young fellow.
- 32:33 Then I went back and did my internship. Now I only did one year's internship at the Royal Adelaide. The army wanted its pound of flesh. I would have liked to have done two years, so that is one of the things in my life that I regret a little. That I didn't do two years internship. I didn't have time. I enjoyed my internship.
- 33:00 I used to line up at three o' clock in the morning to do operations, in the hope that somebody would let me do an operation. But I didn't have the chance to do the second year. Now had I done the second year, I could have, well, perhaps, not stayed in the army as I subsequently did. But I could have gone out and I would have realised
- 33:30 a different sort of potential to what I did. I loved medicine. But I loved the army. So the two professions sort of fought each other. The army won. But had I had done two years of internship it may not have been the army that won. Now, I'll refer back to that later, but
- 34:00 that was so much for my medical school. I then went and joined the army. I had a marvellous career. First of all I went to the Recruit Training Battalion, which I'll speak of later in more detail. That was the best thing that I did in the army, because I was a young captain, a first year captain. As soon as I
- 34:30 graduated, I graduated from being a lieutenant. So during my intern years I was paid as a captain. So it was my second year that I went out into the army, for the first time, really, in a job. But at Kapooka there was a whole lot of young lieutenants from every different area of the army. From the infantry, who are really the army. The artillery, the tank corps,
- 35:00 they're the arms, and from all the services as well. From the transport operators, from the dentists, from the padres, etc. There were young lieutenants from Kapooka from all of those different corps. And I learnt from every one of them. Had I gone anywhere else... If I had gone to an infantry battalion, they're all infantrymen, so you learn all about the infantry, but you don't learn about
- 35:30 the rest of the army. I spent time with the service corps people. I spent time with the infantrymen, with the tankers, with the artillery people. I learnt their jargon and I learnt more about the army from those young lieutenants than I did anywhere else. So I had a couple of years there. Then I went to war in Malaya. I had two-odd years
- 36:00 in Malaya. As part of that Malayan war experience, Mr Menzies, who was our Prime Minister at the time, realised that we could be going to Vietnam. So I was sent to do a medical intelligence survey of Vietnam whilst I was already in Malaya. After two years in Malaya, I came back to Australia. I had then
- 36:30 been in the army three and a bit years. They said, "Would you like to sign on?" Because I only had four years of my four years bond left. "Would you like to sign on?" I said, "I don't know." They said, "What would you really like to do?" I said, "I loved tropical medicine in Malaya." I really enjoyed...and I also became quite experienced as you could imagine.
- 37:01 I said, "I would like to do a tropical medicine degree." They said, "You would have to go to England." I said, "So?" So they sent me to England. Tropical Medicine School, and I did a tropical medicine degree. That's my first speciality. I topped that actually, I won't be modest. I topped all elements of that. From
- 37:31 etymology to pathology. The whole lot. I did very well in England. I was soaking it up. I'd had four years without study and now I was much more mature than I was when I was a little boy, and I realised my responsibilities. So having done that I came back to Australia. It was in 1965 that I got back.
- 38:00 I was put as the number three down from the general. The deputy assistant director general, in Melbourne. Albert Park Barracks. I was a major. I had to teach young doctors coming in. I was very experienced. I had been to war and all this. So I was teaching tropical medicine to the young fellows coming in, when somebody...
- 38:30 I was up at Healesville teaching these young doctors. They'd just got out of medical school. I was teaching them when somebody said, "You've been promoted lieutenant colonel." I was then aged twenty-eight. "You've been promoted lieutenant colonel. And you're now commanding officer of
- 39:00 Two Field Ambulance and you're going to Vietnam. And you can select any of these doctors to take with you that you want." So I knew which were the good ones and which weren't. So I selected all the good ones to go with me...

Tape 2

- 00:41 As I said, I chose my doctors for Vietnam. I eventually, on the 19th of April, left for Vietnam. Had more than a year in Vietnam, that was my second
- 01:02 tour to Vietnam. I didn't mention that whilst I was in Malaya, I had a tour in Vietnam to do medical intelligence, in case the Australians went in. As they subsequently did. That was a most interesting tour. I then got back
- 01:32 the year later, that's in 1967. When I came back, I went to the military hospital in Brisbane for a period of two or three years. As a Commanding Officer. I then went back to Vietnam again at the end of the 1969/70.
- 02:02 I came back the third time, I went as simply the chief doctor. I was chief doctor every time I went, but my third tour had very much less to do, and it was a much more mature force, in my opinion. Over-served, so
- 02:30 I had less to do on my third tour than any other tours. So having come back from Vietnam, and spent three tours in Vietnam, the grateful army said to me, "We owe you." I said, "You do." They said, "What would you like to do?" I said, "I would really like to become a physician specialist." Remember that I had been a tropical medicine specialist, and I really
- 03:00 would have liked, at that stage, as I said, to be a specialist in internal medicine. And that would put my tropical medicine into better perspective. The army was very, very good. They gave me my choice of where to go. Of course, I went back to my alma mater in South Australia. They gave me my choice of who I'd like to study under.
- 03:31 I chose a man called Mark Bonner, who, as it happened, had been in the army in World War II, as a captain. And he had been the chief censor of the College of Physicians for a period of ten years. That was unheard of. He was just a marvellous physician. He was the physician's physician. This was the best physician in Australia, so I trained under him in Adelaide.
- 04:01 The army weren't as sort of grateful as perhaps I may sound. They said to me, "You've got eighteen months to get your speciality. After that time, we are going to use you again." Eighteen months after you've been out of medicine
- 04:30 for a period of fourteen years. Although I had been looking after soldiers, I had been a Commanding Officer. In Vietnam I had been a surgeon, I was operating on soldiers. Malaya I had done a lot of the tropical medicine. I had been a doctor all the time, but I had been out of study, I had been away from academic medicine. And here I was going back into study, probably the hardest specialist in all of medicine. That is internal medicine.
- 05:00 It's easy to be a surgeon, it's easy to be an obstetrician. Being an internal medicine expert was the widest speciality...and I probably chose the worst of them. I chose being a general physician. Instead of being a cardiologist, or an endocrinologist, or a dermatologist or a gastroenterologist I chose to do general medicine, which means that I had to do the lot. So in eighteen months
- 05:31 I did my first exam, a written exam, and I passed it straight away. I thought that a breeze. I studied pretty hard. Then I went for the oral examination. They worked out that I didn't know enough. And I knew I didn't know enough. I thought I might have lucked into it. If I had passed myself I would have felt that I was cheating
- 06:00 because I didn't know enough. So I thought, "I'm not going to go for the next one." So I went for the next one after that. And I pulled out all stops. Eighteen months. I was actually sent by the army to PNG [Papua New Guinea] before I'd actually knew I passed. I was well on the way to PNG by the time I knew I passed it. So I became a specialist physician then, trained in Adelaide.
- 06:31 I'm a fellow of the Australian College of Physicians. I then went to PNG, where I put my medicine and my tropical medicine together. I was senior doctor to PNG. But I spent most of my time up there looking after patients. I did that for both the defence force and the... I think there was only two physicians for the whole of PNG. Four million people there. And I think I was one of two.
- 07:05 I might be wrong on that. Consultant physicians I'm talking about. There was as plenty of people who knew as much as I did but that they weren't trained consultant physicians. So I consulted for the defence force and I consulted for the private side. I went to Lae, Madang, Mount Hagen, Wewak, Vanimo,
- 07:31 Goroka, Manus Island. In fact, a whole lot of cities. Wherever I went I helped them out on the public side. I didn't just look after soldiers. After a couple of years up there, I loved it, I didn't want to come

back. They told me that, "If you don't come back you will never be promoted." I had been a

08:00 lieutenant colonel for eleven years at that stage. The longest ever. Anyway, so I did come back in 1974. They promoted me to full colonel. I was then put as the

08:30 colonel in charge of environmental health. In other words, it was preventive medicine in... I was actually given two jobs. It was colonel of environmental health and a colonel of professional services. So I was, more or less, the chief professional person in the military, doctor-wise. And I was at Albert Park Barracks

09:00 in Melbourne, and I was there for the most miserable part of my life. About four years. It was a terrible time in Melbourne. It rained when it wasn't supposed to rain. I'm an outdoor person, and I could hardly do anything outdoors in Melbourne. Whenever you wanted to go to the beach, you had to travel for four hours. Otherwise, there was manure on the beach at St Kilda. I couldn't go there.

09:30 So I found it a terrible time. My wife, then, I had two children. My wife became ill, very ill. Anyway, in 1978, after four years slugging it out there, we went to Canberra. The whole of the army headquarters, that was in Melbourne, was all transferred to Canberra. So we went to Canberra in 1978, bought a house there. I was still

10:00 in that chief professional services job. My wife died, leaving me two children. One aged eight and one aged ten. So I had small children and no wife. I luckily settled in a nice big house. The closest house to the top of Mount Ainslie.

10:30 It was a beautiful house. I worked away there, I travelled a fair bit. I was lucky to have relatives and others. Although I came from South Australia, I had a brother that was at Young, which was only a couple of hours away. So I kept up with my job. A couple of years later I was lucky enough to meet a glorious young lady,

11:04 who happens to be my wife now. So we married in 1983. In 1984, I became a brigadier, the Director of Medical Services for the Australian Army. Following that, I had four years under 'Digger' James, who was the director general. And I was his brigadier.

11:33 'Digger' was a very strong person. A very interesting chap. He'd had his legs blown off. He was junior to me as a doctor, but he came into the army before me as a soldier. He was my senior in the army but my junior as a doctor. So it was interesting.

12:00 He used to defer to me on medical things and I used to defer to him on... He was my boss and he was a good boss. A very good boss. A strong, decent man. After four years I became the director general. I was fairly young still.

12:30 As a major general I did what I thought was right. I was married, my children were doing well, my wife was happy, we were still in Canberra. However, there was restructuring going on in the defence force, and I became the Surgeon General. I was the first Surgeon General of the Australian Defence Forces. Which means to say I was the senior one in the army, navy and air force.

13:05 I'm not an air force person. As I said I loved the navy, and I used to spend as much time as I could in the ships, but the air force... I think the air force realised that I treated them as the junior service because they took every opportunity to get me in the air and fly aerobatics and do nasty things to me. In 1990,

13:32 or the end of '89, I realised that I had set up a line of succession. I had been training young men to succeed me. I had been sending people to America

14:00 to work with the American army. I had been sending people to England. The people in succession from me I tried to send to both places so they had experience of other armies. They had a wider experience. I gave them interesting appointments in Australia. So I had this line of succession. Had I stayed any longer than the time I had, I had five years as a general.

14:34 I was around about fifty. But had I stayed on, those young men, one of them would have realised that he's missed his time, and therefore I would have really mucked up the future of what I saw as my line of succession and therefore the medical corps in particular. The army side of it.

15:04 So I got out. I didn't want to go. I didn't have to go. It really was for an altruistic reason that I went. I regret that, to a certain extent, now.(BREAK)

15:30 I need not have gone, but I did it for altruistic reasons and I regret that a little. Because during my time as both the DG [Director General] and surgeon general, I invited all my predecessors back. 'Digger' James came to every dinner that I had. We revered him. But, in fact, the person I selected following me never invited me back once.

16:00 I gave him what I thought I should have, but he did not reciprocate. And so I look back on that thinking that I could have had another six years in the army, and I did it for a person who didn't appreciate it. So, that's not the thinking of a bitter person after eight years. I've had a lovely time. I've had a

16:30 successful time thereafter. Let me therefore say, I got out of the military. I went as the chief doctor, the principle medical advisor in the Department of Repatriation. I was there for eighteen months. I did a lot

of things. Unfortunately, they and I didn't see eye to eye on some things. I was very much pro-servicemen, pro-soldier.

- 17:00 The person in charge of the pensions, or as they called it, the benefits program, his attitude was, in my opinion, was decidedly anti-servicemen. And they would therefore have to prove everything before they would get any benefits. I could not stand that type of attitude, where I felt that... I was close to servicemen my whole life.
- 17:31 This man had never been a serviceman, yet he was there pontificating on what servicemen should or should not get, and I could not countenance that. So even though I enjoyed my job, and I enjoyed the responsibility and I enjoyed the Repatriation Commission, who I advised, I found there were certain things that I didn't like. So I decided to leave,
- 18:00 and to take up what I thought was my glorious retirement in Noosa, which was the place that I had selected to go. After flying up and down the coast, by aircraft, and finding all of the places that met my criteria, then coming in by helicopter on seven of the places I studied from the helicopter. And five of the places I went in to live for a few days. I finally settled on Noosa as
- 18:30 as the best place in Australia, anywhere, to live. So here we are in Noosa. Now having got to Noosa, I brought a house on top of a hill. Sixty five squares, double brick house. My wife and I rattled around in this five storey thing, but it was beautifully built so it needed nothing done to it. I put a security system. I put in micro-irrigation system in. That took me four weeks.
- 19:01 Then I started quietly to go mad. I did not realise that I was not ready for retirement. I had had all of the psychological counselling by the military and everyone else, but I was not ready for retirement. I don't think I will ever be ready for retirement. So I looked in the paper and there was advertised a job as a chief planner for the Sunshine Coast. I thought, "That
- 19:30 sounds all right." I had been planning military things my whole life. So I went into it and they said, "You're hopelessly over-trained for this job." I said, "I would love a job like that." So anyway, they gave me the job. I wrote the plan for the Sunshine Coast, after making myself very familiar with every bit. The epidemiology, with the demography, with the geography and with everything to do with Sunshine Coast.
- 20:01 I wrote a one point seven million word plan. That plan was taken up by the university because, in fact, prior to that there was no real planning that went on. It was a funny old plan. It was well written and well presented, but it had to be in the format I was told to do it in. Anyway, having done that
- 20:30 the job of being superintendent of a large hospital came up and that was very much more like me. It also paid more, so I saw the challenges. I'd written the plan, I'd served my apprenticeship, I knew what there was to know. I think I did know more than anyone else. I got the job, I applied for it,
- 21:02 got the job straight away, and I went in as medical superintendent at Nambour, which was then about a hundred and eighty bed hospital. It was Sleepy Hollow a bit. I've taken that from that, where I had one physician, one surgeon, one obstetrician, one psychiatrist, then he left, so there was none, to a hospital now where we've got a hundred and five resident doctors,
- 21:33 fifty specialists, full-time staff, and fifty-five specialists, half-time staff. So we've got over two hundred doctors. So it is a big tertiary teaching hospital now. I'm starting to feel now that it's time to do something else because I don't think will retire.
- 22:08 **You gave us a wonderful introduction. I want to take you back to Kapooka, because I'm curious just how they balanced**
- 22:33 **your medical training with army training? How you skilled up on both of those?**
- As I said, I had learned how to salute in the cadets. And I learned how to do rifle drill in the cadets. I was just a little boy learning to play soldier. But
- 23:01 in my fourth, fifth and sixth year, I actually wanted to go to Healesville. I wanted to learn the military. The others all tried to get out of it. There were seventeen doctors chosen from the whole of Australia. It was the first group ever in any area of undergraduate scholarship training. Subsequent to that, the air force took it, the navy took it, Papua New Guinea took it, the Northern Territory took it.
- 23:30 Everybody thought this was a good idea. But I was the first group, there were seventeen of us. Four from South Australia and the rest from scattered right over Australia. The others, as I said, didn't want to go to Healesville. They thought it was plain chockos. Going up there, withstand all that nonsense. I liked it. I liked going there. Not because I wanted to be away from family at Christmas time or anything like that, I just wanted to learn military things.
- 24:02 I had it in me. I wanted to learn. I could do military things. I found I could do them very easily, I could learn them easily. So when it came to Kapooka, I had three pips on my shoulder, I was captain to all these subordinates. And the lieutenants were, of course, subordinates.

- 24:30 And at dining-in nights the subordinates stay and get themselves squiffy after the seniors have left. So they were all my friends. And they still are my friends. Those subordinates were both from Officer Cadet School at Portsea, which was the one year trainees, and from the Royal Military College at Duntroon, who were then three year trainees.
- 25:00 And we were of like age. Portsea took them a little bit older than Duntroon. They were about 20 and I was about 21, 22. So we were all much the same age. I knew quite a bit about the structure of the military and how medical work,
- 25:30 how the medical system in war worked, I knew that. But I didn't know how the proper soldiers, the arms, worked in war. And these young lieutenants, they were all vying for each other because they were all tremendously dedicated to their own corps. Being part of the armoured corps is the right of the line. I mean, the armoured corps comes from the cavalry.
- 26:00 If you're line in battle, they're the most senior. They're seen as the senior corps, and the tankies will never let you forget that. The infantry are the real soldiers. I spent my whole life with the infantry. And it's the infantry that go before the guns. The infantry are the foot soldiers, the real ones. The artillery are superb chaps. They were
- 26:30 always known to be very well dressed and we were always referred to them as nine mile snipers. Or koalas. Koalas were the tank corps. Never leave Australia and never to be shot at. And then there were the sappers, the engineers. They were tough and rough. They always had little heads and big bellies. We always used to tease them, but they were brilliant blokes, too. So all of these lieutenants would teach me
- 27:00 about their thing. And we were personal friends. Most of them were unmarried. I was married young, as I said. With a young wife, and of course she was the same age as their girlfriends and we all used to mix together, and it was a lovely social happening. And as part of that, I imbibed, I absorbed all this knowledge. And it was the best start for a young medical person.
- 27:33 In twelve months I learnt as much as I could have in ten years. So I became a bit knowledgeable about all of these. I mean, I even knew how the padres worked. You've never seen anything like the padres that used to descend on Kapooka. We had a thing called character guidance.
- 28:01 The aim of character guidance is to get young soldiers to be highly moral, strong, young people. That would uphold the virtues of the nation...and all that. Well, to do this you had to get the padres. They provided spiritual guidance and all that. That wasn't all there was to do with it, because they had to be taught all about sex.
- 28:30 And have a guess who used to have to treat every soldier that came into Kapooka? This was the Recruit Training Centre for the whole of the Australian Army. Everyone was trained, not the officers, but all the other ranks were trained at Kapooka. And they'd come in and they'd all have to be character guided. And I used to teach them about sex. Some of the soldiers were about ten years older than me, and they were the licentious soldier anyway.
- 29:04 So there was this young fellow standing up, teaching them things that they already knew. Most of them. Anyway, I used to make it into a fairly humorous thing, to keep their attention that way. Tell them things that they didn't know.

What were you actually obligated to teach them about sex?

The aim was

- 29:30 so that they wouldn't get VD [venereal disease]. The aim was to stop promiscuity. So the bosses would have liked to me to say that if you go out there and do that, it's going to hurt you. Whereas, I actually got into the scientific side of it, and told them why you liked it. And what nature meant it for.
- 30:05 I used to have a set lot of jokes. None of them were smutty, although they had to be a little bit coloured, because the padres were all standing there. I mean, you couldn't sort of say too much. They had to be a little bit coloured to keep the soldier interested. So that was my challenge. To make the character guidance
- 30:31 sex lectures interesting, yet keep the padres from getting on my back. Anyway, the padres used to descend from all over Australia onto Kapooka. And there would be padres everywhere. Flocks of them, of all denominations.
- 31:02 At one stage, I met a Jewish fellow. We only had two Jewish sappers come through as soldiers, but we had a rabbi come in, and he was very welcome. He didn't know quite what we were all about. We never had any Sikhs or any Buddhists or anything like that.
- 31:36 All Protestant denominations, Roman Catholics and the odd rabbi. They used to come in and the lasting memory that I've got is that these fellows would descend on these thousand recruits. And then lunch time would come. And we would all dine in the mess at lunch time. And at night, for dinner.
- 32:00 And the bloody dinner gong would go, and you've never seen anything like the horde of locusts... These

padres would absolutely descend on the food and there would be nothing left. If you didn't get in there very quickly there would be nothing left. I think I've never seen anybody eat like a mob of padres. Anyway, I then put two and two together because... I didn't mention before, that

- 32:31 before I got married, in my third, fourth and fifth year, I got married at the end of my fifth year, I was in a Lutheran seminary. I'm not a Lutheran. I'm Anglican. But I was a clean living young fellow. They had forty-nine pastors-to-be and one spare bedroom in this seminary. Being Lutherans, they never wasted anything. They said, "Let's get a young medical student in."
- 33:03 So I was selected to be a right and proper and fine upstanding young man, to go into the seminary. I wouldn't corrupt the forty-nine pastors-to-be, you see. So that's where I studied for three years, and it was a good place to study, in North Adelaide. But again, the same thing happened. Now I put the two and two together because at lunch time or at dinner time
- 33:30 the forty-nine and I would sit down together with Doctor Hobart, who was the head of the college, at one big refectory table. All the food would be stuck in the centre, there wouldn't be much food I should say, then you had to sort of sing for your supper for about fifteen minutes. They had what most people would call grace. But it's an expanded grace.
- 34:03 And then, at the end of this, all the food's in front of you, for fifteen minutes. The fellows... you would see saliva dribbling down their chins. The poor young fellows. And then when they fell on this food it was like the locusts. And then I put two and two together. In every seminary in Australia, it must be the same. That when they eat, they eat fast and they eat quick.
- 34:30 Because if you didn't eat quickly, someone else ate it. There it was. And my eating habits today still reflect my three years in the seminary. I eat fast, and efficiently. I swallow, but I don't chew. And I eat the same food. Being Lutherans,
- 35:02 they had people at Kingaroy, they had people on the River Murray at Mildura, around there. They had people at Murray Bridge. And they had a great deal with the Sanitarium Health Food. Sanitarium are Seventh Day Adventists. So on our table was plenty of bread. There was peanut butter from Kingaroy. There was apricot jam, from Mildura. There was tomato sauce from Murray Bridge.
- 35:32 And there was Vegemite from Sanitarium, which they would swap for the other things. So we had these four things. If you wanted something sweet, it was very simple. Peanut butter and apricot jam. If you wanted something sour, Vegemite and tomato sauce. I had that this morning for breakfast. So my eating habits were very much
- 36:01 influenced by those padres. If there is one memory that sticks out in my mind, it's padres and their eating habits at Kapooka. But Kapooka was a lovely experience. I had a fine Commanding Officer. My first Commanding Officer was a chap called Burt Walmsley. Marvellous infantryman. He was at Kapooka
- 36:30 when I went there. His wife was Audrey and they had twin boys. I looked after them at Kapooka, wives, children, everyone. Kapooka means 'the egg'. Wagga Wagga is 'the place of many crows'. And it's where the crows used to nest. Put simply, Kapooka was the place where the crows used to nest, just outside of Wagga [Wagga Wagga]. But it's about five
- 37:00 miles outside of Wagga I would say. And being so, I used to have to look after family if anything happened. And what happened there, we had a whole lot of meningitis. I'd probably be more experienced with meningitis than anyone in Australia. We had outbreak after outbreak. And it was only realised that, of course, these young coming from all over Australia, between the ages of seventeen and twenty,
- 37:30 they would bring it from their communities. And then the young boys would come out of the farms and they had absolutely no immunity whatsoever, and they would live in these little huts with very little ventilation. It was as cold, as you could imagine, at Wagga. Like Canberra. Only worse. And of course they closed down all the windows. There at night, there would be forty of them in that hut.
- 38:00 And within a very short time, the conditions were right for a meningitis outbreak. And I had literally dozens of outbreaks. Then I had to quarantine the camp. Colonel Walmsley would say, "Jeez, not again, Bill." But in fact, I don't think they minded, because if you were married it kept the wives
- 38:30 in camp and they couldn't go shopping, so it was a good way of saving. If you lived off camp, as many of the sergeants did, they had to live in the mess. They thought a change was as good as a holiday. They weren't allowed to go, so they stayed in the mess and boozed it up every night. The greengrocers and the butchers and things would come out and they would lay all of their wares on the road, you had to order it by phone,
- 39:00 then they would lay it on the road with little names on it. Then come along, pick it up and deliver it, you see. This was so that we didn't contact. They were good days. How I started the story, Colonel Walmsley, who was my first CO [Commanding Officer]... I came here on the top of the hill and guess who was the next door neighbour? It was Colonel Walmsley,
- 39:31 and he had been the mayor here for the previous ten years. He had retired from the military and had come up and been the mayor. He's still here and we're still very good friends. He's a marvellous man.

He was a World War II colonel.

We'll have to pause there.

Tape 3

00:47 **It seems like you wanted to do medicine, but did you ever regret not taking the engineering scholarship?**

No. My delight in life now

01:00 is engineering. My hobby is engineering. I build trailers, I build caravans. I've got welding units everywhere. Probably I don't build as

01:30 much as I used to because I'm not as adept with my hands, and other things. But engineering is my hobby. And as a hobby I love it. I don't think I would have been as happy doing engineering as I have been doing medicine or being in the military. I had the two profession I love most. The military and medicine. I would have liked to have been a vet,

02:00 but in fact I'm very soft with animals. People don't worry me. I can look after a person and be totally objective. But I get very upset with animals. If I see a sick animal or an injured animal I am very much more emotionally tied up with it than I am with a human. So I would probably have

02:30 not done well as a veterinary surgeon. My father said, "If you're going to be a vet, you may as well be a doctor." And that's how they went. That veterinary phase was as a child I wanted to be a vet. The argument, you might as well be a doctor, was there, because my father saw vets as mini-doctors. I don't see them as that at all. I see vets as very well trained professionals. They're treating patients

03:00 that can't talk. The veterinarians have a superb backing in all the basic sciences. Sometimes, in some universities, much better than the doctors. I would have not changed, I think, anything that I have done. I did mention before the fact that had I done a second year of internship, I could have gone

03:30 down a different track. That also happened when I finished my first major speciality, was medicine. I forgot to mention that I also got a surgical speciality. I'm a Fellow to the Australian College of Surgeons as well. I'm one of five in Australia that's got that. I think it's five.

04:01 **I'm curious to know, Bill, what did you buy your parents after you graduated?**

I bought my mother a marcasite ring, which I've still got. When my mother died my sister got it and gave it back. I bought my father, who was a fairly authoritarian Englishman, I brought him

04:31 a record of Noel Coward's, which was rather a smutty record. And I forget what the name of it was, but it was an album of Noel Coward. He had just got himself a new record player. The minute he got it he looked at it and said, "I hate Noel Coward. He was a collaborator during the war." I said to Dad, "I'm terribly sorry, I didn't know he was a collaborator."

05:01 I was young. I didn't know what war was all about. They weren't real smutty.

Not Mad Dogs and Englishman?

Mad Dogs And Englishman. Anyway, Mum loved hers, Dad hated his.

Your wife-to-be at sixteen

05:30 **was being interviewed by the powers that be in the military. How did you meet someone so much younger than you at university?**

She came from the same country town. She was my first girlfriend. I was her first boyfriend. I was the head prefect on the bus that went to school.

06:01 **I wasn't the school captain, but I was the head prefect, and I remember the first day she came to school and I saw her for the first time and said, "She's a lovely looking girl." Whilst I took out other girls, there was only ever one girl, and that was her. Until I met my present wife.**

06:30 **And then there was only one girl and that was her.**

What was your first wife's name?

Fay.

And when you went to all these various places, initially, when you went to the UK [United Kingdom] to do the tropical diseases course, and what have you, did they also pay for your wife?

Yes, she went with me to the United Kingdom, and we had a little flat in Earls Court. She went with me

07:00 to Malaya. Malaya was a different sort of war. I took the troopship over and she went with me. Of course, she didn't go with me anywhere else. She didn't go with me to Vietnam. For my three trips to Vietnam, she didn't go. She did go with me to PNG, and it was shortly after that,

07:30 of course, that she died.

So what got you interested in tropical medicine?

I'm interested in bugs. Bacteria. But the protozoans, which are the one-celled animals, the protozoans interested me, of all

08:00 the beings, they interested me most. And malaria is caused by a protozoan. And there is a whole lot of other tropical medicines. Tropical medicine used to be thought of, probably wrongly, but it used to be thought of as a disease of protozoans. And all these odd so-called exotic tropical diseases that one would see,

08:32 were pretty well actually all caused by protozoans. One-celled organisms.

The protozoans. How did you even get interested in them initially?

Well, I did zoology in my first year at medical school, and I had a book...

09:04 and it was called Animals Without Backbones. Baumgarten was the author. And it went through all of the classifications of animals. The protozoans were the ones that stuck out in my mind as being very interesting.

09:30 It just happened to be a thing. Now, tropical medicine itself, I got an interest in as soon as they said, "You are going to Malaya." That was when I really developed my interest. I thought "I'm going to Malaya. I've got a thousand soldiers that are reliant on me as their doctor. There is no other doctor. I am going to be out in the jungle. They are going to have one bloke to look

10:00 after them, therefore I've got to know what's going to kill them." As I said, I was a master surgeon, even though I hadn't done much. I thought I knew everything at that stage. But I was confident with my surgery. I'm not as confident of it now. But I was confident then. I felt that if somebody got shot, I was taught enough to be able to look after that person.

10:31 If anybody could, I could. But I didn't know enough about the clever diseases in Malaya to know whether I could save people or not. So what I did was I went to the university, and I looked up the diseases of Malaya

11:00 and what killed people. I found about ten diseases that could kill you in Malaya. They weren't all tropical diseases, because Japanese encephalitis was one of them, and that was everywhere. But I found the ten diseases, then I made it my job to know everything about those ten diseases. I knew everything there was to know. Everything that was ever written

11:31 on those ten diseases, I read. And then, when I got to Malaya, when I didn't know something, I applied the test. Is it one of those ten? And I excluded them. And every time I saw a soldier and I wasn't quite sure what he'd got, I excluded things that could kill him.

12:01 I was the doctor of the only battalion that has ever left Australia, in history, that's never had a death. Not one, from anything. The enemy didn't kill one. Disease didn't kill one. No soldier died in Malaya in two years. That's a thousand men. And the reason for it, in my opinion... The British battalion did the same things. They had

12:30 twenty-six deaths, that I know of, from disease. The Kiwis [New Zealanders] I know had deaths, from disease.

Well that's certainly something to be proud of...

I'm very proud. It's not only my pride, it's the fact that the soldiers did what they were told. The medics that worked with me... I mean, sometimes the companies

13:00 were three hours' walk from me. So I had to train the medic to do what I would have done. He was in contact with me, by radio, but only for certain periods of the day. In the jungle, what happens is that interference, radio interference, we called it mush, comes down about four in the afternoon and you can't get anybody on the radio except by morse code. And believe you me, trying

13:30 to converse with someone with morse code is very difficult. So, I knew that I couldn't get there. And I knew that I would have to train them and rely on them to do the same as what I did. So they had to learn what I told them about those diseases. And if they suspected something, give them whatever I gave in their pack to stop them dying.

14:00 It was that little training manoeuvre and my medics doing that, and the fact that soldiers were receptive to a lot of education. And they were very good with malaria and things like that. They did as they were

told. They didn't muck around with it. They weren't like a lot of Americans who said, "I'm not taking any bloody tablets that will make me sterile." That sort of attitude...

- 14:31 The Australian soldiers were sensible. So the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment were, in my opinion, the best battalion ever. They were superb.

You eliminated the diseases by a blood or urine test?

No.

- 15:00 One of the things in Malaya that killed people often was leptospirosis. Leptospirosis is caused by a little germ called the leptospire. It's a spirochaete, very much like what causes syphilis. And this little germ usually comes from the urine of small animals. Rats, little jungle furry animals.
- 15:32 Only little ones. In the cane fields of Australia, one of the worst forms of the disease is called leptospire ectohaemangioma], which just makes you bleed all over. While's Disease is caused in the cane fields by the rats. They wee on the cane, then the
- 16:00 cane cutter gets a bit of urine, gets cut, the leptospire goes through the cut. A few days later he starts to get sick then everything breaks down and he dies. Now, the early symptoms of that are red eyes. They get very painful muscles. Very painful in their calves and their thighs, particularly when they are walking.
- 16:39 They get a fever and a headache, but plenty of things give you fever. Malaria gives you fever, but it doesn't give you red eyes. So they were taught to look for red eyes. They were taught to feel the muscles. Now scrub typhus also gives you red eyes and sore muscles. But scrub typhus
- 17:00 has got a little, what's called an eschar. Like a cigarette burn. A little black burn. You see that in Malaya quite often. Eighty percent of cases. So you look for an eschar under here, along the legs. So this was what they were taught to do. You pick up that eschar, you treat the person with this antibiotic within twelve hours and they won't die. The British twenty-six that died,
- 17:30 they died from leptospirosis. Now if you pick up the leptospirosis within the first twenty-four hours, you give them piles of penicillin, they won't die. If you don't pick it up within twenty-four hours, it doesn't matter what you give them, they will usually die. So our soldiers carried that, they watched for the red orbs, they watched for the muscle soreness, they watched for the temperature. "I've been brushing through the jungle." Or, "I've been in a rising jungle creek." That
- 18:00 was always the worst, the rising jungle creek. A little animal comes down to drink, as soon as it drinks it wees, soon as it wees, the water rises, it carries all this, a soldier walks through the water, scratches and cuts all over him, goes straight through one of those and it's in.

Can you also get cellulitis from doing that? Like cut coral?

Cellulitis is caused by different germs.

- 18:31 They used to get a lot of cellulitis. A lot of infected cuts. Cellulitis is tissue infection with streptococcus. Coral is a little bit different. Coral cuts. Coral is living tissue and if you put living tissue in anyone... As you are cut by coral, it leaves little bits of meat, the coral, as living tissue, and
- 19:00 what will happen is that that they will attract a very big reaction. So a coral cut is always worst than a cut from a normal rock. A coral cut need not be infected to cause an inflammatory reaction. Whereas an ordinary cut will heal itself up with nothing, unless it gets a germ in it. What I'm talking about,
- 19:30 the cuts wouldn't get infected by the spirochete, from leptospirosis.(BREAK)

Do you think penicillin was the most used drug that you took to Malaya?

No, I had a whole heap of drugs that I used. Penicillin was

- 20:00 one of the most useful. But I still used to use a lot of sulpha drugs in those days... Sulpha was quite a good drug to use for infections. I used a lot of that. Aspirin, you can never get away from aspirin. Aspirin is good for a lot of things. People are only finding out
- 20:30 now how useful aspirin is. We'd get a lot of skin problems up there, with dermatitis and things. And I used to use a lot of anti-fungal tablets.

Antihistamine?

Antihistamine? I've never been an antihistamine person. I don't like

- 21:00 the... I've got a few peculiarities, a lot of doctors have. But to my way of thinking, if you know your physiology right, it's only when somebody gets a release of histamine, do you get a reaction from it. Now taking an antihistamine is like shutting
- 21:30 the door after the horse has bolted. If you get a nasty reaction, you should use a steroid, perizone or

something like that, to stop the inflammatory reaction that is occurring. Or you should use something to stop histamine being released if what is still going on is going on.

- 22:02 If you were allergic to a bee sting, it's going to be no use at all to take antihistamines. Steroids are the only things that will do a lot of good. You can't give antihistamine on the skin, otherwise you become violently sensitive to it. So that can't be used again.
- 22:30 And they used to have lots of preparations for the skin, so I don't like that. As I say, if a patient comes to see me and they've had some sort of an allergic response, the usual one is hives or something like that, the horse has bolted. They've got the hives and the histamine has been released. Antihistamine doesn't kill the histamine that has been released. It's already
- 23:00 caused its affect by being bound. So what you really need to do is give something that stops that allergic reaction. There are very good drugs that aren't antihistamines that will stop that reaction.

Can you tell us how long it was from

23:30 Kapooka before you went sent to Malaya?

Yeah, well I was sent straight from Kapooka to Malaya, as a posting. However I was prepared for it. I didn't know I was going, actually. I was prepared to stay for several years. Perhaps my whole military service. I was preparing to stay at Kapooka. I loved Kapooka. I became, not only the Regimental

- 24:01 Medical Officer, I was that for six months. Then I become the OC, the Officer in Command of the military hospital there. A little place called Seven Camp Hospital. And that was a lovely little hospital. I was it. I was Commanding Officer, but I was the only doctor. Until Mick Naughton came. Mick was a year
- 24:30 or two years under me as an undergraduate. He was on the same scheme, but two years after me. Anyway, Mick came along and I was always very military. I always carried a cane. Even then I carried a cane. I did all the things that proper military officers did. I saluted properly. I learnt to salute, I learnt to march, I learnt parade. I did everything.
- 25:01 I wasn't a sloppy doctor. I wasn't out of MASH [TV show]. I was a military officer, and that's the way I saw myself. Now Mick was different. Mick came along. I had the most beautiful uniform that I had tailored for myself out of saltine. Cost me a lot of money. A hundred pound in those days. It lasted me for about fifteen years. It was
- 25:30 the best uniform that I ever had. Now my first doctor, in my first unit, was to roll up on the train from Sydney, that was Mick Naughton. So I put on my saltine uniform. I probably looked a million dollars as a military officer. No-one else had the saltine uniforms except the generals in those days. The cane went under my arm.
- 26:02 And I sort of rocked on my heels, waiting at the station for Mick to get off the train. I was expecting a highly regimented officer to get off and come on over and present his credentials. He'd slept on the bloody train, half the night. He was crumpled like a concertina, all the way up.
- 26:30 His trousers were halfway up, his shoes were dirty. He got off the train, bleary-eyed. He'd had a heavy night the night before, that's why he slept all the way. He got off the train. He looked like a bag of poo tied with string in the middle. I took one look at him and thought, "What am I in for here?" He said, "You must be Bill. G'day, Bill." This set me right back on my heels.
- 27:00 I must have looked a real upstart to him, two years more senior than him. Anyway, Mick didn't stand on ceremony and that was Mick. Mick and I became very, very firm friends. He followed me everywhere I went. Every posting I had in the military, Mick followed me. I went to Vietnam three times. I think Mick went to Vietnam three times. One time he was before me.
- 27:30 In Vietnam, he went before me. My second trip, he was there as a major when I came in as a colonel. He was RMO [Regimental Medical Officer] of the 1st Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment. We were the first battalion into Vietnam. I came in with the task force and Mick met me
- 28:00 as a major, he met me as a colonel. That was the first time he got anywhere quicker than I did. He didn't go to PNG. He wasn't 'black hand' enough... It's not a derogatory term, it's just what we called ourselves... We were very proud of New Guinea. I loved New Guinea. They had to drag us screaming and kicking away. I loved the people. I loved the
- 28:30 country. It's pretty country. I loved everything about it. But people who went to New Guinea are a brotherhood. We were all the same. We loved New Guinea. We loved the people and the country and the culture. And somebody that has never been to New Guinea doesn't understand New Guinea. We had 'black hands' that went back and kept going. Our governor-general was a 'black hand'. Mick Jeffery and I were together,
- 29:02 we were lieutenant colonels together. He and I had been together in Vietnam. Before Vietnam, Mick and I were in Malaya. Mick and I have been together for postings... We're brother major generals together, at the same time.

Do you mean like a 'black hand' in cards?

No, we were just called a 'black hand'. They were black people,

29:32 and we were there. It wasn't a derogatory term, it was just what we were called. So he had never served in Papua New Guinea, that was what I mean to say. And that was the only place that Mick and I diverted. He never went there and I did.

Can I ask you one more question about Kapooka before you went to Malaya?

30:00 **You said you were the only doctor there at the hospital. Did you treat the wives and the children at the hospital there?**

No. The hospital was for troops. If we had a meningitis outbreak I used to treat everybody, because nobody was allowed in the camp. Saw everybody for everything. However, there were doctors in Wagga. They were private doctors in Wagga. And our wives and children used to normally go into Wagga.

30:30 But if somebody had an accident or if a child fell over and they needed stitches or anything happened when we were sealed off, in quarantine, then I did it.

That wouldn't extend to childbirth, would it?

Had somebody been in there at the time, yes. In Malaya I did childbirth for the families.

So you were at Kapooka for two years

31:00 **before you went to Malaya?**

Yeah, nearly two years before I went to Malaya. I got there just before Christmas, in 1960, and I left for Malaya in September of 1961.

31:30 Malaya later on became Malaysia, when Singapore was part of Malaysia. Now Singapore has broken away again. My

32:00 first impressions weren't good, and let me tell you why. We had a troopship, and the whole battalion with all their wives was put on the troopship. The troop was called the motor vessel Flaminia. It was an Italian ship. It had two Italian doctors on it. They weren't allowed to look after any Australian citizen

32:30 because it became Australian territory as soon as it was taken over by the military. So the Italian doctors weren't registered to look after anyone on Australian shore. So they were only allowed to look after the crew. The Italian crew. Have a guess who had to look, all the way from here to Singapore, to all the wives, all the children, all the soldiers, all

33:00 everybody but moi [me]. And that was something. I got down and got ready on that ship, because the Italians had their own mixtures, their own tablets. So I took big cases of my own tablets and mixtures and panniers of this and panniers of that. I got on the ship, and I worked out where my little Regimental Aid Post was going to be on the ship. Then I looked at the hospital on the ship.

33:30 I had to do that, too. I did this. I was one of the first on board the ship. Then the wives and soldiers started to come on board. I can remember a whole lot of pregnant women walking up that gangplank and vomiting as soon as they got on the ship. There we were, berthed in Sydney, and they were seasick before they got on the ship.

34:00 And I thought, "This is going to be lovely." There was an outbreak of pregnancy, there was outbreak of seasickness. Anyway, we took off and we got up there. But I was just... I didn't see my wife for three weeks. I was in the hospital. I was so tired that all I could do was sleep when I wasn't working,

34:30 looking after people in the hospital, and the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] and the soldiers and the kids and the broken arms. I was just so tired. They were all having a wow of a time. You can imagine. All the lieutenants, all my mates, they were having dining-in every night. They were all having drinkipoops. It was a holiday. They didn't have battalion parades, they weren't working. They had a holiday. We couldn't move in

35:00 to Singapore. It was supposed to only be a two week trip, but Singapore Harbour was blocked out. So we went around and around and around in the middle of the sea for a week until they let us come in. And I was absolutely flat out the whole way. I went to one dining-in room one night. The Commanding Officer said, "You haven't been to anything. You've got to go to this."

35:33 So I said, "Yes sir." And I said, "But if I have a drink, I shouldn't look after patients." They said, "You haven't had a night off. You haven't done anything. Surely the Italians can just look after it for a night." I said, "Well, they're not supposed to." And they said, "Let the Italians look after it for a night." I said, "It will be on your head." So, the Italians

36:00 looked after things for the night. It was a pretty rough night I can tell you. They put me in the middle of the swimming pool. It had a net over it at night, on the ship. And all the lieutenants in the battalion on

the ship, there's about twenty-five lieutenants. So they all got around the net on the swimming pool. They pushed

- 36:30 me into the middle of the net and just did that, so I was twelve feet in the air, and I had all the wines at dinner. It was terrible. They had a lot of fun with me, that night, the lieutenants. The following morning I had to go and see what had happened. Of all nights, there were three or four children who had fallen down the staircases.
- 37:00 They were fairly narrow. It wasn't a QE2, this ship. The stairs and things are made of steel, and the kids were running up and doing what kids do. Fall down and break your arm. The Italians had done... That night there were four fractures. They had set the four fractures. They were all wrong. So I had to get the poor little buggers out. Take the plaster...they had put tight plasters on.
- 37:32 Take the plasters off then straighten their arms and put back slabs on them. So I had to undo all the bad work that the Italians had done the night before. So they didn't get me to another party. And there was I, sick as a dog, from all the partying. So it was a very interesting, but traumatic trip
- 38:01 to Malaya. When I got there, I didn't even notice it because I was still so flat out. We berthed in Singapore, and then they loaded us onto a train, from Singapore to Malacca. We arrived at Turrendah [?] Barracks, which was specially made for us.
- 38:30 It was a new camp, brand spanking new. Made for the Commonwealth Brigade. The brigade is made up of three battalions. The Commonwealth Brigade was then commandeered by an Australia, who was Brigadier Frank Hassett. Then there was the Pom [British] battalion,
- 39:00 who in my time was the 1st 3rd East Anglicans. Or the Fugawi Tribe. They would always get lost and all you'd hear was the plaintive cries from the middle of the jungle, "Where the fug are we?" But they were named by our licentious soldiery as the Fugawi Tribe.
- 39:32 The Kiwis were good. The Kiwis were a lovely bunch. So there was 1st 3rd East Anglican, the Kiwi battalion, they only had one battalion. They just kept replacing soldiers. They didn't have any more than one battalion. Then there was the Australian battalion. And they used to rotate every two years, which was our rotation, 2nd Battalion. This was the
- 40:00 second time the 2nd Battalion had been there. They were the first into Malaya during the emergency. Followed by the 3rd, followed by the 1st, followed by the 2nd. There were only three battalions in the Australian army then.

We're going to have to switch tapes...

Tape 4

- 00:40 **You were the one doctor there, initially, for everybody. For all the soldiers in your care...**
That was on the ship.
- What sort of resources did you have at your disposal when you first got to Malaya?**
Well, we got to Torunda as I said. It was
- 01:00 a beautifully built camp, with separate bungalows for the senior officers. Which I wasn't then. I was a captain. And you had semi-detached for the captains. And of course the unmarried had to live in the officers' mess. So I lived in a two storey, semi-detached.
- 01:32 With a little house out the back. That was the servants' house. I had three servants. A cook amah, a wash amah and a gardener. That's pretty good, when you're coming from Australia and you've never been overseas before, you're starting to think, "This is the life." But I had Chang as my wash amah.
- 02:01 She was a lovely little Chinese lady who looked after my wife and took her shopping for groceries and that sort of thing. Then I had Pang as my cook amah. He was Chinese. He was hooked on opium. He was an opium smoker. At night-time I used to wonder what the
- 02:30 smoke was coming out of the little house at the back. Instead of having a couple of beers, he had his opium smoke. Which was quite legal, in those days. Every six months he would go away and dry out and come back again. So he was less affected by that than he would have been by alcohol, for instance. He did his job. He was a beautiful cook and he was a nice bloke. He just happened to like opium better than alcohol.
- 03:00 Well, opium cost nothing. Alcohol did. Then there was the garden amah. We didn't have a very big garden so we shared that one with the padre, who lived next door to me. The Anglican padre lived next door to me on the other side of the semi-detached. That were our living arrangements, and they were

very, very comfortable. Beautiful houses. Not air-conditioned, but built

- 03:30 for the tropics with louvre windows, and built to not catch the sun. Built in what these days would be called environmentally friendly. They were well-built, architect designed houses. Anyway, the military camp was much the same. The whole thing was a camp, but the battalion lines, so to speak, were much the same. They were all
- 04:02 pavilion single storey type buildings. My RAP, Regimental Aid Post, was a little house, by itself. It had about six rooms in it. The front room was the waiting room. It was specially designed as an RAP. There was a little office to register everybody in and keep records.
- 04:30 Then there was the doctor's room, where I used to see patients, with two little examination couches. The other side of that, out the back was the treatment room, where my medics had all their patients and pills and things, and they would carry out my orders. Dressing the wounds or
- 05:00 giving out tablets. Doing what they do. Then there was another room that was our storeroom. And in that we kept all our 'going to war' stores. While we were in camp, we were very much like a normal doctor's surgery. But all our war stores were carried in panniers and things that could be put into Land Rovers or carried on our back.
- 05:31 We kept those up to scratch, polished and ready for when we had to go. Remembering that Malaya was, then, an emergency. Whilst there wasn't much happening in our particular area, that's why our wives were allowed there, there was still communist terrorist activity going on. Particularly on the Malay-Thai border and
- 06:00 out in the jungle. There was still quite a bit going on. So we could have been called out at any time, but we knew that we had to go onto operations. When we got there, we went into training, again, acclimatising to the tropical climate...

What did they put you through? What did you have to do to acclimatise?

Well, I was the one that advised the Battalion Commander that

- 06:30 they should gradually, over a period of about seven days, what I would like them to do was to build up their activity. In fact, on the boat on the way over, had I not been so busy, I would have done a lot more. Three weeks, we should have acclimatised on the way over, but they didn't. All they did was drink alcohol, and that's about the worst thing that you can do for acclimatisation. You need exercise. You need to be in the climate.
- 07:00 You need to be out of air-conditioning, because the boat was air-conditioned. You lose your acclimatisation very quickly if you are in air-conditioning, so all the things that should have been weren't there on the boat, so they had to be acclimatised at the other end. But in particular they had to be acclimatised, or they had to familiarise themselves with true jungle operations. We had (UNCLEAR) exercises just out at the out on the Kalaparti Range, just out of Sydney.
- 07:30 And we used to learn to march for thirty miles and all that stuff. Twenty-four hours without stopping, we did all that. But when we got to Malaya, the hot wet is different from the hot dry. The hot wet...the jungle is different. Soldiers have to know what fireflies are. Otherwise fireflies can assume
- 08:00 different proportions in the middle of the night. They've got to learn what the curry tree smells like, otherwise you think the enemy's just over the next ridge. They've got to learn when to set up camp, because darkness happens in about five minutes in the jungle. Soon as the light starts going, you've got about five minutes then it's pitch black and you can't see what the hell you're doing. So you've got to set up camp and put our your protection lines
- 08:30 and your lines of fire, the machine guns. But in time to have everything set. So when it's pitch black, you're ready. You know where to go, you know where your machine gun pit is, or where your pit is in case they lob something in on you. You've also got to know where the latrine is. We had shallow trench latrines. They're little things that long and that wide.
- 09:00 You straddle them and fill them in and do everything right. But you've got to know where it is. And you're not allowed to put torches on. The enemy will see a torch a mile away. So you've got to learn how to live in the jungle. This is what we had, as Australians. I found that a lot of the others, the English, hated it. They just did not like the jungle. The
- 09:30 jungle was our friend. I mean, you could hide, you could find shelter, you could find water, you could find food. But the Poms hated it. They never, ever liked it. The Kiwis were much the same as us. They didn't mind.

Did the Poms every try and engage with the jungle in the same way the Australians forces did?

I don't know. They always used to get lost. So I really don't know. The Malays were bad. Now I really shouldn't officially talk too much about the Malays.

- 10:02 The Malay army, the Royal Malay Regiment, I had lots of friends, but they had superstitions about the jungle. And when we used to go into the jungle, and I mean we'd go three hundred miles in, but the

Malays would stay in the edge of it. They'd go in thirty metres, then start looking sideways.

- 10:30 I perhaps exaggerate, but they didn't like the jungle. They felt the supernatural in the jungle and they didn't want to go in. And I always thought, everywhere I've been, that the forest is your friend. That's the way we used it. But they didn't use it.

What kind of superstitions did they have?

- 11:05 Superstitions with the spirit people in the forest. There are all sorts of beings that live in there that are malicious to you. Later on, in New Guinea, I worked out how... If ever we had to take on the New Guinean people, I knew damn well how to sort them out.
- 11:30 I mean it was just very simple. They were terrified of the things that happened in the forest. Even though the New Guinean people use the forest as their livelihood, but as soon as they moved in, each tree had their spirits. It would be very easy to win a war without firing a shot in Papua New Guinea. I'd frighten the hell out of them within five minutes.
- 12:01 But the Royal Malay Regiment didn't like going in the bush. They've since that become a much different army. I've been back there many times. I've got friends there and seen them and they're different now. But I wonder if that basic... If they really do like getting into the bush. Because, you see, the enemy used it. The communist terrorists used it. And we used it, too. You've got to learn. And that's what we did.
- 12:30 We had pipe opener exercises where we went out and we learnt. We went out without water, sometimes to our disadvantage. I remember a couple of times we ran out of water, and we had to get out in a hurry because we just didn't have any water. I remember once we went out, we didn't have any water and we couldn't get out. We had to call water in. The only way we could call water in was a little
- 13:00 aircraft, by air, coming in. They'd drop water in jerry cans. We're talking a thousand men, and we had some Englishmen with us who weren't acclimatised. They were going down like nine pins. We were way up the middle of the jungle and they were going down like nine pins, the British. Because they wouldn't drink. They said, "We're saving our water." They wouldn't drink.
- 13:30 And I had a lot of sick people and I was very worried. I told the boss, and he said, "Well, let's put a balloon up." There was no such things as helicopters in those days. So we called in a fixed wing aircraft. We didn't have enough water in the battalion to put a marker balloon up. A marker balloon's a big yellow thing you put up above the canopy in the jungle. And you've got to put water in it, to mix with the thing, to make the helium or whatever gas,
- 14:00 probably hydrogen, to float it up through the canopy. So the battalion commander said, "I'll fix that." So he lined us all up and made us wee in it. Let me tell you, there was just enough wee in a thousand men to get to get that marker balloon up above the canopy. We got it up. And they dropped the water down. Then about an hour later the heavens opened up and we were fighting our way through water that deep. Even in the jungle, finding water can be bad.
- 14:30 You don't always find a water vine. And if you do find a water vine you've got to be pretty damn patient, because it just drips out. It doesn't just run out. You cut a piece of water vine and you're getting it one drop at a time. If you've got really got a thirst on, that doesn't do much good. So all these people that live out back and tell you how to survive in the jungle, "Live on water vine." When it's dry, the vine's pretty dry, too.

- 15:01 In the middle of the wet season, you can pick a piece of vine off and it will run out, but that's not when you want it.

So the rainfall wasn't regular, then?

No, it was very seasonal monsoon and non-monsoonal in Malaya. The further north you go the more pronounced that became. In Singapore, as you know it's right on the equator, or five miles away from the equator,

- 15:31 it's very much... They could happen at any time in Singapore. You could get the monsoon from the south, or the monsoon from the north. But up the Thai border is a fair way from the equator, and therefore you get fairly seasonal rainfall. You can go for quite long stretches... Probably the biggest thing is water.
- 16:01 The biggest worry is water. I used to carry five water bottles. They were pretty heavy to carry, but the last thing you wanted was to run out of water. And you were fairly circumspect about drinking them and filling them up, too. Because there is nothing worse than starting to get heat exhaustion through lack of water. And then have nowhere to fill them up. Every time you walked past a stream, if you've got one empty one...
- 16:30 You keep them all full, if you can. You're very much more satisfied that way.

But I can only remember that one occasion where we really ran out and had trouble. And that was during an exercise. The exercise was how to get by without water. And the exercise was actually a set of circumstances. The Commanding Officer thought of almost everything.

17:00 Alan Stretton, he was the Stretton of Darwin fame. He was the chap who went to look after the Cyclone Tracy. Later became Major General Stretton. He was then Lieutenant Colonel Stretton. But Alan Stretton said, "Look, Bill. Do you think we will get through their two days on their bowls and things if we fill up there?" And I said, "Look,

17:30 if the water's okay there, by all means. You should be all right if you take it easy and do things right." Obviously it wasn't in that sort of vein. "Yes, sir." "No, sir." "Three bags full, sir." He was the boss and I was his adviser. So I said, "You better let me go in first and make sure that creek's all right." So he said, "All right, how many do you want to go with you?" I said, "I want somebody to show me how to find

18:00 the place first. Get me a proper soldier." So a young lieutenant and a couple of others, there was about four or five people in our party. And we went in, we went in with the same water that the battalion was going to carry. And we went into this bend in the creek. It was quite a big,

18:31 flowing creek. It was supposed to be flowing. I went in and tested it for arsenic and everything. I had the water test kit and this was one of the jobs that the lieutenant Medical Officer has to do, pronounce the water all right to drink. Because if they had put poison in it... Remember, the enemy could poison it, too. If it had poison in it, then I would have a thousand men that are poisoned. So I went in,

19:00 I walked two days. I got into this place and tested it, okay. We got lost on the way back, so we just marched on a compass to the nearest road. It took us two or three days to get out. On a straight compass. We got to the stage where we couldn't get to the top of a tree to see, and there was no hills. It was flat. You just couldn't see. So you just take a compass point there, just walk on the compass, then walk up to him, then keep walking up.

19:32 And we got out all right, without any trouble. But I was very pleased when we got out. Then when the battalion came through, a couple of days later, I walked through again. By this time I had done the route. We got up to the water point and I went to test the water again, and it's full of arsenic. What had happened was upstream a little,

20:00 I don't know how far... But Malay is full of rubber plantations. And they keep the undergrowth down under young rubber because it tends to stifle young rubber. They keep the undergrowth down by poisoning it. So the arsenic was there to poison the undergrowth. So a rubber planter, upstream, had arsenic'd his undergrowth. It had washed down, and it was full of it. It would have poisoned the lot. So I said to the boss,

20:30 I said, "There's arsenic in the water." And I wasn't too sure where it had come from. I didn't know too much about what they used. And remember these were the pipe opener exercises, I had been there a month or something. And somebody said, "Well, what do they use on their rubber?" And somebody said, "I think they use arsenic." Anyway, it's full of arsenic, and the thought went through my mind, "What if the enemy's out there and they've dropped a handful in?"

21:00 But anyway, it was arsenic. We couldn't fill up. So that's when it happened. We then went on, you see, and it was drier and drier. We knew that was our only watering point so we had no water. It was about a day after that that the boss had to call in the thing and that's when we were all trying to put up the balloon. Anyway, we got through it all right. But a big lesson learned. Always test the water.

21:33 When you've got an opportunity, always fill up your water bottle. When you get (UNCLEAR), you get these black holes in the middle of the jungle. It's just this black hole, full of rotting leaves and everything else. The soldier's used to call it, 'black panther pee'. But in fact, if you get your bag,

22:01 there's a special bag called a Millbank bag, designed by the Royal Army Medical College at Millbank, on the Thames. You get your Millbank bag, made of special canvas, and you fill that up and that filters all the particular material out of it, and then you treat it with whatever you want,

22:31 chlorine or... In those days we always used chlorine. Later, in Vietnam, we used some iodine. Then you'd de-taste it. Because people don't like the taste of chlorine, you over-chlorinate it then you take the taste of the chlorine out by the de-taster. And that's the way you do it. And black panther's pee used to be quite all right, once you put it through this system. Especially if you put tea in it, because you couldn't see

23:00 that it was dark, then. But it tasted all right. You get by on things like that. But when you don't have any black panther pee pools around, that's when you're in trouble. And it will dry out pretty smartly. So that was the pipe opener exercise. The first time you see a tiger... I reckon I probably saw half a dozen tigers in my time in Malaya and they were all scruffy, scrawny little fellows.

23:34 And they're not like the great big things you see in the zoo. They've got stripes, but they're scrawny and little. Probably people don't realise that in the wild that they're not nearly the animal they are in the zoo. I can remember we used to have animal pickets.

24:00 I can remember young soldiers would get ribbed by the orangutans. There was a shortage of male orangutans and the stories went around that if you don't watch, you will be grabbed by an amorous orangutans. These were serious stories. The last bastion of orangutans are in Malaya and Borneo. The lady orangutans in

- 24:30 Malaya were very amorous, you see. And some of the younger soldiers would have took this serious. Anyway, I can remember when an orangutan fell out of the trees one day, one of the young soldiers didn't stop to see whether it was male or female, he was off. Of course, this comes down the line.
- 25:00 A battalion when it's marching through the jungle, you go in column route, one after the other. And if the battalion is a certain way, you protect the Commanding Officer and the centre of the battalions. So you've got a couple of companies forward and a couple back. And you have around the Company Commander the things that he needs. Like the doctor, the signals, that sort of thing.
- 25:33 On one of these pipe opener exercises, this one was just south of Kuala Lumpur. A place called Batu Caves. We were fighting the Gurkhas. We were part of 17 Gurkha Division. We were one of the brigades, there were three brigades in the Gurkha Division. The other two brigades were Gurkhas. So we used to fight the Gurkhas for an enemy,
- 26:01 when we were getting ready. And the Gurkhas are a pretty good enemy, I can tell you. But they're not as good as you think they are. Not in the jungle. Anyway, we fought these bloody Gurkhas up the hills, and we had done everything right. Up hill and down dales. I remember the CO was absolutely exhausted. He was so determined to get these Gurkhas. He had the battalion just about exhausted. I slipped him a couple of phenobarb tablets
- 26:30 to quieten him down. He went to sleep and the whole battalion just collapsed and went to sleep. He said, "What are those tablets for?" "You take them, sir. They will stop you itching." Anyway, this particular day the battalion was in column route. We had just contacted the Gurkhas and we were told they were across on the next hill. And we were coming down a
- 27:00 very steep hill. And we were coming down, zigzagging like that. Down a track. We were just about at the bottom. Fifty yards, forty yards from the bottom. And back came the message. Messages all come back along the line. "Take ten."
- 27:31 And you don't talk. If you chatter the enemy's going to hear you, so just these little signs and simple commands. So this time, it was the first time I'd heard it, it was, "Python on the right." Python on the right? This kept coming back. Looking on the right of the track was the biggest bloody python I've ever seen.
- 28:00 He was curled up like a little mountain, like a little pyramid. And he was big. Big. He was really big. So he was there. His head like that, like a little coffin, sitting on top of this mound., "Python on the right." So we all gave him a little berth and went on with our thing.
- 28:30 I reckon I was within about ten metres of the creek, right down the bottom. "Take ten!" So I had my little group. My group comprised the hygiene sergeant, the RAP sergeant, my batman and myself. The medics are all out with their companies. That was just my little group. We were on the side of the hill like this.
- 29:01 And Jock, my batman, was a Scot. And Jock said, "Sir? That python's not far away." I said, "Just up there, Jock." He said, "Look, what if he comes towards the water? Don' they come towards the water?" I said, "They do. They like the water." He said, "Well,
- 29:30 if he comes towards the water, he is going to come straight down into the water, and we'll be in the road." I said, "Yeah, we will be, Jock." He said, "Sir, I'll sit up there and I will take out my machete." He said, "If that snake comes this way, I'll just take my machete, go like that and cut him in two.
- 30:00 And as you know a snake is no good if he's got his bum cut off." I said, "Good for you, Jock. You're protecting me, and that's good." So there were four men in this little group and me furthest away from the snake and Jock, brave Jock, protecting. There was a blood-curdling bloody yell. Someone from the assault pioneers,
- 30:30 who were also near us in this column route, had leant on a bough, which had gone up a vine, which had gone up to a dead bough up there and broken it and it had come down and landed on the snake. So the snake headed our way. Straight downstream. Jock let out a blood-curdling bloody yell and I went swoosh swoosh, and straight above my head went this razor-sharp parang, because he had spent all day doing nothing but sharpening this machete.
- 31:00 It went straight above my head. He had just thrown it, like that. The next yell came from my RAP sergeant and he's trying to climb the nearest tree. And this fellow, the hygiene sergeant, he had one leap and he was twenty feet away. We worked it out. From a standing jump, it was a world record, a twenty feet jump. I was the last one.
- 31:30 I was paralysed. I couldn't bloody move. And this snake ran straight over my legs. He was more frightened than I was, if that was possible. But he went straight into the water. Anyway, I heard this roar going down, because it was still twenty or thirty feet away, and there a lot of soldiers in that twenty or thirty feet. Really, it was a very funny period, because the commander was just across the creek,
- 32:00 so he saw all of this going on. This line of soldiers just disappearing. And the intelligence section was the next one in front of us. One of the battalion intelligence officers... There was a little waterfall on this

creek, and he went up, sheer face, twelve foot up, up a waterfall. And nobody knew how he got up there. When all of this had finished. Here he was,

- 32:31 on top of this waterfall asking people to get him down. My RAP sergeant was up a tree. Sheer tree, no boughs. And both his knees were shaking, he was so frightened. He was giggling away, he said, "I got up that tree quick, boss." He had difficulty getting down. My hygiene sergeant was wet in the creek, and here was me sort of giggling hysterically, with this running over me.
- 33:01 And Jock, my protector, he never found his machete. It went over my head and into the water. And really, the fun that this caused was a good one and a whole booster for the battalion. In the battalion newspaper when we got back to camp, after the exercise, there was, 'Lost, RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major]...' The RSM of the battalion was one of the people caught up in this fun.
- 33:30 'RSM lost his hat.' His giggle hat. We all wore little giggle hats. 'Last seen in the mouth of a large python swimming down the river. If anybody finds it, please return it.' But it was good fun. But that was an interesting episode that happened. I will never forget it. "Python on the right." But we used to get different orders and sometimes they were...
- 34:01 With the Australian's humour they were...

I understand some of the operations you on were quite long?

Yeah, they were. Once I went out in the bush I used to stay out. Unfortunately I was the only doctor. Everybody else would get out for three months, then they'd get back. Or they'd go out for six weeks, eating hard rations, sleeping in the bush,

- 34:30 ambushing every night. The infantry were ambushing every night. Or patrolling, trying to find them and get them. But unfortunately where everybody else used to go for six weeks and then they'd be relieved, another company or another platoon would come forward and relieve them while they had R & R [Rest and Recreation]... They would go out to a base camp where they had showers and everything else.
- 35:01 The poor bloody doctor had to stay in, because there was no relief. I was only relieved once in many, many months. I remember they sent my wife up, she was the only wife that was allowed up into the dangerous area, and they set up a guest house. It was an old style British guest house.
- 35:30 The old rubber planters used to come in, and they'd have a piano and they'd drink their pink gin to the piano and sing songs and have a lovely time. That was their only form of social interaction. And these, in Malaya, we saw the last of the British guest house. And that's where we stayed. This massive room, with a punkawallah outside, a big fan
- 36:00 and the punkawallah outside going like this making it go back and forth. And that's all he does all day. And mosquito nets, big mosquito nets. Anyway, my wife was brought up and they said, "Well, special dispensation for the doctor." Big deal. She could come up and see me. I had a very comfortable R & R. Only one.
- 36:30 I think they gave me about three days. Then trained her all the way back. That was about three hundred mile, four hundred mile back to Terinda.

What were the more common medical procedures that you would have to deal with, out on operations?

Forget the exercises. They finished after the first few months, and from then on we were on operations.

- 37:01 We were fair dinkum. I don't know how many operations we went on, but there were quite a few. Some of them lasted six months. Some of them lasted a month. And it was all in response to what the enemy was doing. The normal things I remember the battalion doing is
- 37:32 both patrolling, looking for the enemy or ambushing. I remember at one stage we had about twenty ambushes, right along the Thai border. They used to come in from the Thai side. They would hide over there. They were safe in Thailand. Then they'd come in, infiltrate through, do their bargaining or dastardly deeds, then go back through.
- 38:01 The Malay-Thai border is a pretty rough thing. There is no road. Every three or four kilometres there is a can. That's the only thing that tells the border. So you're not quite sure if you're in Thailand or Malaya. But our fellows, the Australians, they would stay out there in ambush positions. Not allowed to talk, not allowed to do anything. Because the enemy was very, very good
- 38:30 at fighting in the jungle. The fighting perhaps he wasn't very good at. But he was good in the jungle. The jungle was his friend. The jungle wasn't his enemy. We were the enemy. And the jungle was our friend, too. So these people used to have to go out... The enemy could smell you. I mean, I could smell people that came into camp from three hundred yards.
- 39:00 Now we had no smellies at all. No smellies. That means no toothpaste, you use salt. No soap. Nothing of any odour whatsoever. We ate combat rations which were supposed to be without odour. The only odour you more or less got from it was curry, and they had curry, too. And there was curry trees around, that smelt like curry.

- 39:35 So, they weren't allowed to shave. That is the only battalion that ever wasn't allowed to shave. I stopped them shaving because of leptospirosis. When you shave, as you know, once you put aftershave lotion on, the whole of your face is one shallow abrasion. And the leptospire goes through that, I proved that.
- 40:01 So I said, "No more shaving." So the soldiers loved it. The soldiers in our battalion, when they went on operations, they didn't shave. So they would come out of the bush, and you would wonder who it was behind the beard. I grew a pretty good one myself, I might say. But haircuts? The hair was down to here. But it was quite amazing, that after months of no washing,
- 40:32 nothing at all, you can't smell anything. You can't smell the next bloke. But if somebody comes into that... As I said, I could smell one man, I knew that there was somebody else there, three hundred yards away. Because we had our track three hundred yards away from our base camp. And I could smell the new recruits coming in. So these ambush positions, we weren't very successful to start with.
- 41:00 Then we started to be successful, because we had no smellies.
- We'll just pause there.**

Tape 5

- 00:32 **Bill, you mentioned before about doing childbirth in Malaya, can you tell us about that?**
- Yes, Turinda Camp was not far from Malacca, about twenty miles out of Malacca itself, which was a very old Portuguese town on the east coast of Malaysia.
- 01:00 And Malacca was really third or fourth world during that, the '60s. The Malacca Hospital wasn't, for instance, air-conditioned. The theatres weren't air-conditioned. The birds flew in and out of the operating theatre. It was very much a third world hospital. None of the people from our garrison, that is, the
- 01:30 English, New Zealanders or Australians, ever attended that hospital. Instead, we were looked after firstly by a small hospital on Turendah Camp. It was a pavilion style hospital with about fifty beds. There was Australian and Kiwi nurses there. There was actually an Australian doctor in charge of it, Ralph Meyer, when I was there.
- 02:01 And the doctor of each battalion, that is the doctor of the Australia battalion, the New Zealand battalion and the English battalion used to have to take it in turns of being on night duty. Now, in that particular little camp hospital, they had very strict rules on which type of childbirth should and should not be done there. For instance,
- 02:30 first children should not be born there, and any over the fourth should not be born there. These are the areas where there is usually most risk. What we call "prime-ips" and with the "multi-parus" ones, that is the ones that have had four or more children. So we used to send all those, they all went off before the baby was born, obviously, to the British Military Hospital in Kuala Lumpur.
- 03:03 Kuala Lumpur was about a hundred miles, about a hundred and sixty kilometres, from us, from Turendah Camp. So it was obviously a little too much to take them up there if they were in childbirth. But they would go up beforehand and deliver. All the others had to be delivered in our camp. The midwives did most of it. The midwives,
- 03:30 again, English, Australian and New Zealand, and they did very well. The trouble was when anything went wrong, they would call on the doctors. And doctors like myself, even though, as I said before, I'd done very well in medical school in obstetrics, I hadn't delivered babies for several years, at that stage. And we didn't get the normal deliveries, the midwives did all those. Only when it became something
- 04:00 difficult it was our problem. And I can remember, every delivery I had there was a complicated delivery. I would look after a thousand soldiers three hundred miles from anywhere and not turn a hair, but I must admit my biggest stress was looking after complicated childbirths. One of my very
- 04:30 good friends had a child there. The child was abnormal, but I didn't know that at the time. We didn't have all the apparatus we have now for detecting abnormalities in children before birth, such as ultrasound. I was looking after a woman who tried to commit suicide by diving through a plate glass window.
- 05:02 Therefore I was putting in several hundred stitches, and they called me, that my friend's wife was having a baby. The next call I got was that she has had the baby, precipitously, which means within a minute she'd had the baby. When that happens it means there are a lot of tears in the woman. You don't know about the baby.
- 05:32 I said, "Is the baby all right?" They said, "It's breathing, but probably not normal." I said, "There's nothing I could have done about that." Then I spent the next hour and a half stitching her up. That was

my friend's wife. So it was a very difficult part of my career, being thrown in as a

06:00 relatively junior Medical Officer... I mean, at the School of Army Health they didn't teach midwifery. Here was me, having had delivered about twenty or thirty babies during my medical course, and having had no other experience until I was thrown in with complications. Complications that would be dealt with these days by a specialist, and an experienced specialist at that.

06:30 **Did that turn you off doing obstetrics?**

No, there's much of an opportunity for obstetrics in the military, apart from where there are wives, and this was probably the only posting that an Australian soldier could have had, anywhere in the world, where the wives are looked after by... In New Guinea it happened, too.

So that wasn't the last time you did childbirth then?

07:01 I was the boss in New Guinea, so I didn't have to do it there. And I was a specialist physician. I used to get called out for all sorts of other things. I didn't do it in New Guinea. But my doctors used to have to do it. But they were trained. I made sure they weren't put out in the cold, so to speak, to do it without warning or without preparation.

07:30 The other thing is New Guinea, we also did have a obstetrician gynaecologist there, and the military camp was only five kilometres out of Port Moresby. So it's easy enough to take them to the specialist straight away, or let the midwives do it, and if they got into trouble call the specialist. So we didn't have any complicated deliveries at Port Moresby. They did at Lae and they did at Wewak, but

08:01 in my time there, anyway, there was never any problems. No babies died or no mothers died. You're quite right, it's the sort of thing, it's... That people should go into whatever they do and should be prepared and educated for what they do. Whilst I was very well educated for my military medical role, I wasn't educated for

08:30 the care of women.

What about medicine in the field, during actual conflict in Malaya? Did you encounter that?

Yes. I was the only doctor. So I did all of the medicine in the field. There was no other doctor to look after the Australians. So I did all the surgery and I did all the medicine. There was no obstetrics in the field because there was no

09:01 female soldiers.

Can you give us an example of what a day in the life of that conflict in the field is like?

It depended whether one was in operations, that is out fighting the enemy, or whether you were out of operations, whilst someone else fought the enemy. In camp it was pretty straight forward.

09:31 I would go from home, have breakfast, go to my RAP, which was very well set up and designed. All the soldiers in the battalion that were sick would come in and wait in the waiting room. The RAP sergeant, he used to triage them, he used to go through them and sorted out those needed to see the doctor and those who could be treated by him. And I used to see the ones he wanted me to see.

10:02 I'd treat them. Those that needed specialist care, I would refer off to a specialist. Very rarely send anyone to a specialist, because remember we were dealing with a very fit young male group. Ninety nine out of a hundred didn't need to go to a specialist. When I was stonkered by something... I can only remember, quite candidly, one case where

10:30 I just didn't know what was wrong with the lad. This was the case of a young boy who was hauled out of the operations by his boss, who called him a coward, and frogmarched him into me. This was an exemplary soldier, who had been a big hulking muscular fellow. When he was frogmarched into me, he was

11:00 skinny, pale. I could see he was sick. I went right over him and I couldn't find anything. I did blood. I had a microscope, and I had a look for malaria and everything else. He didn't have a fever. So I didn't know what it was. So I contacted my friend who was a specialist in the British Military Hospital at Kuala Lumpur. I said,

11:30 "I'm very worried. He's lost weight. He's not doing things he could previously do easily. He's lost confidence. He can't even keep up with his mates on the march. I really think there is something seriously wrong with him. And I don't think it's psychiatric." So Colonel Montgomery, who was the specialist involved, said, "Send him up to me."

12:00 I sent him up to him. The telephone call came back. "Bill? It's a very rare case of sprue." Sprue is a condition where the soldier cannot absorb fat through their intestines. They get an infection of their intestines. They can't absorb any fat, or anything in their food, and they quickly become very anaemic and they lose weight because they can't absorb any food. And he had

12:30 tropical sprue, which I had never seen before. And it wasn't one of my ten real dangerous things, because it takes them a long time to get sick. I'm not saying that was the only case that tricked me, but

that was one that did trick me. I can't remember any others. For malaria and things like that, I would send them off. If they needed hospitalisation they'd go off. I did have

- 13:00 some cases of leptospirosis but they were all diagnosed early and treated early and I didn't have any deaths. I had several that had to go to hospital. They lived, because they were treated early with penicillin.

What about on operations?

On operations it was similar, except for my way of seeing the patient. Now

- 13:30 most of the operations were ambush. Australians sitting along the border, with twenty ambush positions out. The company headquarters are out, probably five miles away from me, perhaps ten. I had a little hospital that myself and my sergeant and my batman built. The little hospital was made of bamboo because
- 14:00 we were in the middle of a lot of bamboo forests and we made our own tables, chairs. We carried on our backs a large piece of tarpaulin. Probably ten metres by six metres. A very large tarpaulin. It was a plastic, but it wasn't the thin blue plastic like you have these days.
- 14:30 It was quite a fine piece of material, quite waterproof, with rope holes all the way around it. And that was carried on top of the medicine pack. So my sergeant and I carried pack, which was our own pack with our own food and blankets. On top of that, we either carried the
- 15:00 tarpaulin, or 'paulin' as we called it, it wasn't made of tar, or the medicine kit. And we were the only two that carried it, the sergeant and I. The batman carried a whole lot of other things. He carried leg splints and things. So in the end this 'paulin', if it got a bit wet, was too heavy. So we slit it down the centre and put lace marks in it and carried half of it each.
- 15:30 But because we were carrying up to eighty pounds each, and I wasn't as big as I am then, and my sergeant wasn't as big as I was. So we were probably both about a hundred and sixty pound and we were carrying eighty pound, which is half of our weight. It's well known that you tire very easily if you carry any more than a third of your weight. So the little hospital
- 16:00 was located fairly central. We knew that the enemy wouldn't attack, if there were more than a section of riflemen there. A section is seven. So the section of seven
- 16:30 plus myself and my sergeant and batman made ten. So we knew that we wouldn't be attacked. So the Commanding Officer gave me seven men, and their sole job in life was to protect the hospital. What they did was lie there and have a nice holiday but they were there to protect the hospital so the enemy wouldn't attack it. So we built this little hospital under the paulin. A whole lot of bamboo beds.
- 17:00 About ten we could fit in it. You couldn't get them out. It used to take them a day about to get someone to hospital. So if they were sick or if they needed something, it was best for me to do it there. A little operating table made out of bamboo. I used to then stick mainly around this place. That meant if Alpha
- 17:30 Company, Charlie Company, Bravo Company, Delta Company, the support company had to come in, they came to me. If I left there and went out to one of them, I wasn't available for anyone. I really should have stopped there. However, one does get stir-crazy staying in the one spot. So what I used to do was when the radio would clear it that everybody was well, then
- 18:01 I'd duck out. By ducking out, it would take me an hour and a half to walk to the company. The company medic was out there treating them, and I would see anybody that he wanted me to see. Then I'd walk back again. So three hours walking and I might only see two or three patients. I might bring someone back with me, but you could never carry
- 18:30 them by stretcher that far. So, if they had a bad ankle or something, we used to let them mend out there, just not send them on ambush, let them rest, then let them walk out themselves. Not by themselves, but let them walk out on their own two legs. So I can only remember once being called out to an emergency where the soldiers couldn't get back to me and that was to a bad
- 19:00 scorpion bite. Snake bites we didn't worry about. We used to get them all the time and the medics knew how to treat them and what to do. But a bad scorpion bite can be extraordinarily painful, and this chap got a very bad one. He was in a very bad way from pain. I didn't let the medics have any of the real heavy painkillers. So I went out and saw him.
- 19:30 In fact, I had to walk back at night, which I didn't like. I had my little protection group with me, of course. That was the only time that I was called out on an emergency, on that particular operation. That was a long operation. But soldiers used to come in to me, regularly. With all sorts of things. From cuts, broken arms,
- 20:02 broken collarbones. One night I remember seeing the one that probably worried me most of any. I stayed with him all night and held his hand. A young man that fell over on a stump and the stump hit him here, and I was sure he had a ruptured spleen. A ruptured spleen, if they bleed, they just die like that. I was sure he had a ruptured spleen.

- 20:30 But I kept an eye on his pulse and his blood pressure. His pulse and his blood pressure kept right. So the next morning he was all right. So I said to the Commanding Officer, who was back at the base, "I'd like a helicopter." The only helicopters you ever got was the little ones, like a little bubble, with the two pods. And the pods were out the side.
- 21:02 And so the boss authorised a helicopter. The helicopter came in. I sat in the pilot's seat. The poor damn soldier had to go out in one of the pods. He was conscious and he was talking to me, so I was there with him.
- 21:30 I got him back to the hospital. I spoke to the surgeon, and remember all this time I was away from my other soldiers, but I was so worried about this one. And anyway, they said, "Look, you can't hang around here." I wanted to hang around and make sure he was all right. Anyway, I was shooed away
- 22:00 and matron said I smelt. Because I'd been having no smellies. And she came and said, "You smell." Of course, you can imagine what I did smell like. Unshaven. I was shooed back and I went back to my little hospital. The next morning I got a signal that he was all right. He did have a ruptured spleen, but it had sealed itself off. Because it hadn't blown.
- 22:32 I was getting pretty lucky.

Had it blown you wouldn't have been able to fix it?

In my little hospital, if I'd opened his belly and I didn't have any blood, he would have bled to death. All I could have done was clipped it off. It's an expert job to clip off a spleen. If I had attempted it, I probably would have killed him. He would have extenuated in front of me. My experience since then of

- 23:00 removal of spleens is such that an inexperienced fellow, if there is a lot of blood in the belly and you haven't got a whole lot of... I mean, I had instruments. But I didn't have an anaesthetist. I would have had to give the anaesthetic and do the operation myself. And I couldn't have done it under local anaesthetic. So I was fortunate in that I got a live one again.

What was perhaps

- 23:30 **one of the more common ailments you received in operation, in the field?**

After the first R & R. The R & R used to be held by the licentious soldiery in the fleshpots of Malaya.

- 24:00 Probably one of the common ones I got was venereal disease. So they would all troop up, looking remorseful. The medics would take great delight in having them for five days with the penicillin in the behind, which was the treatment. It was almost all gonorrhoea in those days, and it was all
- 24:30 sensitive to penicillin. So five days course of penicillin would fix them. We used to give them the penicillin that hurt a fair bit, so that might be (UNCLEAR) to getting it next time.

What about the character building lectures that you would give?

Well, you can build character so far, but you can't make soldiers into saints immediately. Remember these are not married men. These are young,

- 25:00 healthy, red-blooded young Australian soldiers. Who have had aggression built into them, through all their training. They've been out in the bush for many weeks, or months. Without any alcohol. With the exception of a couple of times, we had no alcohol in the bush. The exceptions were when we were with the Ghurkas, we always
- 25:30 got a pennyworth of rum. Which is what the Ghurkas were given every night. But Australian soldiers didn't get alcohol in the bush. The only alcohol was in my medical pannier. And I had medicinal brandy in there. And a lot of people knew that, too. Anyway, they used to go on R & R, and of course they'd have a few beers, and
- 26:00 all the inhibitions would melt away to dust. And despite all the lectures that were given by the doctor on the dangers of what they were doing, they still got VD.

Didn't the army think about issuing them with condoms?

The army had that many condoms, you could have floated a boat in them. They were all issued with condoms.

- 26:41 As I say, the inhibitions are lost with a few alcohols and the soldiery go their merry way, and that's the end of that. So venereal disease was a relatively common one.
- 27:00 Perhaps just as common, when they'd been on R & R they used to get gastroenteritis disease. That was very common. If one doesn't watch very carefully what one eats on the economy. What we used to call eating on the economy. That means going out and eating at the local shops and food carts and that sort of thing. If one doesn't watch very carefully, one can finish out with a nasty case of gastroenteritis.
- 27:30 Or even amoebic dysentery. Dysentery was not uncommon. Amoebic dysentery was the only one that

could kill you, so that was one of my ten. But the others were very severe diseases. Quite often they'd come back with a mild doses of something which didn't entail them going to hospital but had to be treated. That was very common. Perhaps equally common was minor skin conditions because they were...

28:01 Remember they have to get through the jungle and the jungle is full of things that sting and bite and cut and pull. And the wait-a-while bush is a vine with little claws that are reverse shaped, so when you're walking through they would catch you. And hence, wait a while, you do have to wait a while. You have got to disentangle yourself from them because they won't let you go.

28:30 So they get infected, with the sweat and things. So there are pimples and infected sores. The bamboo cuts like paper cuts, through the skin. I stitched up many, and I learned very quickly not to stitch them up, because immediately you stitched them up they got infected, so just leave them. Put a dressing on them and leave them. They would heal up if you kept them relatively dry.

29:01 **Can I just ask you, did your experience in operations in the field in Malaya help you down the field when you were in Vietnam?**

Yes, I taught all my soldiers. The jungle in Vietnam wasn't as beautiful as the jungle in Malaya. And it wasn't pristine jungle. It was still jungle. It still had the wait-a-while trees and the bamboo and all the creepy-crawlies and everything else

29:30 that it had in Malaya. So I was able to pass on my knowledge of the things that were common to me, to the doctors. As I say, I did that before I left Australia for Vietnam. And my knowledge of tropical medicine, I was one of the few people that had practical in Malaya, but I had all the theory in the United Kingdom. And I was able to pass all that on

30:00 to my people for Vietnam. So when I went to Vietnam, I was fairly the right person to be sent to Vietnam. I was well trained to be able to lead, to be the senior doctor amongst a group of doctors going into war. Into another country. Whereas, for instance, the Americans weren't ready. They didn't know what to expect. When we went to Vietnam

30:31 the Americans were my very great friends, but my first few weeks in Vietnam was spent teaching the Americans.

You'd been in Malaya for two years, then you got posted back to Australia?

I was in Malaya for a couple of years, yes. Then I got posted back to Australia. We flew back to Australia, as I recall.

What were your thoughts on leaving Malaya? Because I know

31:00 **that you loved New Guinea. What did you think of Malaya?**

Malaya is probably the prettiest place that I've ever been into. Malaya is known as the jewel of Asia. It's absolutely an exquisite place. The jungles were primary jungles. The canopy would be a hundred, a hundred and fifty feet up, and very little underneath.

31:31 There would perhaps be a few ferns and things. So you could move through the jungle fairly fast. It was only where you got where man was that you got these secondary jungle. Which is where you got these wait-a-whiles and everything else. Where they had sort of half cleared the edge of the jungle, and you got a sort of almost impenetrable tangle. And they were the things that used to hold us up the worst.

32:01 A lot of Malaya, when we were there, was like that. The primary jungle you could move through pretty fast. It's all soft under foot, because there's that much leaf litter and stuff on the ground. So it's soft on your feet. Leeches everywhere. But you get used to the leeches. I found out how to stop leeches when I was up there. We used to walk through paddies in Malaya, and a lot of

32:30 our activity on the border was through paddy fields. And the big bull leeches that suck on the buffalo and things. You used to watch them swimming after you. They used to swim like a porpoise. And you'd come into a paddy and you'd see these things swimming towards you, just like a porpoise. I've seen a man, a Brit, get drunk and fell down a drain, a monsoon drain, and he was exenterated the following morning. He had that many leeches

33:00 on him, they sucked him dry. The bull leeches used to come, and while you were walking through, they'd get underneath and suck your legs. The soldiers very worried because the stories were they would crawl up inside your penis and suck blood, then they'd get stuck. Because they'd get very much bigger when they suck blood.

33:33 So soldiers, of course, always thinking about that part of the anatomy and how it can get hurt or otherwise. I found that the natives - the Malaysians, rather - discriminate rather badly. The Malays discriminate rather badly against the aborigines there.

34:00 And the aborigine people of Malaya, they call sack-eyes. Which means slaves. The sack-eye people I found very nice. I used to go out and stay with the sack-eye. They didn't get these, they didn't get bites. And I wondered how. I had a dear old man, who had his leg shot off by the Japanese.

- 34:32 The war when we got there was fifteen years past. And he was there, and he told me what the Japanese did to him. I gave him a bottle of Coke, which I happened to have. I gave him a bottle of Coke and I asked him how I stopped the leeches from getting him. He was the head of a little tribe.
- 35:02 And he said, "The brus" or words to that effect. I forget what their name was for tobacco. But they had this rough tobacco. It's just very rough thick tobacco. It's not refined. It's just tobacco leaf roughly cut. And it's called brus in some
- 35:30 parts of the world. What they do, they get a little bag and they put this raw tobacco in the little bag. Tie it up like a little blue bag. And then they'd tie it onto their belt. And if they were in a paddy, they would just
- 36:00 drop it out of their belt and it would drag along behind them. And the nicotine in that tobacco was enough to keep the damn bull leeches away. And I let this be known, and the soldiers, all they needed to do was put their butts in a little bag, and that used to keep the leeches away. The bull leeches were the worst. The little arboreal leeches dropped out of the trees onto you. They were only teeny-weeny little things. They would give some people the horrors, but they didn't worry me much.
- 36:30 **Would it work on those leeches as well?**
- If you put it on you, they wouldn't get it. But then again, it's raining a lot of time in the rain forest. And when it's not raining it's dripping off the trees onto you anyway, and it just washes anything that you've got on. The bull leeches were in the paddies and the creeks and that sort of thing. Whereas the little arboreal leeches are in the trees and they drop on you. It's hard to get them off.
- 37:00 They're easy to get off, but it's hard, it's difficult to repel them. They didn't like our mosquito repellent. That was pretty good, just using the mosquito repellent. And the anti-mite they didn't like. We used to have anti-mite stuff that we used to put into our clothes to stop the mites which carried the scrub typhus.
- 37:30 And they didn't like that. They got onto clothing which had been properly impregnated with anti-mite, they'd drop off. They wouldn't pursue you.
- Did Fay fly back with you from Malaya?**
- Yes, she did.
- Was she happy to leave, too?**
- She had a lovely time. Women had a lovely time,
- 38:00 having a wash amah a cook amah and a gardener. They had little women's tea parties every day. And swimming at the officers' club. And lunch at the officers' club. There was an officers' club on the beach. We were right on the beach at Malacca. On the Malacca Straits. Pretty little beach, a troop of monkeys going past every day, and the women sitting there drinking their pink gin. So, no, they had a good time.
- 38:31 **So she wasn't too happy about coming back?**
- I'm sure they all got an awful shock. Most of the young women that went up there, they had a baby or two when they were there. You got somebody to look after the baby, too. The smart ones were pregnant. That's why there was a rash of pregnancy before they started. They knew they were going, they all got pregnant, they had their baby there, knowing that you would have somebody to look after the baby in any case. Somebody would look after it until it was one and a half,
- 39:00 then you would then enjoy your child. No dirty nappies or anything. Some of them had two while they were there.
- What about you and your wife?**
- No, no. I was too hard working when I was there to think about it. And away too much. But no, we didn't have any children until much later.
- Okay, we better switch tapes.**

Tape 6

- 00:42 **I was keen to get you to tell us about your trips to Borneo, on your first trip to Vietnam?**
- I went to Borneo for a short trip from Malaya.
- 01:00 But I can remember very, very little about that. It was then still Malaysia. The fighting that was going on was just about to start. It was called the Indonesian confrontation. It's not mentioned these days, because we are supposed to be

- 01:30 very good friends with the Indonesians. But they were just over the border on their side of Borneo, and we were on our side of Borneo. I didn't go with our battalion. I was part of that battalion. I went there as an observer, much the same as I went to Vietnam. I didn't stay very long, and I didn't find out anything... There was no difference in the disease patterns or anything else.
- 02:00 So I got out just as soon as I could. Mainly because my battalion commander didn't want me there. I just happened to find my way across there. I was looking after Australian troops and I was their doctor, so they wanted me back where I was. So I'd rather not say too much about that.

But you were in Malaya when you did your first trip to Vietnam?

- 02:30 Yeah, I was. I forget whether it was late '62 or early '63, but it was the day I was promoted to major, I was sent to Vietnam. It was supposed to only be a couple of weeks. Two, three weeks or so.
- 03:03 I seem to recall the battalion commander went and then some of the company commanders went. Then the battalion commander called me and told me I had to go, because it was almost a voluntary thing. And I sort of wondered why, and then he had a chat with me and he told me they wanted me to look at disease patterns.
- 03:32 I thought that was fairly nebulous, so I did what I was told. You weren't allowed to go directly from Malaya, because there was some international agreement that we had to go from Singapore. We couldn't fly from Malaya to Vietnam. Even though it was quick. We had to go down to Singapore and fly out. Perhaps Malaya weren't party to the war, or something, in Vietnam.
- 04:05 But we had to fly to out from Singapore, I remember that. We got into Saigon, straight into Saigon, and I went to where I was supposed to go, to the Australian Army Training Team Headquarters in Saigon. And one of my old Commanding Officers...
- 04:40 Before I went to Malaya with 2 Battalion, we trained in the Kalumpatti [?] Range, north of Sydney. And we were a very big battalion called a pentomic battalion, which was two thousand men. And when we went to Malaya, we become a
- 05:00 pentropic battalion, which was only a thousand men. So we went from this great big battalion to this smaller battalion. The great big battalion was commandeered by a full colonel, and his name was Joe Mann. He was a legend throughout the Australian Army. He was eccentric. Joe was my Commanding Officer. He was the first training team commander. So
- 05:30 I turned up not knowing who was there, and who should be there? Joe Mann. No, he wasn't full colonel, he was lieutenant colonel, too. Anyway, Joe met me saying, "Well, we've got to go down and have a few beers." So we went down and had a few beers, then he told me what I had to do.
- 06:00 And that was, go to the very top of Vietnam. Vietnam's shaped like a boomerang. Go to the very top, that's the seventeenth parallel and then find my own way back, and finish out in Mildula [?]. And have a look at the disease patterns. This was a pretty tall order. Find your way up and find your way back. Remember that the enemy, they owned it.
- 06:31 They owned the whole country. So I hopped on an aircraft. They said, "Go out to Ton San Nhut and hop on an aircraft. One's leaving at such and such an hour." I remember going out on the airport and they had a Provider. A Hercules with only two motors. A
- 07:00 shortened version of the Hercules, two motors only. I thought, "This looks good." There were only five passengers on it. Anyway, a lieutenant colonel was flying it. I remember him vividly. He was one rank more than me. He was a Yank. And he said, "Where's your weapons, guys?" So I patted my trusted pistol. He said,
- 07:30 "Throw that bloody thing away. It's no good at all where we're going." He said, "Use this." And he handed me a carbine, and I've never seen an American carbine in my life. And a whole pile of ammunition, and this little American carbine. And I thought, "This is pretty interesting." And the other fellows, he did the same to everyone else. The others were Yanks. He said, "Now, how many of you
- 08:00 are parachutists?" I'd parachuted, but I'd only parachuted out of balloons and things. While I was in England. Unauthorised I used to jump out of balloons. All of my class was killed in a plane crash, my parachuting class, so
- 08:30 I was banned from doing it because I narrowly escaped being killed with all the rest of my class. They were all doctors, too, as it happened. "How many parachutists?" I said, "Well, I'm not a parachutist." He said, "Have you ever put a parachute on?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Here." And handed me a parachute.
- 09:00 He said, "Put your parachutes on." He came by and said, "You couldn't have done many jumps." He cinched me up, and cinched me right up, because I was fairly loose. He said, "Now guys, I've been up there times in the last three weeks and all three times we've crashed." He said, "These aircraft have been in country
- 09:31 twelve months and none of them have been maintained." He said, "They won't fly on one motor, and

we've only got two." So he said, "If you see a red light there, you go up the back and hook on." He said, "If you see a green light, you jump. And if you don't jump, you'd want to be a damn good pilot

- 10:00 because you will be the only person on this aircraft." He said, "Now, every bit of land between here and where we're going is enemy held." He said, "I had to fight my way out the last three times." He said, "I don't want people around me who aren't willing to fight." He said, "That's your carbine and whatever you do, you don't drop that carbine." With this, I hopped on the aircraft,
- 10:30 with my parachute on, back like this. It's a two hour trip. You can imagine with a parachute stuck in your back. There were only five of us on it, and in the middle of it they had a motor that would have been longer than this room. One of their fighters. In Vietnam, the jets were too fast. They didn't use the jets. There was
- 11:00 no enemy aircraft. The jets, by the times you've seen somebody, you've gone past. So they wanted prop [propeller] driven aircraft. So this was the motor of an old World War II prop driven... It wasn't a Spitfire, it was a P38 or the American equivalent of a Spitfire. So there's it, sitting in the middle, with a couple of little straps around it. It must have weighed... I looked at it and thought, "Yeah, well that is going to weigh a couple of tons.
- 11:30 If that falls sideways, I'm going to have sore toes." Anyway, we took off, this bloke was a fighter pilot by the way, we took off, and the first corner was a steep bank like that. I looked out the side and the wind would have been this far... He took off like a fighter would. We got off and anyway, nothing much happened. We landed where we were supposed to land, and the motors went all the way. I was listening. Everybody was craning their ears to make sure
- 12:03 we did not drop a motor. Because we couldn't fly on one. We got in, and nothing happened. Fourth trip lucky. And Bill was lucky again. Except that I had to go even further up north. So I hopped on board a Buffalo, which is a Canadian aircraft. It was a twin engine.
- 12:31 Like an Otter. Anyway, I hopped on this and that was good. There was about ten people on that. Just a little single row of people sitting on seats. This fellow said, "They can't go too high." He said, "We have to stick pretty low." I said, "That's good. I don't want to be up there." We went through a pass and
- 13:00 bullet holes appeared in the floor. I looked down at a bullet hole. Now everybody else looked down and saw the bullet hole, too. Now we'd been soldiers a fair while, and the first thing you do when somebody is firing is you hit the deck. So we all hit the deck, and then we suddenly realised that they were shooting from below. Ten people stood up and presented their soles to the firer.
- 13:30 We were hit. The aircraft seemed to go all right, so we kept going on to where we landed. And there was a big crosswind on the airport. Somebody came round and said, "There's a big crosswind and it's not behaving as it should.
- 14:00 We will try and land anyway." I thought, "Well, that's good." We came around three or four times, and the crosswind blew us off, and blew us off again. Finally we got there and he landed. He hit with his right side, bounced around, and our left wing, we went along the tarmac, and when we came
- 14:30 to a halt, there was about six feet worn off the end of our left wing. It wasn't that fast. It was a very slow aircraft. It was all sort of in slow motion. Somebody opened the door and we all walked off. That was the first crash I had.

I see why you don't like the air force.

I'm not keen on the air force. But anyway I got up there, and

- 15:01 I saw a lot of diseases that were supposed to be eradicated throughout the world at that time. There was supposed to be no smallpox in the world at that time. I went into Montagnard territory, up in the mountains, which is where the natives of Vietnam were. I saw if not hundreds, then dozens of cases of smallpox. I had never seen
- 15:30 smallpox, but this was quite obviously smallpox. I was vaccinated, so I didn't worry about it. I actually took samples back, and it was smallpox. In the north, I saw lots of malaria and as I say smallpox. I wound my way back again.
- 16:02 I saw plague, which I had never seen before. Which was interesting, from a soldier's perspective. What else did I see? A little bit of typhus. Cholera, I saw cholera down in the delta, which is fairly pandemic. So I was able
- 16:30 to come back and give a fairly good... I also went and got all the French records. I went to the Institute De Pasteur, which is a big research establishment in the middle of Saigon. Beautiful museum pieces they had in there. They had stuffed animals of every animal. I was able to take photographs of all those and say
- 17:00 these were the forest animals. And all that became good intelligence for when the Australians went up there. We eventually went up there. Australians went about three years later.

Were you aware at this time that you were collecting all this information, that it was soft

intelligence, for future action?

I was aware

- 17:30 that as a proper army officer, that wherever I went, particularly where there was a conflict going on, that one keeps one's eyes and ears open and reports everything. I wasn't so dopey that I didn't know. When I came back I wrote a big fat report. I never knew officially where that report went.
- 18:01 But I know where that went. Almost certainly people were using that. To my knowledge I was the only doctor that went, in those early days. There was no other doctor went there. I was able to get enough... If they wanted something, they probably could have got it out of the Institute De Pasteur, but I pointed them in that direction, and therefore, if they were friendly with the French,
- 18:30 they could have got anything out through there. The prime minister didn't say to me, "Bill, go up there and get all the information that you can." But it's quite obviously that the fact that they selected a doctor to go up there, when there was only a few of us that went. Commanding Officer, the company commanders who may
- 19:00 have gone back as battalion commanders. Therefore they needed to have a quick look around, to get it fixed in their brain, and myself. There was another captain, a guy called Graham Williams. I don't know what he did. Time has told me
- 19:30 that the reason I went was to collect intelligence, not for my own interest. The reason why they picked a doctor instead of a fighting soldier to go, in my place, would have been that they wanted intelligence from me. But I wasn't formally tasked.

20:00 In that trek all the way back down, what did you observe of enemy activity?

I was jumping from base to base. I wasn't silly enough to get away from the military. There were big American bases by that time. They were training the Vietnamese. They were mainly training teams. The Americans were actually fighting at that time, but they were officially were training the Vietnamese army to fight.

- 20:34 But there was a big camp, for instance, at Hoa Long. That's about fifty miles north of Saigon. Now we dropped in there. That was one of my stopping off places. I think Can Tho was my stopping off place in the delta. I didn't go to Vung Tau. Of all the places I didn't go was where the
- 21:00 Australians eventually finished. But I went to Saigon and I went outside of Saigon to Bien Hoa and Hoa Long. I went to the west of Saigon, out to the Parrot's Peak. Out on the Cambodian border. And I went to army camps, flying between. I used to hop on a military aircraft between bases.
- 21:30 And there bases were pretty safe. They didn't have bases where the enemy was likely to... The enemy dropped a few mortars in on their aircraft, but the enemy wasn't strong enough to tackle the Americans front on, in open daylight. So, I found it all pretty easy. I saw a few Australians.
- 22:01 In my travels I stayed with two Australians. That was John Healey, who has since died. He became a full colonel in the army, as an infantryman. And another was a chap who became a journalist. He was a military journalist. His name was White. He was a major in the army, got out of the army, became a journalist and is now a very well known
- 22:31 military commentator. He's an Englishman, actually, an expat [expatriate] Englishman. I think his name's White. They offered to give me a parachute jump in their camp. I said, "How do I get up there?" They said, "In the helicopter." I said, "I've never jumped out of a helicopter before." They said, "Well, we'll teach you on the way up."
- 23:00 I said, "Why in Australia does it take three weeks to learn, and you're going to teach me in the three minutes it takes to get up in the helicopter." And I said, "No. I'll give this a miss." So Algie Clarke, an Australian, who was a colonel at the time, who was with me, Algie Clarke was from SAS [Special Air Services]. The bloody SAS are mad. He couldn't resist himself. And he was a very good parachutist. He hopped up, went up in the helicopter and came down. They had a whole lot of ranges.
- 23:30 Firing ranges. They had the mounds, then they had the shelters because it rained most of the time. They had shelters made of just corrugated iron across four sticks. And anyway, he came up and there was a fair crosswind, and he nearly cut himself on one of these sheds. So I finished up stitching him up. That's what you bloody get for going up with this mob of cowboys.
- 24:04 He didn't hurt himself. It was just skin.

Apart from the, for want of a better term, the outmoded diseases that you saw in regional Vietnam, the ones that had supposedly been eradicated, did you see any new strains or tropical diseases that you weren't familiar with?

Remember that I was in Malaya and

- 24:30 most of the diseases in Vietnam were present in Malaya. The most common disease, overwhelmingly, is malaria. And I had been unfortunate enough in Malaya, to be the first to 'discover' the first chloroquine

resistant falciparum malaria. It was the first in Asia.

- 25:06 And here's me, a captain in Malaya, and all my soldiers are going down, and here's me giving them chloroquine in the mouth, and making them drink a glass of water. The next day they would go down with malaria. And I knew there something on. And I was nearly court-martialled. I said, "I'm giving the soldiers this
- 25:30 and they're going down." Anyway, the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, in Washington DC, and it's got arms, and one of the arms is in Kuala Lumpur. They came up there and their fellows totally exonerated me. They said, "No, this is a chloroquine resistant strain." It was never seen in Asia. Well, this part of the world. It was only ever seen in Venezuela. So I discovered that. Hoo-ha right across the world then. They had every malariologist in the world
- 26:01 was interested. So when I went to Vietnam everyone knew that I was an expert in my area. And let me tell you, the Yanks got me in and grilled me for tips on how to stop, what command type of decision should be made, how should soldiers be disciplined to wear their protective apparatus. To take their pills.
- 26:31 So, overwhelmingly, malaria was the thing that dogged my life wherever I went. Malaya, Vietnam, PNG. It was always the disease. It is the overwhelming... It may not be the killer. There's two types. Over there, there are two main types and that's vivax and falciparum. There's actually four types.
- 27:04 But the two types there are mainly vivax and falciparum. Vivax doesn't really kill you, it just makes you real sick. Falciparum on the other hand will kill you. It's cerebral malaria. It's algid malaria, it gets into the adrenal glands. It can thicken the blood. It can kill.
- 27:30 And I've seen it kill. For all the cases of malaria we had in Malaya, we didn't have one death. We got onto it quickly, and we treated it quickly.

How did everything that you learned in Malaya about tropical illness inform the research that you did over in the UK?

I did my formal degree and training in the UK. I knew more about tropical diseases than a lot of teachers who were teaching me.

- 28:00 Then I went back to Vietnam. I've got the theoretical and the practical. I've been in the field, I've been in the jungle, I knew how to prevent it. You've just got to stop the mosquito biting you. I had to pass over to the Americans that 1) they had to wear protective clothing, 2) wear repellents, 3) don't go out after dark unless you're covered up. It's all pretty simple stuff.
- 28:31 The Americans, they make the Medical Officer responsible for malaria precautions. Our system, we make the Commanding Officer responsible. As soon as the Commanding Officer is responsible, it becomes a command., "You do it or else." The Medical Officer can cajole all he likes. Our system was much broader. And we got that through to the Americans. When they sacked a few
- 29:00 battalion commanders for having too much malaria. I'll tell you what... Field Marshall William Slim did that in Burma. He sacked the first three battalion commanders that had too much malaria. And the others really pulled their socks up and then malaria rate went straight down. It's the Commanding Officers that can fix it. So that's the message I had to teach. But there are all sorts of other messages. There's the message I had learned about
- 29:34 how do you build a toilet somewhere where you have a water table three inches under the soil? How would you build a toilet to last two years when you've got a water table three inches under the ground? You see, it's very difficult. And the answer is flaming furies. You get forty-four gallon drums that your the petrol comes in,
- 30:01 or the avgas [aviation gas] comes in. You fashion a seat to go across the half drum. You fashion chimney to go up the back. People used that as an ordinary toilet. And in the middle of the night, or at a certain time, they come along and they put range fuel, which is halfway between petrol and kerosene. You put a cupful of that in, put a match to it,
- 30:30 and the flue just burns it. And you can use it for two years, as much as you like, and you won't get much more than that much ash in the bottom of it. Completely hygienic. So it's tricks like that... Otherwise you start trying to dig deep trench latrines. I mean it doesn't run the sewerage out into the fields, you know.
- 31:00 You dig even shallow trench latrines, you finish up without any land left to dig them. If you've got five thousand soldiers you've got a fair bit of rubbish. What are you going to do with the rubbish? If you don't do it properly, you're going to attract too many little pests and rats. So there's a trick to that, too. How do you get rid of your mosquitoes? If you've got breeding areas, you get rid of them, but how do you get rid of them after that? For instance, if you are within eight hundred yards of a village, breeding mosquitoes,
- 31:30 and the mosquitoes are catching malaria from the villagers, and they fly eight hundred yards and they bite you. So you how do you fix that trick? And it's all those sorts of things that I took with me that the

Americans, as smart as they are, didn't know. One of the most remarkable things with the Americans, that I found, they would stitch up every wound. Now, a little lesson in

- 32:00 military surgery... If somebody is hit by a bullet, you don't stitch them up. You cut out all the dead stuff. You make sure that the wound will drain and not block up. Then you just wait for a couple of days and have a peek at it. And if the wound is nice and clean, after three or four days, you can then stitch it up.
- 32:38 But what you don't do, is when that soldier comes in, you don't stitch it up finely and nicely and say, "Look at my handiwork." Because it will finish up in two days a bag of pus, gas gangrene, you'll kill the soldier. And this is what happened to the Americans when they first went over there. They didn't learn the lessons of World War II and World War I. And this is why I
- 33:02 became a permanent member of the military forces. This is why I stayed in the army for thirty six years. To pass on that sort of knowledge. To make sure that we never went to war again and were ignorant. And had lost the lessons of history. And that was a simple thing. When it happened in my own hospital, I had a surgeon, when I was a Commanding Officer
- 33:30 in Vietnam, I had a surgeon who was a master surgeon from Melbourne. He was a master surgeon, and in civilian surgery he was literally a master surgeon. He got up there and he stitched everything in sight in the first two days. We had a few casualties. I went along behind him with a scalpel and cut out all his sutures. You can imagine that made him real happy
- 34:00 surgeons being surgeons. Even though I was his boss. I kept saying, "You must not put any sutures in the skin in this. You must make it a draining wound. You must then allow a little bit of bleeding and seepage. Come back in two days and have a look and you will find there will be a bit of muscle there dead, and another bit of muscle there dead and a bit of muscle there. You just snip that out,
- 34:30 then you put a dressing on it, come back in two days. And when it's lovely and pristine and clean and there's no dead muscle left in there, then you stitch it up. And you send the bloke back to Australia." Nothing else needed to be done, you see. The Americans didn't learn that lesson for a while. We were there early.
- 35:03 The American hospital was 36 Evacuation, which was only about five kilometres away from us. It was a big hospital. It had three times as many beds as we had in our hospital, and had ten times as many doctors. But they made that very error. We did, but I fixed it. And it didn't happen any more.
- 35:30 We didn't have, in my time, one soldier die in my hospital. Of all the soldiers that were horribly wounded we didn't have one soldier die in my hospital.

That's a record you've got to be proud of.

Yes. I must admit, a few went back and died back in Australia. One of them was an SAS soldier that we spent a lot of time on.

- 36:01 And the surgeon said, "Whatever you do, don't open him up back there. He's been re-plumbed. Don't open him up. Let our surgeon open him up again, because he knows what he's done." Anyway, somebody opened him up and he didn't survive that. We brought his dad and mum up to the hospital in Vietnam to see him. That's how sick he was.
- 36:30 We got him over that, took him back Australia, but he died in Australia.

And what did you mean that he had been re-plumbed?

Well, I mean that he had had so much surgery that we'd been connecting bits of valves up everywhere. He was shot through the belly. That particular boy was carried kilometres by one man, on his back. He was an SAS soldier. He'd been out on patrol and carried him in.

- 37:02 But he was just one of our casualties. A very badly wounded bloke. But as I say, we didn't have one die. We had plenty of dead come in, don't get me wrong. They came in dead. If they hit us alive, they lived until they got back to Australia.

So what you're saying is that it is essentially hygiene, and making sure all wounds

- 37:30 **get clean and stay clean...**

No, there's a lot more to it than that, and unless you know ballistics... I'm a ballistics expert. You can ask the question why they're building bullets that are as big as match heads now that convey more danger than the big bullets of World War II, which were massive bullets.

- 38:00 And the answer is, the formula EMV squared over two, energy equals mass by velocity squared, right? So it's the velocity that counts, not the mass. So the velocity, we've got extraordinarily high velocity missiles. You could have a pinhead, if that pinhead is doing ten thousand feet per second that will blow you to bits. The cavitation.
- 38:30 If you have a pinhead that hits you at thirty thousand there, it will break every bone in your body. It's the velocity that counts. So if you get a bullet that goes in there and out there, there's normally a much

bigger exit hole, and there's a reason for that.

- 39:01 What it does, when it goes in, all these tissues slow the bullet up and therefore they absorb all the energy. It's just the same as putting a little bit of explosive in there and setting it off, it goes pwhrrrp. Like that. And if you take slow motion of an arm or a leg, it will swell up like that then go back to where it is. What that means is that it actually causes a whole lot of damage to
- 39:30 muscles, quite remote from where the bullet track is. So you will find dead muscle here, dead muscle there. So you've got to take at least the width of the limb, above and below, and you've got to clean out that cavity. Now a cavity that blows up like that has always got to collapse. If you've got a pair of trousers, you get shot in there, it goes out there. You don't run around in the nude when you get shot
- 40:00 by the enemy. You've always got a pair of trousers on. A big cavity forms, it goes down and it sucks in. It sucks in material. I've seen material from down there. Right down there inside the muscle, I've seen it up in there. It sucks in mud. It sucks in anything that's near that wound.

Even as far as ten inches away?

- 40:30 As far as the circumference of that limb, so there or there. So you've got to make sure. You've got to cut that out for a start. And you open that up and you clean that cavity. You make sure there are no foreign bodies in there and then you leave it open. You make sure then, after two or three days, that there's no dead muscle in there. Or no dead anything. There might be a little bit of skin dead.
- 41:01 You can see, live muscles are red and shiny and nice. Dead muscle is grey or black, so you just snip that out, cover it up for again for a couple of days. Open it up again, lo and behold, nothing, then you stitch it up. Nothing too fancy. But it's, as I say, soldiers quite often like
- 41:30 their war wounds with scars, so they don't really need a lot of plastic surgery. I don't think I've ever seen a soldier have plastic surgery on his limbs. I've seen it on the face. I've seen plenty of soldiers showing off their wounds.

Tape 7

- 00:32 **Bill, I wanted to ask you because you were an officer in the army so young, was there any hierarchy problems between you and the men?**

They called me the Boy Wonder, the Boy Colonel and a whole lot of other things, but they fought for me on many occasions. They didn't fight the enemy, but they fought their own soldiers. I can remember in Vietnam, I caught a truck home.

- 01:00 I used to send the trucks out on R & R. And this particular night I went into town to have a beer. Vung Tau was a sort of place where even the enemy didn't attack. Vung Tau was a special place, really. That was where the hospital was located. I can remember coming back in the truck with a whole lot of engineers.
- 01:36 The engineers made a crack. I was sitting in the front of the truck. And they didn't know I was there. I was in mufti. "That bloody colonel of yours..." I heard one of my blokes say to him, "Don't you talk about my colonel that way." This, that and the other, and the next minute it was on.
- 02:00 When I hauled them out the next morning I said, "What was that all about?" And they said, "Somebody cast some aspersions about somebody." And I said, "Who?" Being soldiers, they were terribly loyal and they do their things right. "I would rather not say so, sir." So I let it go. But I know that happened on many occasions, somebody had a bit of a go. They were loyal to me and I was loyal to them.
- 02:30 Loyalty goes upwards and downwards. I used to punish them. But they knew they deserved it. We've got a very good association now. We've just had a meeting, here at Noosa. They all came to Noosa. And we had a lovely dinner over at the convention centre. And a couple of them said, "I remember the time you caught me coming through the wire after hours. Why did you have to take all the stripes off me?" I said
- 03:00 "What would have happened if I didn't take stripes off you?" They said, "Well, we would have kept on doing it." "Yeah," I said, "And you finished up there." They said, "Yeah, I'm glad you did it." There was no rank or anything. They knew they would be punished if they did something wrong. And creeping out through a perimeter wire, at night, is not on. And they knew that. The danger was theirs. And apart from that, we had people
- 03:30 on that perimeter with machine guns. "Who goes there?" If you chose not to give the password, next minute you would be dead. So it's very dangerous. We had a few things, but they used to call me 'The Old Man'. All COs are called 'The Old Man'. And I used to think,
- 04:01 "One minute I'm the bloody Boy Colonel, the next minute I'm The Old Man. What am I?" No, my soldiers were good soldiers. The regulars and the national servicemen were superb. They did everything asked of them. I brought them all back without one dead. I had one or two finished out in insane asylums.

They were sent back

04:31 from there. And there's been a lot of them died since. I don't know why that is. I don't think it's through anything that happened in Vietnam. I'm not a believer in Agent Orange. I was on the Agent Orange Royal Commission. Justice Everett. I was his adviser and his doctor. I went over there as Doctor Rodgers.

05:00 I was the first soldier back in Vietnam after the war, on the Royal Commission. That Royal Commission came up with the fact that there was really nothing. That Agent Orange was pretty well harmless. From a scientific point of view I totally agreed with the legal investigation. The legal outcome of that was there was nothing to it. But of course, there is a whole lot of

05:30 Vietnam veterans who would like to think, would like to excuse their lifestyles and how they finished up now, on Agent Orange and what happened. Now, I'm not saying there weren't other things in Vietnam. People have bad experiences in battle and that sort of thing. But Agent Orange wasn't one of them as far as I was concerned.

06:02 I was there in the battle of Long Tan, I saw what happened. I was literally there.

I just wanted to make sure that after you did the gathering of intelligence for the army, you came back to Australia, and then you were posted to Vietnam. Was that straight after or...

No, I came back from Malaya,

06:30 I went to England. I came back from England and for about six months I was teaching the young doctors. I was at army headquarters, then I was promoted colonel and told I was going in command of 2 Field Ambulance and I was going to Vietnam. That was just leading up to November-December of 1965. The 19th of April, I went to war.

07:00 The beauty of me going, probably, was that I had already been to Vietnam, remember, and I already knew Saigon. In my mind's eye I had a picture of what to expect. I had a picture of the diseases. I had no fear of that as a battle theatre. People were crying all sorts of dire results. That our soldiers would go over there and die. I had no fear of that at all. Because I had seen what was there, and I knew that with our experience, with our

07:30 discipline and with our good soldiers that we would be superb. So, that was probably the beauty. I was an optimist. I won't say that I was happy to go to war, but I was happy that Australian soldiers were going into that war. I knew what we were going into... So, we went to war.

08:00 I went on the advance party. I was the advance advance party. I had about fifteen fellows go on the... I went by air by myself, with the general and a few others. The advance party, about fifteen of my soldiers... I took a hundred and twenty-one men. The advance party was about fifteen of them, and the rest came up on the Sydney. A hundred and twenty-one medics.

08:31 This was my hospital...

That you were setting up?

This was my hospital. This was what was called 2 Field Ambulance. Ambulance, in French, means a little travelling hospital following the army. That's the true name of an ambulance, so when we talked about 2 Field Ambulance, we didn't talk about a four wheeled thing with a siren on the front.

09:00 It is a little hospital following an army. So that's what 2 Field Ambulance was. I had a hundred and twenty-one men. I originally had something like one hundred and eighty men, but a fair bit of bartering was done between... The Australian government decided it was only going to send a certain number. Then the bartering started.

09:30 The infantry said they wanted the whole lot. The artillery said they wanted the whole lot. The tank corps wanted to send a full regiment. Obviously, I'm exaggerating, but every corps fought to get as much as they could. Now, what should have happened was to say this was a two battalion task force. The two battalions were there, they required this, this and this.

10:00 And that should be dispassionate and should have been done as a structural thing and should have been done with all the knowledge we had of army structures. Instead of which, army headquarters got into a whole lot of argy-bargy. Instead of sending what should have been a full field ambulance, in my opinion... One of our senior blokes, the Commanding Officer of the School of Army Health that I mentioned before,

10:30 by now he's gone on. He's at army headquarters. He negotiated a reduction, without talking to me as the Commanding Officer, he negotiated a reduction of the numbers of men I took. So my men had to work very hard. And it was extraordinarily hard. And they worked twenty-four hours a day. When the need arose, they worked all the time. They were working harder than any other soldiers in that area were.

11:00 So I blamed my own directorate, the medical directorate of army headquarters for, without talking to me, reducing the numbers of soldiers I took. They did it arbitrarily. They didn't even allow me to design

which ones they'd take. They just took them

11:30 and said, "You get on with it." Now that was unfair. And I've now said... That's probably the only angry thing I've got to say about any of the wars. It was an unfair chair born soldier. And Wally, I had more respect for him than that. He was a good soldier, but he did the dirty on me. At least, him and his mates did the dirty on me. And one of his mates might have been an infantryman.

12:00 I don't know who got the others. But if I gave up, let's say, probably thirty positions, somebody got an extra thirty, somewhere in that force.

Could you manage with the hundred and twenty that you got?

I had to manage. Whether I could have or not, I had to. And they just had to work as hard as I worked them in order to do what we did. In the army, you work seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day. You don't have

12:30 shifts. You don't have days off. Public holidays. You worked all the time. And they just worked harder than anyone else. And they need not have had we had the correct establishment. The establishment is the people that comprise the unit.

What were your orders, Bill, when you first arrived?

13:01 In Australia, they didn't really know what was going on. But I arrived by myself. I arrived in Saigon. I went to see the general, and he was a lovely man. Very bright man. I went to see my brigadier. The brigadier in charge of the task force. Brigadier OD Jackson. Brigadier OD Jackson controlled the task force, and he also

13:30 controlled the whole force. Just as I controlled the hospital, I also was the senior medical officer of all the Australians in the whole of Vietnam. There were other Australians apart from the task force. They were all over Vietnam. We had a hundred or more of them. And there were other units that were there. There were air force units and there were navy units. I was also in charge of all of those. They weren't at Vung Tau or Nui Dat.

14:01 The navy unit was at somewhere else. And the air force unit was at Cam Ranh Bay. So I went there, but I knew the Australian task force was going into Nui Dat. I knew that the Australian Logistics Support Group was going into Vung Tau. Vung Tau was a lovely little French peninsula.

14:30 It was a holiday place. Beautiful hotels. Beautiful beaches. Palm trees. French chic everywhere. It was a bit down at heel by the time we got there. Certainly was after we'd been there for a while. When I arrived, the commander of Vung Tau was a chap called Dave Rouse. He was a lieutenant colonel the same as me. We were

15:00 the only lieutenant colonels at ALSG [Australian Logistics Support Group]. There were five lieutenant colonels in the whole of Vietnam. And the brigadier. There was two battalion commanders, the ALSG commander and me. There was five of us, and

15:31 there was the brigadier. Everybody came into Vung Tau. All of the battalions, everything, came into Vung Tau. Onto the sand dunes to the north east of the actual township. Vung Tau is right on the tip of this peninsula, and we took all of the western side. All it was all sand dunes.

16:00 That's all it was. Just sand dunes. It had been a firing range for the French, so there was unexploded bombs all hidden in the sand. I can remember walking those sand dunes with Dave Rouse, saying, "The hospital will go there." I said, "No, it won't. The hospital should go there because that's in the middle and we would have other people protecting us." We didn't know if we were going to be shot at, or what was going to happen at that stage. That was Day One. He said, "All right. As a rule

16:30 the hospital should go in the centre." I said, "Okay." And the hospital did go in the centre. The engineers went out there, and others in transport went there. Stores went in the middle. All the big logistics store depot. So Dave and I did that. We got the perimeter right. Got people working on it. Pegged out a bit of it. My fifteen people came and we put up tents. The first

17:00 thing we had was this tented hospital. Before we left, we prepared. Quite obviously, I'm not going to operate in sand. So we had a big tent. A twenty by forty tent. A modern tent, it was a very good one. And we put a wooden floor in it, across the whole thing, then we cut the wooden floor up into jigsaw bits. Then we stacked them altogether and we took them with us to Vietnam. So when we got there, number one

17:30 went into number two. So we had a wooden floor off the sand, and we air-conditioned that tent. So we had an operating theatre from Day One. We had a few people wounded, or a few people with appendicitis, or whatever it was. But we didn't get any people shot, or really with broken arms and that sort of thing. We didn't really get any enemy casualties for a while.

18:00 Then after about two weeks, the engineers came in. This sand was very fine sand. So when you were carrying a casualty you sunk into the sand. We had helicopter pads out there, and when they came in, sand was blowing everywhere. We had bloody sand caving in on the tents. So I said, "Look, we've really got to put some concrete pads down."

- 18:30 So it then became concrete pads and tents. Except for the officers' mess and all the other. All of where you slept... I slept in sand for the whole twelve months. And the officers' mess was in sand. Sand was in everything. Every conceivable thing had sand. So anyway, the hospital itself started to grow. The big marquees were on concrete after a month or two. Then Long Tan happened.
- 19:01 But let me say before that, we then went north. After a week or two the brigadier came down and said, "Look, you're my SMO [Senior Medical Officer], please come north with me. We're taking the two battalion commanders. We're going to take the transport boss, because he has to bring all the convoys up. So we'll fly in in a Chinook, and we'll have a look at the ground where we are going." So all of us tottered over, like little kids.
- 19:30 (BREAK)
- 20:00 (BREAK)
- But anyway, we got in a Chinook, a big double engine helicopter and we flew out with our weapons. We landed at Nui Dat. Nui Dat means little hill, small hill. It was in the
- 20:30 middle of a Michelin rubber plantation. Apart from Malaya, Vietnam is the biggest rubber manufacturer. Michelin had all their forests there. Michelin tyres. So the brigadier said, "Let's just walk over here." He said, "I think that's a good place for the headquarters. And Bill, you better start thinking about water and rubbish and lavatories."
- 21:03 The next minute all hell let loose. The bloody enemy were there. They were everywhere. The Viet Cong were just everywhere. They owned the village only five hundred yards away. They saw us coming all right. We weren't Little Lord Fauntleroy's when we left there. We left with unseemly haste. People being thrown into the helicopter by the seats of their trousers.
- 21:30 I landed on top of the brigadier. But anyway, we got out of there a damn sight quicker than we got in. A lot of people have a go at the Americans. I love the Americans. They're a bit brash if you get a lot of them together. But individually they are nice people, they are genuine people. The Americans came in and cleared our area for us.
- 22:01 Australia didn't even clear their own area. The Yanks' seasoned troop came in, and they took a lot of death clearing that area of the enemy so that we could move in. Anybody ever says anything about the Americans, they certainly saved us a lot of lives. They saved our green troops from... By green, I mean they'd never fired a shot in anger.
- 22:32 The 5th Battalion and the 6th Battalion were there. And the 5th Battalion was made up of green troops, all of them. The 6th Battalion, half of them were from 2 RAR [Royal Australian Regiment], from my old battalion. So half of 6th Battalion wasn't green. But the other half was. And all of those people from Touro [?] had split up, gone throughout the army, they all trained and were promoted up. So the Yanks,
- 23:00 I thought, were superb, and I was forever grateful to them. It could have been a bloodbath if our soldiers had gone. Our soldiers were brave, they would do anything. But green troops, not quite knowing, not quite acclimatised. All the exercises in the world doesn't get you ready for the real thing. Anyway, two weeks later, the Yanks had been through, got a lot of dead.
- 23:31 We then took over our land and put up a perimeter. Bill went back in there and showed them which wells to dig, and tested all their water, and made a nice place for a rubbish dump, and told them how to get their water, and how to stop the mosquitoes, and dig their ponds out. Which were the good ones and which were the bad ones. We did all that. Deep trench latrines we used there,
- 24:00 because the water table was fairly low.
- This is for establishing the Australian base?**
- This is where the fighting soldiers were. The task force. This was where the two battalions was based in Nui Dat. The logistic force, including the hospital, was based back at Vung Tau. Now, it was only twenty miles away.
- 24:32 **So most of your patients came by helicopter?**
- All of my patients came from helicopters. That's why I got the OBE [Order of the British Empire]. I arranged, as soon as I got in there, one of the things I did with my American mates... For three weeks I was teaching them how to do all these things. What they should do with malaria and what they shouldn't do. Well, they were sucking my brains dry, let me put it that way. I wasn't so much teaching them, they were asking me questions. A fellow called Bob Joy, he's a lifelong friend,
- 25:00 he was in charge of the Walter Reed Institute of Research and he was there to try and stop malaria, and all the other diseases. So he got me to talk to the Operational Medical Officers and commanders. So while I was up there, I met a fellow called Williams. Major Williams. I will never forget him. He said, "Hey, what are you guys doing down there in Phuoc Tuy Province for medivac?"
- 25:30 I said, "We've got ambulances." He said, "Ambulances are okay. I mean choppers. What are you doing?"

I said, "Well, the Australian air force is going to do something for us." He said, "What training have they had in dust-off?" I said, "What's dust-off?" He said, "Dust-off's our world for aero medivac. Real time aero medivac."

- 26:01 I said, "Well, I'm not sure. I don't think they've had any." He said, "Guy, come with me." So I went with Major Williams, who was a wide man, not fat, but wide, a wide, square jaw. He was medical corps chopper pilot. He said, "Hop in the chopper."
- 26:32 And I hopped in the chopper. We were in Saigon. And the Saigon River goes right through Saigon. It's part of the Mekong. He said, "Now I'll show you what we teach pilots to do." And he flew that chopper flat out, that far above the water. It was so close that his skids were tipping the water.
- 27:09 I said, "Well, you know, that's very impressive." I said, "Why do you do that?" He said, "Let me tell you guy. The Viet Cong will shoot you if you're below two thousand feet, if they can see you. So, we go in fast and low. We pick the casualty and we go out fast and low,
- 27:30 until we reach maximum speed and then we pull back the stick and go up." We went straight up as if we were in a lift, at maximum speed. That way the Viet Cong can't shoot you. Because they use the Red Cross as a firing... There is absolutely no recognition of the Red Cross. Never. It was just the reverse. It was a good aiming point.
- 28:02 So, I was very impressed with Major Williams. I went back to my boss and I said, "Look I want the 144th Dust-Off Company," or whatever it was called, "to be our dust-offs." So, from then on, the Americans said, "You guys are up here helping us out. You're the only ones here helping us out. Colonel Rodgers you came up here and helped us out, so we'll
- 28:30 send you down some dust-off." So for the rest of that war, while I was there, they gave us two helicopter ships, with two pilots each and a crewman, and a medic. Four people in each ship. And they lived with us. They used to rotate. They'd go back to their base after a week. But they lived with us for the whole thirteen months that I was there. And they saved
- 29:00 hundreds of lives. Just absolutely marvellous people. So that was a little offshoot of meeting the Yanks and knowing how to do it, and that's why I got the OBE. For arranging that.

And so you should. You saved hundreds of lives.

In my opinion, they saved hundreds. They saved not only lives. There was live ones that they took out. They were supposed to be army medical aircraft, but they'd take out live ones,

- 29:30 they'd take out dead ones. Our dead bodies all came out with them. They just piled out with them. They'd just throw people in with broken legs. They didn't have time, they were being shot at. So they just picked up and threw them in. I saw one come in with twenty people on board. They were only meant for eight people. I saw one with thirty-two Vietnamese soldiers, on one chopper. I don't know how it flew.
- 30:04 The Australian task force is in place now. We organised all the things. We've got the dust-off up there with the task force. They didn't stay back at the base. They stayed there, with the task force. They weren't like the Australian air force. The Australian air force had a base back at Vung Tau. Every night they'd go home and have their little place back there. The American dust-off stayed with us,
- 30:31 and did everything with us. Now I had arranged that my hospital was there. One section which comprised twenty-one men, I put forward. So in this task force area at Nui Dat, I had a little hospital up there, too. One doctor, twenty-one men. Remember the battalions and the field regiment each had a doctor. So there was
- 31:00 one, two, three doctors. Plus the doctor in my little area. So there was four doctors in the task force. Then I had about six doctors back in the hospital, with myself. Then about five miles away, on the other side of Vung Tau, we had the American Evacuation Hospital, where if we got full I could send people.
- 31:30 **Would casualties go to the small Nui Dat one to be checked out before going to Vung Tau?**
- It all depends. If they had a scratch on their foot, they'd go up there. But then again, they didn't get flown out if they had a scratch on their foot. If they couldn't work, let's say. If they tripped over and sprained their ankle so much they couldn't carry their pack, or couldn't keep up with their battalion,
- 32:01 you haven't got any jeeps out there to take them back. And if you did, the enemy would grab you as soon as you left the battalion. So all casualty evacuation out of the forward area when the battalions were out from the base. The battalions went out from that base. They went out fighting. And all those were taken back by choppers. Now, not only were the dust-off used...
- 32:30 We had the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] re-supply by helicopter. They would bring all the ammunition up, they would bring all the food up. Sometimes they even brought hot food up in there. They'd be out fighting away, they'd need ammunition, and the helicopters would bring it in. Now when they go out, you send all the medivacs out with them. The sprained ankles, the people who have got a fever, and that sort of thing. So the dust-offs were kept for the people who were shot or really sick.

You were there in

33:00 Vietnam during the battle of Long Tan?

Yeah. I was Commanding Officer there, I was right there. I was under it.

Can you tell us about that?

Yep. It happened very quickly. We hadn't had a lot of casualties up until then. It happened in September. We got there in April. We had ones or twos and things, but we hadn't had a lot of casualties in a heap.

33:30 We were preparing, getting everything ready. We knew it was going to happen sooner or later. Anyway, this particular night... I had been up there all day on the task force. One day in Saigon, two days in the task force, four days in the hospital. Every night I'd go back to the hospital. Because casualties came in, and they were sure to come in at night, and I was one of the surgeons. And I was certainly one the physicians as well, so they needed me there.

34:00 But I was Commanding Officer as well, so I had to direct who did what. So, the first thing was I'd just come back from the task force, and we got a message signal through that we'd taken casualties. Mortars. And what had happened,

34:30 the enemy was outside the perimeter, and he was firing mortars, and he was pretty good with mortars. You fire in the air, it comes down and lands there. It's fired from a tube, you stick them down the tube, and they go up and come down. Now, he landed his first lot on the engineers.

35:02 Then there was the logistics group over there, and a gap, but he missed the gap and then through that hole. We had funk holes or pits, weapons pits, where you get when the bombs are going off. But there wasn't any overhead cover on them. They hadn't put overhead cover on them. For some reason, I never ever found out. Because there were no bombs,

35:30 we had control of the air. Unlike World War II where you put things on top of your pits, they didn't. All the pits were open at that stage, and we were in a rubber plantation and what happened... Normally, mortars go off, boom, and if we'd been in the pits and there'd been no rubber trees there, we would have been all right. But they were hitting the rubber trees. Some of them might air burst, meaning they went off before they hit the ground. But some of them weren't

36:00 and they were hitting the rubber tress and going off. So we got a lot of injuries. We got nineteen in that night. They were all from shrapnel on the upper body. And this was because there was no overhead cover. They were all bundled up and dust-off brought them down, and everything was beautiful. We got no dead. No dead. But I think it was nineteen. So my surgeon's flat out, and I'm flat out, and

36:30 the surgeon worked all night. I didn't. I was buggered by about midnight. The surgeon kept going on a couple of bad ones. But everything was all right. I think we took all but about three of those, who went over to the Americans. I can't remember the numbers, but I recall that we took the majority of them and very few went to the Americans, of that lot. And a couple of little stories arose out of that. My medical officer was by

37:00 the name of Ted Hefferton. And I learned this well after. It's funny how you hear the brave things that happened, but you don't hear about them at the time. Because if I had heard at the time, I would have done something about it. But I heard that Ted, he was a doctor in our group. Nobody injured in our group. They landed some off in there, but there was nobody injured. They all dropped in funk holes and they were all right. But Ted was

37:30 a big hefty young man. Ted Hefferton. And hairy, the hairiest man. A lovely gentle bloke, but Ted evidently, he heard someone squeaking that was wounded, and actually got out of the funk hole and went and got him and took him back in. Under a mortar attack, that's pretty brave. But Ted did that, and I heard about it afterwards. He's laughed it off when I've mentioned it.

38:02 But that was Ted Hefferton. He's a surgeon now in Geelong, and a very good one. Anyway, what happened then, all the casualties came in and we were buggered. The next day we had to do some more operating. There's never just one operation, because as I explained to you before, you open up, and then two days later or three days later, you've got a whole lot more operations, because you then have to look to make sure you got all the muscle and stuff.

38:31 So you never do one operation on a casualty, you're doing two or three operations on everyone. So, anyway, we were all tired. The soldiers were all tired. They'd worked all night. Things quietened down a bit. But what happened was, the following morning, Delta Company were tasked to go out and find out what happened,

39:00 on the mortar site, where the mortars were let off. We had a div [division] locating battery and this is a battery that detects incoming missiles and lines up our guns to land where they are. So while their mortars are in the air, as soon as they fire, the radars will detect them, it will then direct the big guns

39:32 where that site is and then fire. So you can have ones coming down on him, while he's got ones coming down on you. That fast. And it worked. The div locating battery got them, and we had shots in the air before all theirs landed. So we knew there was something out there. So Delta Company 6 RAR were

sent.

40:05 One company, that's D Company. A company's got three platoons. A Company has 1, 2, 3. B Company has 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12. Delta Company's got 10, 11 and 12. So 12 Platoon was at the head, and D Company was at the back.

Sorry, we need to change the tape.

Tape 8

00:32 Where we were was the Battle of Long Tan and Delta Company 12 Platoon up, 10 and 11 Platoon back, within the company perimeter. Major Smith, the OC of the company was with them. I'm not sure where

01:00 company headquarters were, but it would have been somewhere with 10 and 11 Platoon. Anyway, 12 Platoon hit enemy. They were following blood trails. There was a buffalo cart track, leading away from the mortar plate, where the mortars were. And there was blood trails as well.

01:30 So they were following the blood trails and the cart tracks. And through the rubber, again more rubber, and they came upon the enemy. And there was a lot of them. Now, they didn't know what they hit. But in retrospect, we know what they hit. They hit D445, which was

02:00 a brigade of Viet Cong. It was one of their regular brigades. They weren't Mickey Mouse soldiers. I don't know how many in that brigade, but there were many hundreds, if not thousands. They were not as big as our brigades. Our brigades was

02:31 between two and three thousand. They weren't as big as ours. One could say between a thousand or two thousand. Anyway, 12 Platoon was up, 10 and 11 Platoon was behind them, and 12 Platoon hit the enemy.

03:01 And 12 Platoon immediately got into a firefight. Now it was coming onto dusk by the time all this happened. Late afternoon. It was raining and they were in a small rubber plantation. There was a lot of fire going on. The platoon commander was killed almost outright.

03:32 The platoon was taken over by Bob Buick. Bob was one of our corporals in 2 Battalion in Malaya. So I remembered Bob very well. And Buddy Leigh was an aboriginal corporal with us in Malaya. There were others from Malaya that I remembered. Anyway, Buddy was badly wounded. He got one in the hip.

04:04 Bob had minor wounds. And a whole lot of them were killed as the firefight went on. Bob told me later that in the end he had to try and get out, so he took the last five out. Only he and five got out,

04:35 out of that initial firefight. At this time, obviously, the armour was being called in. We had APCs [Armoured Personnel Carriers], in those days, machine guns on top of them. And we had choppers. The fighting choppers

05:01 which had weapons on them as well. The artillery was called in as well. So our artillery back at that base could fire. Some of that big artillery they could fire from twenty-six kilometres away, and very accurately. So, there was a fair bit of

05:31 support on the way for 12 Company. But then the enemy was more than they thought. They started to surround the whole company. Instead of just surrounding 12 Platoon, they started around. So Harry, Major Smith and these other two platoons got into a firefight as well. At that time, I understand, I wasn't there, I understand that the armour arrived and they started firing onto the side,

06:00 on one flank. There was a lot of mud around, and they were running over enemy as well as using their weapons. So, eventually, with the weight of support, artillery and others, the enemy withdrew slightly.

06:31 And our people, our helicopters were able to come in. That's dust-off as well as the RAAF. This time the RAAF were there. There were too many casualties for just two dust-off. So I was, in the end, tired as all hell from the night before. And here it is the next night now. And six choppers arrive, full of casualties and dead and everything. So, we

07:00 got stuck into it again. I think, this time, we got twenty-seven casualties and nineteen dead. We sent thirteen of the casualties to the 36 Evac. And we kept fourteen. As far as my memory goes... I'm pretty sure that's right. And we had nineteen dead.

07:30 We put the nineteen dead in our little tent mortuary. By this time, we had practised a lot of things, so the RSM had been able to take a lot of weaponry from the dead and from the wounded. Previously, we had found that soldiers would come in with grenades, dead soldiers with grenades with the pin out. So you would be underneath him and roll him over, and it would kill everybody

08:01 in the hospital. So you had to watch very carefully. Every patient that came off those helicopters, the RSM, who was a marvellous man called Ted Parry, he used to check. He had a weapons pit. So if there

was anything live, he'd drop that down the pit so it couldn't hurt anyone. If it was a weapon he would put it aside. But there was

- 08:30 half pins out of grenades and all that sort of thing, so we couldn't allow that to go into our triage tent, where we did all our sorting out and resuscitating and x-raying, and then they went on to the operating theatres, we couldn't have that. But the dead was hived off and went to the morgue. Anyway, we operated all damn night. I remember Sapper Jones, who was our sapper, he was a carpenter.
- 09:00 We had one carpenter on each establishment. He came and helped me. I was taking stuff out of this bloke's chest. Luckily it wasn't a big bit. It wasn't a big bit, it was a piece of shrapnel. It had blown a hole in here, but it hadn't blown a hole into his chest. It was stuck onto what's called the pleura, which is the lining of the chest.
- 09:31 And Jonesy said, "I don't feel too good, boss." I said, "Neither do I. Look at the other fellows out there." He said, "Yeah, but that's not what I mean." He said, "I'm not used to this sort of thing." I said, "Grit your teeth." He said, "Right, boss." So he gritted his teeth and got on with it. But this particular bloke... Our anaesthetists were all tied up and I had two surgeons going. And I was there,
- 10:00 I had been directing traffic. There was still a heap of casualties. So I had to do some. I put them on a berush [?] and put a bit of local anaesthetic... This thing was like a claw that had clawed its way in. And every time I touched the claw it made him cough. Every time he coughed he scraped his lung on where I took the claw out. There was no bleeding inside, luckily. And he didn't have any air in him.
- 10:31 It wasn't a sucking wound. But it must have been just touching on the lining of his chest, without penetrating it. And it was a ticklish thing. "Why's he coughing?" Sapper Jones said. I said, "If you irritate the pleura, that's why they cough. And that's what I'm doing. I'm irritating his pleura." He said, "If that's that lining, why hasn't it gone through? And if it does is he going to die?"
- 11:01 I said, "He will if he sucks air in... He won't die, but I will have to block it up, otherwise he will get a tension inside there and he will pump himself up and he will die then." He said, "That's pretty touchy." I said, "Yeah." He's listening to all this, the soldier, mind you, I've just got local into it. So Jonesy said, "Hey mate, it's nothing to do with you. It's between me and the colonel." But anyway, we got it off, and just jissed it up a bit and he was all right.
- 11:30 But that was a simple one. I used to do arms and legs. One of my other surgeons used to do bellies, and one did the heads. So we took it in turns. Anyway, we got through that all right. I didn't do much. I was the CO. I had to do less than anyone else probably.
- Bill, can you talk us through one of the more complicated procedures that you would have to do?**
- Oh, yeah.
- 12:00 We used to look after the Viet Cong. They would get more wounded than we got. I had a nasty experience with the Korean MASH [Mobile Army Surgical Hospital]. The Republic of Korean troops were there. We used to call them ROKs, R O Ks. The Koreans, they had this MASH. This Mobile Army Surgical Hospital. It wasn't mobile. It was in a big mansion,
- 12:31 and they had their operating theatre set up in there. Their job was supposed to look after the enemy wounded and that sort of thing. I spent all night operating on a whole lot of enemy once. We took them down there, and they were all dead in the morning. The ones I operated on, we put them in the ROK MASH, and they were all dead in the morning.
- 13:00 They weren't dead of natural means. So this meant to me that if anyone was going to kill prisoners, it wasn't going to be me. And I never sent another prisoner after that, to the Koreans or anyone else. I looked after every prisoner in our hospital. I lived by the Geneva Convention, so... That's the build-up to the story. What happened was we had a little fellow come in who was beautifully stitched up by one of our machine guns.
- 13:33 Zapped him and pulled him down like that. You could see he was a good machine gunner. He put a bullet through there, and he had his arm up like that, and one through there, one through his belly, one through his knee and one through there. So he stitched him right through. This fellow came in and he was bleeding pink lolly water. One gasp every thirty seconds.
- 14:01 And I looked at him and I looked at everyone else, and the surgeon looked at me and said, "Well, let's get to it." He was unconscious. And so he zipped him the centre, put a towel in, put it on his liver, stopped him bleeding, filled him full of blood through wherever we could get things in. Fixed him up. Got his blood pressure up
- 14:31 and we started operating on him. I operated on that elbow, that knee and that. The surgeon operated on his belly. And, in fact, within a week, I had to cut this leg off. I might say his belly was all right, everything was okay, mine was the last one to heal. I was the worst surgeon by the look of it.
- 15:04 But this little Stumpy, we called him 'Stumpy'. He was Stumpy Mark 3. Because every time we got one... He became my batman and he stayed with me for the rest of the war as my batman. And he followed me

around. We gave him a prosthetic leg. And I never used to send them to prisoner of war compounds. I let them go. So, that was Stumpy. But there was a whole lot of others.

- 15:31 The nasty ones, if they were lightly wounded, I used to send to the Americans. The Americans were good with them, but the Koreans... I would never send them back to the Koreans. So that was walking you through an operation.(BREAK) When they come in, in the triage, off the helicopter, onto the helicopter pad, walked in, no weapons, into the triage.
- 16:00 The triage, the most senior person present, usually the senior surgeon, would look at them and say, "Well, he's not as bad as the other one. We'll operate on him first. This one second, and that one third, that one fourth." Now, we'd take blood. We'd have blood ready for them. We'd cross-match him. Make sure what it says on his dog tags is what he really has. So you have to cross-match, to make sure the blood you have is not incompatible with his.
- 16:30 You haven't got blood, then you've got to run out there and start bleeding blood on the hoof, some soldiers somewhere. Having done that, you then take x-rays of wherever they're injured. The average is about six or seven x-rays. You've got to take different shots. You get lots of shrapnel and stuff in and you've got to know where it is.
- 17:02 So having taken your x-rays, that takes a little while. Meanwhile they've had a painkiller. You ask them the questions about when they last ate. As soon as they're wounded, none of their food digests, and that can kill them quicker than anything. Because under the anaesthetic they will vomit, choke themselves. You are very wary about that. So, having
- 17:30 done all that, you then take them into the operating theatre, with their x-rays, their blood arrives. So the blood goes up if they need some. The surgeon then quickly does the cut, he saucerises it, makes sure that it's like a saucer. So that it drains,
- 18:00 so that it hasn't got any deep pockets left in it that can form up and build up pus and whatever. He makes sure that all the de-vitalised bits that he can see. He squeezes the muscle. Live muscle will shrink away from you if you squeeze it with a pair of forceps. So he does all that. He then says, "Okay, draining well." He then what's called 'packs the wound.' He puts a little bit of jello net, something that doesn't allow it to stick
- 18:30 and allows the fluids to come through. He puts that both sides and lightly bandages it, and puts it in a splint so they can't move. Meanwhile, in here is going massive doses of penicillin. Thirty million units of penicillin, or fifty million units. Massive doses of antibiotic. That fights the gangrene that can occur. Painkiller.
- 19:00 So he wakes up from his anaesthetic, ga-ga. He goes back into the ward, he's all right. As I described to you, two or three days later, another anaesthetic, only a light anaesthetic this time, have a look. A little bit of dead muscle there, little bit there. Take those two bits out. That will be all right, I'll stitch that up now. Or, a little bit dead there, there and there.
- 19:31 I'll take those out then I'll have another look in a couple of days. So he does that. In two days' time, he does another anaesthetic, an even milder one. Stitches it up, just bags it up. There's no real time for niceties. And it doesn't matter much. It's now healing by secondary attention. You don't get the wound together nice and clean, like you would having an appendicitis or something,
- 20:00 or an elective operation. These are gunshot wounds, and you are all the time worried about gas gangrene. If you don't watch them carefully... The penicillin and the antibiotics fight the gas gangrene. You can't get away without doing that surgery. It doesn't matter how much antibiotics you've got, they will still die if you haven't done the surgery right. So, having done all that, the soldier usually being young fit men, usually a few days later they were raring to go.
- 20:30 We used to send them all home if they had a reasonable wound like that. We would send them home to Australia. They would have all the physio [physiotherapy] and get back and strong. Usually they didn't send them back into battle, unless they really wanted to go. My quarter master was a World War II-er, Bill Atkinson, and was a prisoner of war in Changi. He was nineteen years old when he was taken prisoner of war. And he was
- 21:00 an inestimable help with people who were wounded. He was a quartermaster in charge of the all the material and things, and the food, and he used to make sure we had everything we want. But he was a very gentle proper man, and he used to do well by the casualties. So Bill knew what it was all about, also. So we had a few people that knew what it was all about. That's how it worked.
- 21:30 From then on... We would get the big aircraft in from Australia when I had enough casualties, I would call the big aircraft. The air force would bring in one of their Hercs [Hercules] in, filled with beds. The most I ever sent out was about seventy casualties in one lift, I think. They would all be lying and the nurses would be looking after them. Doctors would be on board as well. They would come
- 22:00 to our hospital, usually, and say they were right. Because once the air force take them over, they're not our patients any more. It was their right, and it was right and proper, that they should say that, "Okay, he's ready to fly." We weren't experts on all the peculiar things that happen in the air. And peculiar

things do happen in the air. Limbs swell. If you've got a limb that's compromised anyway,

- 22:30 in a plaster, and it swells, you could kill that man. So you never fly with a complete plaster, you always split the plaster. If you have a wound in the chest, you know Boil's Law, if you know psychics, you know that gas always, as you go up in altitude gas expands. As you come down in altitude, gas contracts. That's why
- 23:00 when you go up a hill your ears pop, and things like that. So if you've got a wound in the chest, with a tiny bit of air in there, when you take them up in an aircraft, and remember a Hercules can only pressurise to six thousand feet. That's the most that it can pressurise to. So that little bit of air that's like a bubble, will go like that. And that will press on his lung and that could kill him. So all of those things the air evacuation know have got to be respected.
- 23:30 And that's the air force's business. That's their expertise, they're on medivac. Our expertise is on the ground, tropical medicine and fixing wounds, in the first instance. So they were all taken back to Australia, usually back to me. When I was in Brisbane, I was in 1 Military Hospital. Between my second and third go. They'd come back to me and convalesce there. Or if any other operations were necessary... Sometimes I'd get them back before they were stitched up
- 24:02 because they had too much to do. They'd come back and we'd do the last operation. They travelled well.
- You were just finished telling about your second night of Long Tan, and all the casualties that come in. Can I ask you to finish...**
- 24:33 We operated all that night, I think. Probably the worst thing about it was the dead. We had nineteen dead. They all had to go to the American morgue, which was a bigger morgue. So I sent them all over there. And we did what was called an Operational Casualty Study return. Not
- 25:00 many people know about this. Mike Morton started it, in 1 RAR. In his battalion. Anybody that was killed, I found out why they were killed. I put a probe in to find out which bullet killed them, or which way the bullet went. Whether it was a bullet, or whatever it was. So I did that, and I had to go in with the nineteen dead, and do that on them, in the small room. So that's probably the most traumatic
- 25:30 part of my war. It wasn't that traumatic, but none of the other doctors would do it, so somebody had to. The following morning Major Smith - the Platoon Commander of 12 - was killed. He had three lieutenants with him. I don't know where the third one came from.
- 26:00 Major Smith and three lieutenants turned up to see their casualties. Do the right thing that Commanding Officers or officers commanding do. And they turned up and I remember they were still jittery. So they should have been. They were talking a lot. They were talking their own way through it.
- In what way?**
- Talking fast. Jittery. Sort of on edge.
- 26:34 I had spoken to Bob Buick, and Bob had a few bits in him. I took them out. He only had a few bits of shrapnel in his neck and they weren't that deep. Necks are like tiger country and unless they were deep I wouldn't have touched them.
- 27:00 I could feel them. So I went in and removed three or four bits from him, under local anaesthetic, talking to him. That's when told me what happened and told me some things that probably nobody else knows about the battle, and who did what, and who didn't do what and what happened when it first happened. I respect his confidence.
- 27:30 Buddy Lee, I remember, Buddy was there. Buddy went into the Yank hospital, the 36 Evac. He was a superb footballer. It was such a pity to see a footballer like him go down with a hip wound. That meant he would never play football again.
- 28:00 Buddy was a good soldier, but an even better footballer.
- Was there times when you had to improvise outside of standard procedure to get the job done?**
- Yeah, well, we were always doing things on the edge. We pinched stuff from the Americans unashamedly. We didn't have a truck, so
- 28:31 I said to them, "Look at that big truck over there. Isn't that a beautiful truck?" It was a multi-fuel truck. It went on petrol, diesel. The Yank that finally gave it up said that it would go on melted butter. I said, "We have to have that truck." We didn't have a truck. We had Land Rovers. We really wanted that truck. That was the truck that I was in the front of when my soldiers
- 29:02 stood up for me. Anyway, I said, "Well, what does he want for it?" And they said, "Slouch hat." I said, "What else?" They said, "He's looking for an Owen machine carbine." We had little Tommy guns, Owen machine carbines. We said, "We can't do one of those. We don't trade in weapons. But hats, yes."

- 29:31 I said, "What else does he want?" They said, "No, that's all." I said, "Try him on half a dozen hats." I could have got away with three, but I gave him half a dozen hats and I got my truck, for the rest of the war. This was a big six-wheeled monster. This truck now would be worth a hundred thousand dollars. We put the flying kangaroo on the side of it, and took all the American stars off.
- 30:00 There it was. It was our truck. The bloody Kiwis were worse than us. They would run around with stencils, they'd put, they had the boxing kiwi, with the poor old kangaroo back, with a kiwi's punch in his face. And the Kiwis put the kiwis on everything. All the Yank planes had a kiwi on them. They would sneak in the middle of the night, and they would stencil a kiwi on the side of a Yank plane. They had to, because the poor buggers didn't have anything. You would think the whole damn army belonged to the kiwis, the way they used those stencils.
- 30:38 Again, back to Long Tan, we got over it quickly. We learnt out of it. It was the biggest first battle. After that we had a few more. Not as big as that, but there were quite a few more. By then time our troops were not green.
- 31:00 We were pretty good. In fact, they did very well at that. They laid out, I think it was, five hundred bodies from the enemy. After the battle, after we withdrew, we called in the B52s and napalm strike. That night, all the casualties were taken out that night and
- 31:30 then they laid in the napalm strikes on where they were. They knew pretty well where they were. And there were still two of us out alive, two of our wounded. They didn't know where they were. They thought they were dead. There were of ours, we got them the next morning, they came in. Two boys. I'll always remember them, both fairly badly wounded. Both lived.
- 32:01 They were fairly twerped off that they'd been left. But I think to give the others their credit, they didn't know they were there. There was a lot of nasty things going on, there were a lot of things that nobody will ever know. I mean, there was a lot our wounded at Long Tan were shot at close range, as though it were a coup de grace, rather than the real thing. It looked as if they'd
- 32:30 been shot through the back of the head as a coup de grace, rather than in a real firefight. Almost as if they were finished off. So there was that. But these two, one of them told me that he had woken up. He was wounded badly, and he had woken up and there was a Viet Cong trying to take his boots.
- 33:05 He must have looked a bit of a mess, but he said to the Viet Cong, "F off!" This is what he told me, and he did. He said he did. And surely afterwards the Australians came through and took him out.
- Now those two fellows, did they suffer burns from the napalm?**
- No. They said
- 33:30 that was the most frightening thing, this bloke told me. The other one, I don't know, I didn't talk to him. The time is now mixing me a little bit. Because I remember casualties from their wounds rather than their names. This fellow said to me, "The bloody napalm came in, and the noise..." He said, "This was just over there. The last bit was twenty yards away." He said, "I couldn't breathe." Evidently it sucks all the oxygen out of the air.
- 34:02 And he said it was very frightening because he couldn't move. He was leaning against a tree, he told me. Anyway, he was brought in the next morning and got over his quite well. The other fellow, he came in with a nasty wound. A big, big wound, in his backside.
- 34:32 As if he had been shot while he was lying down. We got him back in Australia. I can remember him being in hospital when I came back. This was months and months later. The fellow sent me a card, some time later, from outback Queensland. He'd fully recovered. This hole was that big.
- 35:00 And I could see nerves and things in it. I thought, "Jeez, well he's never going to walk. He's never going to have children. He's never going to have anything any more because his nerves to everywhere are gone." Anyway, he said he was walking, he had children, he had a normal sex life. The whole bit. And I was just so surprised at how a bloke could recover like that. I've got him mixed up in my mind with the other chap that was left out.
- 35:31 Because I think it might have been him. I'm not sure. One of them never said anything, never said a thing. In fact, never said anything all the time that he was in hospital. He was pleasant, courteous, but he never talked about it. The other chap squawked to me, straight away. As soon as he came in, he spoke. But that was two blokes that were left out. I mean, everybody was
- 36:00 very shamefaced that this had all happened. They'd been out all night, under a napalm attack. But anyway, all's well that ends well. Well, it ended well for us. They got all the bodies and they laid them out, near one of the towns. And because the town was mainly Viet Cong sympathisers, the townspeople were
- 36:30 allowed to have a glimpse of what happened if you crossed the Australians. They weren't marched past, there was nothing crude like that done. But, they were put, the bodies were put in an area that wasn't real private, put it that way. But I think there was five hundred or six hundred. There was an awful lot. When there was nineteen of ours dead and there were five or six hundred of them.

- 37:03 They were found in a mass grave, actually. So the rest of them had done enough to put them in a mass grave. And we dug them up.
- The fellows that you mentioned earlier, the ones that had been shot at close range, I just want to clarify, was that...**
- That was a suggestion. Well, they were shot at close range, yeah. But remember I did this Operational Casualty Study. But I could never say
- 37:30 for sure whether it was a coup de grace, or whether it was a proper shot, or whether they were wounded that were killed or what. I can't say that. But I did the Operational Casualty Study, that's what killed them. Again, my memory dims. But of the dead, there were quite a few like that. I know from what Bob said that
- 38:00 they were in amongst a lot of rubber. And Bob was saying that the rubber trees were down. They were firing exploding bullets. He thought they were firing exploding bullets which were chopping the trees off. And he said that's what saved them, because the tree then fell, and they had cover. Whereas in a rubber plantation, from there to there is the rubber trees, and they're only
- 38:31 six inch trees. You can't hide behind them. But if they were firing machine guns with exploding bullets, and they were chopping them off...Exploding bullets, of course, were verboten [forbidden], but we used to see exploding bullets. The Geneva Convention, we're the only people that seemed to stick by it. The others are allowed to have dirty tricks department.
- 39:03 If I was allowed near a dirty tricks department I dare say I could do a lot of things. I was suggesting at one time that they allow me to get at the water supply of the enemy. I'd give them so much diarrhoea they wouldn't be able to go to war. Those sort of things are more said in jest than anything else.
- Still, it's not a bad idea...**
- It sounds like a good idea to me. We had plenty of people that could
- 39:30 get there and put it in.
- We will pause there.**

Tape 9

- 00:33 **Bill, the hospital you built from scratch at Vung Tau, did that remain there the whole time the Australians were in Vietnam?**
- Yeah, it did, and when I went back, with the Royal Commission, there were parts of it still there. I built the hospital, first with tents. Then we went to tents with concrete floors. Then I went to Kingstrand. The Kingstrand were aluminium huts that came in boxes.
- 01:01 Prefabricated. So the engineers used to put them up for me. In fact, they used to use the Viet Cong prisoners, they were little fellows, they weighed hardly anything. So when you've got a sheet as big as that wall, and you're trying to put a bolt through the sheet, as big as that wall, you have to have somebody standing under that sheet and somebody on top of it.
- 01:32 The Australians were too big to stand on top, because it would just bend and buckle the sheet. So they would put the little fellow on the top, the Australian underneath, making my hospital. So we had Kingstrands and then, probably, towards the last three months, we had the Lysaghts. These were the great big galvanised iron prefabricated huts, made by Lysaght Steel.
- 02:01 And we used those for warehouses and the quarter master store and that sort of thing. So the hospital, the soldiers and myself, still lived in tents, still without floors, of any description. We got a few planks out the dunnage of the ships when they came in. They'd have the planks that they would pack their stores in, and so
- 02:30 we used to ask them to just drop them off on the wharf, leave them there, and then my big truck used to go down and get all these dunnage. And whenever we could, we would lay them on the sand as floors. The next unit came up there and took over. That is the 8 Field Ambulance took over from, and shortly afterward, 1 Field Hospital, which was a very different hospital, it was sort of like a MASH, only it wasn't mobile. Like an ASH, you might say.
- 03:03 And they refined it. So, I really built the hospital in that first tour, and it was refined for the rest of the war. When I left in 1971, it was still going great guns. I left there in December, 1970, and I had a look at it, and it was quite a going little field hospital.
- 03:30 **Were the nurses in Vung Tau then, when you were there the second time?**
- I won't say vexed, but it's a subject that was a subject that I felt very strongly about. I insisted when I

went that I not take nurses.

- 04:00 During the 1966 tour, I could have taken nurses, and the nurses, of course, wanted to go. There were no nurses in the field ambulance. It would have ceased to become a field ambulance had I taken nurses. The soldiers were used to, that is, a hierarchy of soldiers. The sergeant was the ward sister,
- 04:30 so to speak. Although they would hate me to say that. The staff nurses were the corporals. They were the ward shift commanders. And the soldiers, the private soldiers, were the nurses. And they were gentle, they were superb. Not one soldier died in my hospital, while I was there. So I couldn't have asked any more from my corporals, my sergeants.
- 05:01 I don't think nurses could have done any better than what they did. However, when we left, the force was increased in size. It became a three battalion task force instead of a two battalion task force. So everything had to expand a little bit. Now, the expertise of a nurse is in nursing.
- 05:31 These soldiers were not professional nurses. I refused nurses to go with me. It would have been counterproductive. However, when I was sent back to Australia, halfway through my term, to help design the new force. I was taken back for a week. "Why are you taking me away from my hospital?" "We need you for a week to help design what is going up there,
- 06:00 next year." So when I came back it was my recommendation that they do take nurses. But the nurses should all be working nurses. There should not be a hierarchy of matrons and assistant matrons and that sort of thing. The nurses should all be working nurses. I didn't want operating theatre nurses to take the place of the operating theatre technicians. In my day
- 06:30 I had OTTs, Operating Theatre Technicians, that did all... They were the theatre nurses, and they were absolutely superb. I didn't want them to denigrate all the work that had been done by the theatre techs. But I wanted their expertise in nursing. And I wanted them making sure that the ward was run with all the professionalism that a professional nurse can bring.
- 07:01 I mean, doctors aren't nurses. Doctors can't do nursing. There would be upstarts that think that they could. Just the same as nurses can't do doctoring. I suggested they go. But there was trepidation, because... I was suggesting about six or seven and I think that's what went in the end. But you put nurses in the middle of hundreds of men,
- 07:33 and it's not the women that have got to be protected, it's the men. Well, at least that's the way I put it. The nurses were put in a compound, with barbed wire around it. It was a compound within a compound within a compound. The hospital there as a compound, and in the middle of there is the nurses' quarters.
- 08:00 The bigger compound being the whole of the ALSG. I just thought there would be too much problem looking after nurses. Males get into fights when females come around. All sorts of things happen. So it was with trepidation, but I felt that the professionalism that a professional nurse brings was worth all that trouble. So they brought them in and they proved to be...
- 08:30 I'm sure they increased our standard of care. But as I say, I can honestly say that we saved all our lives. We couldn't have done any better, in my opinion. But had we been a bigger force, as we were, then I think it was the right and proper thing to bring them.
- 09:00 **Did you get to know any of the nurses sent over?**
- I knew probably all the nurses that were sent over in the first thing. At that stage, I had been a Commanding Officer, I had been around hospitals, and the Australian army is not that big, so several of the nurses I knew. They did send a matron in the end, she was one of my favourite people.
- 09:30 That was Jenny O'Neil, and she went as, I think she was a major, and she was a marvellous professional nurse. And she was sensible enough to keep those girls... I won't say under control, because they were mature females. But to make sure that there wasn't the problems that I was a little bit worried there would be. Jenny was a marvellous girl. She later became a lieutenant colonel.
- 10:07 **Is that you are against women at the front line because of males fighting each other?**
- I don't believe in women in the front lines, still. I just don't think women should be in the front line, as a trigger puller. I know that we're going down the political correctness track, where
- 10:30 male and females are equal in all things. I have seen the Viet Cong do it, I've seen the Israeli army do it, but it is not right. If you get right down to tin-tacks, if a woman gets into trouble, it is a male's role to protect her. Now, you want a mate that is back to back, he'll protect your back.
- 11:00 It gets right down to soldiers. That's why they have buddies and mates. Your life, you trust him with your life, he trusts you with his life. Now if you spend all your time looking after a female because you're worried... You're not necessarily attracted to her but she's the female. She is the breeder of our race. And I don't like to see women in the front line.
- 11:30 I don't care about them as truck drivers, like the American girl that was captured. I don't mind them as

fighter pilots, because they're either dead or they're alive. They're very rarely halfway in between. And there's only one of them. There's not a battalion of them. Can you imagine a thousand women out there, fighting. It goes against my absolute grain... The Australian army does not have women in a

12:00 direct fighting combat role. They're in combat roles, all right. They're on ships, they're in aircraft, but they don't have women riflemen in the infantry. And it's the infantry that goes before the guns. The infantry is the proper army, that's what I keep saying. The engineers and the artillery and the armoured corps would all laugh at me, but the proper part of the army is the infantry. And

12:30 I can't see infantry riflemen, as women. I can see them having a role in the infantry battalion. They could be the doctor, if they're strong enough to walk across Malaya three times, carrying eighty pound on their back, like somebody I know did.

It's interesting because I think

13:00 **why would anyone want to be on the front line? Male, female, regular or indifferent.**

No-one wants to be. But that's what you're trained to be. That's what a soldier is trained to be. I've got very strong feelings about whether or not

13:30 AIDS people should be allowed in the military, for instance. Or whether HIV positive people should be allowed in. I've spent part of my life doing exchange transfusions from soldiers to wounded. And I didn't check them. I didn't have time to check them. That blood saved that person's life. Sure, I could have passed syphilis from him to him. The soldiers go out and do what they do. So I could have done that. But

14:00 I can cure syphilis with an injection. I could have passed on malaria, which we probably did from one to the other, but you can cure malaria. But when you start thinking about AIDS, and passing it on, it's a death sentence. So I didn't want HIV positive people in the army. When I was Surgeon General and DG [Director General], I fought against that. I fought Justice Kirby when the AIDS debate first came out.

You mean

14:30 **people with AIDS because they age more quickly than others?**

A I D S. I meant HIV positivity. AIDS people would not be in the army because they would be too sick. HIV positive people. People who have the AIDS virus in them, the HIV, but aren't yet sick. I felt strongly about that

15:01 because of exchange transfusions and... You can argue that it's very rarely in the modern army that you have to have exchange transfusions, because the helicopters better and we can bring blood in from somewhere else, fly it in. But I still believe you haven't got the flexibility that we had. That was just an example. As far as females are concerned, I think there's lots of jobs in a combat

15:31 role that a woman can do, but I don't think direct fighting is one of them. A doctor in a battalion, those battalion soldiers would protect her like they protected me. I mean, part of it is altruistic. The doctor looks after us. If there's somebody doesn't look after the doctor, there will be no-one to look after us. They did protect me, always.

16:03 The quartermaster in a battalion could be a female. The intelligence officer. Some people say that females are more intelligent than males, on average. And if you look at statistics, they're right. But they should not be trigger pullers. They should not be out there pulling a trigger in a pit, alongside a soldier.

16:31 He's not going to worry about the enemy if he gets in dire straits. He is going to worry about the female alongside of him. He should know that his mates are protecting him and he should be thinking of the enemy and not the female alongside of him. I'm a happily married man, perhaps I'm old school, but it would be natural instinct for me to look after a female.

17:01 **So you're coming from the nature versus nurture thing, that it's just natural.**

Exactly. It's just natural that a male should look after a female. If a male sees a female in danger, he will protect her.

I wonder if the Israeli army has had cases like that?

I'm sure. All sorts of liaisons happen in war. And I'm sure that if you throw two people in together,

17:30 the male will protect the female. It doesn't matter how strong the female is, physically. I'm not talking about physical strength. I'm saying that nobody should be there unless they're a proper trained soldier. And that presumes they're as strong a male and they can do all the things a male can do. I'm talking about nature. They're the breeder. If we don't protect our breeders, we haven't got a race. It's an awful way of looking at it,

18:00 calling a female a breeder, but as yet males can't breed.

I'll just bring you back a little bit. After that week you went away to Australia, to work out what was going to happen in the future, with the nurses...

I came back for about a week. I think it was mid-term.

And then after your tour, you came back to Australia. Then you were with Fay, at

18:30 **the end of your first tour of Vietnam?**

Yeah. I came home and then I went to 1 Military Hospital, at Yeronga, in Brisbane, as a Commanding Officer, and I had the most I had spent anywhere up to date, I had two and a half years there, which was lovely.

Before you went back to Vietnam?

Before I went back to Vietnam.

19:08 I might say during that time Vietnam was still going, I still had a lot of contact with Vietnam wounded. Because I used to receive back more in my hospital... We had the big hospital for Queensland, I commanded that. So I used to get all the Queenslanders would come back to me, that were wounded. All the New South Welshmen would go back to 2

19:30 Military Hospital, which was out a Ingleburn. And the Victorians would go back, probably, to 3 Camp Hospital, which was at Puckapunyal. Or else to one of the civilian hospitals. South Australia they go to a civilian hospital. West Australia they got to a civilian hospital. So I saw the casualties come out. They used to land

20:00 at the airport in Brisbane. It was then Eagle Farm. All the ambulance convoys would go out and get them at Eagle Farm and take them back to my hospital. So I had a lot to do with their rehabilitation and how to look after them, that sort of thing. And after that two and a half years, I then went back to Vietnam, again. And my next

20:30 tour was only about eleven months, I think. Because I only had one Christmas there. I had Christmas of 1969 there. But I didn't have Christmas of 1970. I went up there and this time I was what was called ADMS. ADMS was Assistant Director of Medical Services of the army.

21:02 Or SMO Australian Force Vietnam, that was my other term. I now spent my day, instead of the way I spent it previously, one day in Saigon, two days in Nui Dat and four days in Vung Tau, and every night in Vung Tau, I now spent one day

21:31 in Vung Tau, two days in the task force and the rest of the time in Saigon. And I didn't care where I spent the nights. Sometimes I would stay in the task force, in one of the tents of my fellow colonels. That is usually what happened. I had several colonels who were my best friends. Infantry colonels. I also stayed at the hospital. The Commanding Officer was Mick Naughton.

22:01 I was his boss, again. So Mick would set me up. By this time, he had a nice little wooden house. And I used to live with him in that wooden house. Or else I lived in the brinks, the bachelor officers quarters, in the middle of Saigon. I think eleven Australian colonels lived in there. The chief of engineers and the chief of

22:30 logistics and the chief of electrical and mechanical engineers. And the chief of everything. By this time, we had all these lieutenant colonels who were heading up the whole theatre. Including me. The three jobs I did, I now had me, I had a major in the task force and I had a lieutenant colonel in Vung Tau, so

23:00 I did the job of three, the first time. Usually I would find myself back in Saigon on weekends. And I'd be at a loose end and wouldn't know what to do. I only ever took Sunday off, I remember. I didn't take Saturdays off. There was never any time off before, but this time... I actually used to go to the American rubbish dump. They called it the American rubbish dump. That's where all their planes that had gone down

23:30 and their helicopters and all the marine mules and all of their equipment of war was piled up, in piles, probably fifty foot high and a mile long, fifty yards wide. Just all piled. New trucks... And I found myself all sorts of gadgetry to keep me interested on a Sunday. I built two mechanical mules. These were the weapons,

24:00 or the transport that the marines used to use when they parachuted in from their ships, they used to parachute this little mechanical mule. It was a go anywhere machine. It used to carry six men. Just a little platform with a steering wheel at the front and a little motor underneath. It would go across paddy fields and go up hills like that. It would go anywhere. One of them had the back blown off, one of them had the front blown, so I put them together and made one and I used to drive it around. I took it home with me to Australia, actually.

24:33 **You were allowed to?**

Well, I pulled it into bits and I posted it home to myself. I've still got it.

What about your wife? How did she cope with you being away again?

She didn't like it. You're in the military, she was a good army wife. She did what she was told.

Did you have children your second time?

25:02 Mathew was born in the two and a half years...

When you were at Yeronga?

Yes. Jackie was born six weeks before I left for the third tour. So I had one six week older, and one a year and a half or whatever.

Did the army offer your wife any help while you were away?

Oh yeah, the army was always good that way. My wife was looked after.

25:36 When I left the first time she was in Puckapunyal, in our house. 7th Battalion were getting ready to come to war. We were the only unit that went from Puckapunyal the first time. 7th Battalion looked after my wife all the time that I was away. She went to all the social evenings and the wives looked after her. She needed anything at

26:00 all the army looked after her, the 7th Battalion looked after her. The second time, of course, I went to war, I had bought my own house in Adelaide and I sent my wife back. She had to have the child six weeks before, and I didn't want to transport her. So I flew her back two or three months before, into our new house that I bought in Adelaide.

26:31 And then just before I left I took all of my annual leave, about four weeks before, and I came back. I was actually there when the baby was born, so I was there when Jackie was born. So it would have been six weeks that I'd taken leave. So then I tizzied up the house and got everything ready, then I left for Vietnam again.

So you didn't deliver your own children?

No, no, I sure didn't. My children were delivered

27:00 by specialists. I wasn't even there for either of them. I was there, but I didn't go in. I held her hand. No, I would have taken over if I had done that, so I kept well out of it. If I don't think things

27:30 are done right, I would have taken over. So I just felt it was all right for me to stand outside and just twiddle my thumbs while everything was going on. When it was all finished I was ready to go in and shake the obstetrician by the hand and say, "Well done. I didn't interfere at all, did I?" I have the tendency to interfere if I think something is not going right. And that's very dangerous for a husband

28:00 who's emotionally tied up with what's going on. It would have been the worst thing that one could do. So I made sure I didn't interfere by keeping out of it.

Now, were you aware of all the student rallies and what the popular media were saying? About the Vietnam War?

Well, we used to hear a bit about it,

28:31 but none of us worried about it.

But it didn't bother you?

It didn't bother us one iota. There has always been people, in a free country, and people don't like war. I used to treat them with disregard. I didn't think much of them, I thought they hadn't thought the war through. I thought they hadn't thought why we were there. And they hadn't, in fact, given it enough thought.

29:00 That's the way I looked upon it. I came home. There wasn't anyone upset with me when I came home. They didn't throw paint over me. I was a colonel. I was one of the few colonels that came back, and I got nothing but courtesy when I got back. I felt like a whole lot of the hoo-ha was beat up by the press. There was certainly nastiness from the population towards soldiers,

29:30 in some respects, but I never once experienced out. I was invited out to talk at all sorts of groups, Rotary groups, service groups, military groups, doctors' groups and nurses' groups. I talked a lot to the populace about what was going on, and what had happened during the war, and I had nothing but courtesy or praise.

30:00 I didn't feel any hang-ups about the war at all. We won our war. Let me tell you. When I arrived in Vung Tau the second time, I told you what happened. I got in that helicopter quicker than I got out of it. And we went away with our tail between our legs. When I left Vietnam in November or December of 1970, I borrowed a jeep,

30:30 and with nothing except my trusty weapon, one pistol facing on the left. I travelled every road in Phuonng Tuy Province. Every road, by myself. That was our war as far as we're concerned. Then we left, and the D445, if there was anything left of them, dragged themselves

31:00 back into Phuonng Tuy Province because we weren't there. People could say, "Okay, well you won the

battle, but you lost the war." As far as I was concerned, we did what we were asked to do as soldiers. We beat the enemy in our province, that was our only area of responsibility. We beat the enemy in our area, and when we were told by the politicians to go home, we went home.

- 31:32 So what more could we have done? I felt very proud of what we did, and we won our war. Now you can see that the whole Vietnam War was an absolute mess and I won't argue that. If you go to Vietnam now, Vietnam is on the up and up. I think Vietnam will be a force to be reckoned with, economically,
- 32:00 in the future. It's one of the giants of South-East Asia now. Look at Thailand. I would think that Vietnam will eclipse Thailand. The people are probably a little more hard-working and industrious than the Thais. They're certainly more cultured. Vietnam's a very cultured people.
- 32:30 I think they will probably eclipse anything that Thailand has done. So you look back at it and say, "Well, I think, at that time, when it looked as if the communist threat in North Vietnam was going to domino,
- 33:00 roll down that coast." It was certainly stopped in Malaya. It never, ever reached Thailand. And you could say the reason that it didn't reach Thailand, it was stopped in Malaya and it was slowed down in Vietnam. And that slow down in Vietnam allowed the world to catch up and allowed people to become more tolerant. We've all become
- 33:31 more tolerant of communism. Communism has had its day really. And who's to say whether it was right or wrong to have done what we did, at that point in time. Or done what Mr Menzies asked us to. I look back on it and I see three or four hundred dead Australian soldiers. And I think of the first one that was killed in our task force. His name was Coop.
- 34:02 And I think of his wife because he came from 2 RAR and I remember his wife. And I think of him on Anzac Day, and I think he did a good job. I think we did our job at the time and we won our war. The politicians might have lost theirs.
- 34:30 **Did you feel like you were missing out doing hands-on medicine the third time you went to Vietnam?**
- No, I looked after the Australian ambassador. All of his staff, they were all friends of mine. I looked after all the colonels and the general. So I had my little people to look after, and I looked after a little orphanage.
- 35:00 I went out there and spent time with the little children. Not long, I'm not that sort of person very much. But I did a little bit there. I went out to Ton San Nhut airfield and every dead Australian soldier has to be certified dead by an Australian doctor, and I did that.
- 35:30 **Would you be called in after the conflict to walk through?**
- No. Well, see, dead Australians were taken home in a casket. And we didn't like the caskets going with the live, the wounded, so the caskets were usually lead-lined caskets that went out of Ton San Nhut. And there was a big mortuary
- 36:00 company. The Yanks had this great big unit, which was a hundred or two hundred morticians. They had a platoon at Vung Tau and they used to look after our dead and send them up to Vung Tau, then we used to take them back to Australia. Or Malaya. Some of them went to Malaya and were buried in Malaya. We had a war cemetery in Malaya.
- 36:31 So that was one of my jobs. They were obviously dead, so I had to sign the death certificate. I used to go out to the mortuary company every now and again, if the Australians hadn't done it at Vung Tau. But an American couldn't certify death in an Australian. We had to do that. That wasn't clinical practice, I might say. I then used to spend a fair bit of my time with
- 37:00 Bob Joy, in the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research. We used to drink a lot of beer. We used to talk about a lot of things like why malaria wasn't cured. How we could change the world if we were really allowed our hand. Bob Joy was a marvellous man, he is still my friend. He became Professor of the Washington University of the Uniformed Services.
- 37:35 The next CO was Harry Dangerfield and I was mates with Harry, too, so he is another one of my American mates. The next one was Phil Russell, who became General Russell. He was the number one man in America for germ warfare and gas warfare. He was the one that was written up
- 38:00 in a couple of big books, you may have read. Ground Zero and things like that. I've got a lot of American friends. I've been firm friends of theirs for a long time. I had a friend who was the brigadier, who was in charge of a whole lot of the American forces. He was the chief doctor. They had
- 38:31 a general there, two star general, in charge of their medical forces. And they had a one star general who was in charge of all of the operational units and this brigadier general that I'm thinking about was in charge of all the operational units. He became a friend of mine. He was a very poor poker player and I always beat him. So we played poker on Sunday, sometimes. When
- 39:00 there wasn't a battle going on and we didn't need to be there.

I'd like to talk to you about settling back into Australia when you came back from Vietnam....

I had no problem. I settled back in. I came back, I then did my speciality. Internal medicine, in Adelaide.

39:33 I worked hard. I was a doctor for the whole of that time. A physician at the end of it. I worked hard. I saw civilian patients, I never saw an army patient during that time. It was all Royal Adelaide Hospital. I learnt my trade better, then I went to Papua New Guinea. Uprooted

40:00 my family again.

Did you start, at that point when you came back from Vietnam the third time, did you become aware of the psychological disorders of some of the soldiers? Or was it much later?

No. I am not a believer in a lot of the disorders

40:30 of soldiers.

Tape 10

00:39 The airport of Saigon, now Ho Chi Minh City, is called Ton San Nhut. That's the area, and the airport is called Ton San Nhut Airport. And a lot of logistic type units, during the war, were located on the airstrip.

01:02 Because our main form of re-supply in Vietnam was by air. There were ships that came into Vung Tau, but the main re-supply was by air. So all the big American Starlifters and things came into Ton San Nhut. So things like the mortuary company were all concentrated, so that the bodies that were

01:30 flown out of Vietnam, all came from that mortuary company. Even the Australian bodies that went onto Australian aircraft were kept in that mortuary company. And I had to go out there on occasion. An Australian doctor had to go out there to certify death. It was a formality, but it had to be done, because it had to be somebody

02:00 registered as a doctor in Australia, so the death certificate was signed. It was as simple as that.

You mentioned that at one occasion you were examining the bodies of about nineteen...

This was after the Battle of Long Tan. I was doing an Operational Casualty Study, returning a report on each of the nineteen.

02:32 Mick Naughton commenced the Operational Casualty Study return and he asked me if I would continue it because he thought it was a good initiative. I continued it, for the time that I was in Vietnam, and I passed it on and I don't know what ever happened to the outcome of that report.

Now what was the aim of it from your perspective? What were the benefits?

The benefits were....

03:01 I did my own analysis of the ones that I saw. But the benefits were, for instance, if you found that a certain percentage of those wounds were caused to the chest, you then looked at what caused the wound. Whether it was a bullet.

03:31 If so, what sort of bullet. If it was a piece of shrapnel. If so, what size piece of shrapnel and was it from artillery. If possible, you could get a specimen of the shell or whatever. Then you could say, as I did, very early in the piece that these five

04:00 soldiers wouldn't have died if they had worn a flak jacket. Now I was instrumental, very shortly after I did another one of these studies, and the mind is dimming on this, but I was instrumental in recommending to the commander of the Australian force that we buy flak jackets. And that certain people wear flak jackets. These were people

04:30 that had been killed through wounds in the chest. For instance, I can remember the transport drivers who could work in a flak jacket, should be wearing flak jackets. Soldiers who are out in the field can't wear a flak jacket. They would die of exhaustion. But, in certain situations where they are

05:00 going into battle and, let's say, and not using a lot of energy going into battle, they could well wear a flak jacket into battle. If they are going in, jumping off a helicopter, getting there and squatting, they could wear a flak jacket. Helicopter, wear a flak jacket. But my recommendation, as I recall, came out of that Operational Casualty Study Report,

05:31 when it was quite obvious to me that these soldiers lives could have been saved had they worn a flak jacket. The same goes for helmets. We wore helmets. But you see, we went into battle without helmets. We had little giggle hats. There were occasions when I believe

- 06:00 that a helmet should have been worn. And you can translate that into a lot of other areas. But that's the preventive area. On the other hand, what really killed this bloke, was it an artillery shell? Should we be more worried about artillery than small arms fire? How many people were killed by small arms fire? Small arms fire in direct contact? Were
- 06:30 they mortars? Should we be more worried about mortars? If you start getting that sort of information, well, damn it, why didn't we put overhead cover on our funk holes? And we did, though, afterwards. The night before Long Tan, the overhead covers went on the funk holes, because of the air bursts and tree bursts. So, you need to know what is going on if you are going to
- 07:00 try and advise your commander properly, as to how he can best save life in his troop.
- You mentioned earlier this morning that you are much more prone to be emotional with animals than you are with people.**
- I am soft with animals.
- But given what you went through, particularly with Long Tan, and having to**
- 07:30 **survey the dead, and all that kind of thing, were there any moments during your service that you did find that...**
- No. Never. I have never had the concern. I mean life is life. I feel sad about a dead boy. But one cannot allow that to prey on one's conscience, otherwise you would never be a doctor.
- 08:04 People work in children's hospital. If there is ever going to be something that cuts at the heart strings it's going to be sick children. But I never once had anything but pride and joy. I never had sad feelings about soldiers. I thrived in the military environment. The military environment was ordered and structured and proper.
- 08:31 Everything in its place. I'm not a real tidy person, but I've got a tidy mind in that way. I've got an undying and untiring respect for the military. If you are promoted to lieutenant colonel, it is my firm belief that you did well as a major, therefore you were selected to be a lieutenant colonel. If you didn't
- 09:00 do well as a major, if you didn't stand the stress of being a major, then you should have never been promoted to lieutenant colonel. The army has evolved to pick people with stress before they get it, and therefore say... If I see a full colonel or a brigadier that gets stress,
- 09:30 I think that... Well, first of all, that he probably shouldn't be promoted to that level. Or else he's sick. There's something gone wrong that's made him more prone to it. And therefore, I've got this undying respect for the military system, that we selected our people right. Our officers particularly, and our NCOs, our senior NCOs. They were selected to be what they were.
- 10:01 They did their jobs, they came back, they didn't have any hang-ups. To me the people that have severe hang-ups when they came back, they probably would have had them through life. The normal pressures of life, anyway. There were people in Vietnam that had very great pressures on them. I mean, one man's stress is another man's excitement.
- 10:32 Dead bodies are not necessarily my stress. But my doctors couldn't go into that room. Now, perhaps, you know, horses for courses. But a sick animal is my stress. I perhaps fitted the army. There are people who are fitted to go and suited to go.
- 11:02 They don't have that sort of stress. When my wife gets sick, I'm terribly upset. But the military is not... As I say, I don't believe that a lot of the people that I have seen... My friends who have been through Vietnam with me, I haven't got
- 11:30 one of them that has been in trouble that didn't have a problem before. I've got one friend of mine, a very good friend of mine, who died in a psychiatric institution. He went through with me in Malaya, and I had to carry him through Malaya. He got sick in Malaya. He went to Vietnam, and he got sick again. But he was vulnerable. He was a mistake. The army made a mistake in selecting him for a start.
- 12:01 And I could see the mistake, right from when he was a junior officer. And I've seen that happen time and time again. My friends, look at Mick Naughton... Mick's got no hang-ups. Mick's Mick. Mick has seen as much action as I have. Mick has done things I haven't done.
- 12:30 I've had to slap his hand a few times for doing naughty things. Like going out in a helicopter, flying around above the enemy when he shouldn't have been. He put himself in danger. I had to get very cross and stop him from flying, for a while. I've had doctors that were foolhardy. I had a young doctor who was... He was my best doctor, so I'll name him. He was Doctor Taskey. He was the fellow that
- 13:00 went up Everest and lost his fingers. He was the fellow who designed and now owns the retractable syringe. And the retractable scalpel. Taskey was one of the bravest men I knew. He took on the navy coming across on the Sydney. He took on all comers. He was only a little fellow. He was black and blue
- 13:30 when he got there, but he won every fight. Boxing. Proper boxing. But this was Doctor John Taskey, one

of my captains. He didn't want to be in the field ambulance, he wanted to get in the front line. The first time a bullet whizzed over his head and thudded into the tree behind him, he suddenly realised that the romance of war was in the minds of very junior people. And the romance suddenly goes when you are shot at.

14:03 That romance... I experienced that. I was the same as Taskey when I went to Malaya. It didn't take long for me to grow up. It took a very short time. It took John about five minutes in battle. He became my best medical officer of all time, I think, and I would have liked him to follow me as the general. But he went down another track, and he

14:30 went to civvy [civilian] life and became a very good anaesthetist and he climbed Mount Everest and done a lot of other things. He was one of my junior officers. He was one of the officers at Healesville when I was selected. He was there and I said, "You're coming with me."

Is it from this experience then, or this collection of experiences, that you disagree with a lot of the talk around PTSD [Prolonged Duress Stress Disorder],

15:00 **as an after effect of war stress?**

Look so many psychiatrists, doctors and others, talk about Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome, that there must be an element of truth in it. In other words, somebody who has had

15:30 a high degree of stress must somehow be affected by that. Now I don't deny that's the case, but again it gets back to what is stress? I think the only thing in my life that has caused me to have nightmares, repeated nightmares, is my final examination in medicine.

16:00 I worked so hard, and it was so traumatic that every year or so since, I will wake up doing my final exam, not my specialist exams and they were harder, but my final exam in medicine. Because I was young. But that's just a nightmare. I wake up, "I'm a bloody fool," and that's that.

16:30 It doesn't worry me that I do that. I realise that that was a traumatic time in my life, it's expressing itself by a nightmare that I get. I don't wake up screaming. But I wake up annoyed at myself for letting it worry me. It's not a bother to me. It doesn't worry me. It doesn't cause me to drink or do other things to forget it. My

17:00 experience of soldiers. The soldiers that really face the enemy. The Bob Buicks of this world, they don't have any trouble at all. Enemy all around him, dead all around him, and he doesn't have any hang-ups at all. He has got sad thoughts about his friends, the same as anyone would. If you were human. But there's no concern that he's going

17:30 to be affected by this, and his sanity and his life ever after is going to be affected by it. I just don't see it that way. What I see more is people who are vulnerable should not be selected to be soldiers. And if they are vulnerable and they are going to be soldiers, they shouldn't be sent to the front line. And you'll notice that

18:00 most of the Vietnam veterans are cooks. And they never went near the front line. All these office bearers of the Vietnam Veterans' Association, they never went near the front line. They'll tell you, "I was in 6 RAR." "What did you do?" "I was a cook." You don't hear it from Harry Smith. Harry the Rat Catcher.

18:30 He's a beaut bloke. He's the bloke that took the stress.

Why is he called Harry the Rat Catcher?

I don't know. Harry Smith, he's a nice bloke. He's anything less than a rat catcher, but he was known as Harry the Rat Catcher. That's what the soldiers called him and it just flowed. There'd be

19:00 a story behind it. My CO was 'Boots' Stretton. I thought, "Why was is called Boots?" Because AB. His name was Allen Brereton Stretton. AB Stretton. Now the boots we wore in Malaya were AB. So became 'Boots' Stretton and he never lived it down.

19:30 **What was your nickname?**

I never had one. Not that I know of. To the troops I was Doctor. To my friends I was Bill. To my Commanding Officer I was Doc. As I grew older... I've never had Buck. I wasn't called Buck.

20:01 I wouldn't have minded. My brother was called Buck.

We were talking about PTSD? You mentioned earlier today that you did have a couple of cases of fellows who did end up being sent to asylums or psych [psychiatric] wards....

Yeah, I had one soldier in my unit, he went off with an acute schizophreno-form episode

20:31 and shot up the officers' mess. Which we all happened to be in. He didn't hit anything except put a lot of holes in the tent. RSM crept up behind him and disarmed him. And we all had a giggle. We were all hiding down behind the sandbag wall, with our beers in our hand. There were no shortage of beers in our hospital. When we were all sitting

- 21:00 there, with our beers in our hands, wondering who it was. Knowing that it wouldn't be the enemy. Turned the lights off. We all had our weapons near us and we were all fairly well protected anyway. But it was one of the privates in my unit. He was just having a shot at anything he could. He had just gone off in a schizophreno-form attack. He was probably an incipient schizophrenic when we took him. We didn't pick up. He was a regular soldier. We would have picked
- 21:30 it up, had he been a National Serviceman, but the Regulars weren't scrutinised, perhaps, as much as the National Service. So the National Servicemen were probably better quality than the Regulars. I didn't have many National Servicemen, I selected my own. Because the National Servicemen weren't trained as well as my own soldiers. So I selected probably nineteen National Servicemen, and the rest, the hundred or more,
- 22:00 were Regulars. No, I didn't see a lot of it. The troops, we got a lot of soldiers that got the... they just couldn't hack it. That's all right. If you select a soldier right... What worries me these days, what really concerns me, is that, see, there is no respect for
- 22:30 the traditions that the army has got. Now, you can look upon that, an example of that, is the bastardisation [initiation] of the Royal Military College. You see, in my opinion bastardisation is almost an informal measure of seeing how well a person responds to stress. And if they get through that bastardisation process,
- 23:00 then they're probably going to be all right. This is a very unpolitical thing to say, but I find lots of army institutions and lots of army practices are designed to pick out the good soldiers from the bad soldiers, and this is done by the old NCOs. They're no longer able to take him out the back and smack him under the ear. They've got to charge him and
- 23:30 go through all the modern court system and all that. In my day, it was a case of, "March the guilty buggin' in!" That was that. But you know who was guilty and who wasn't guilty. You were like the captain of the ship. Any punishment was only a little punishment.
- 24:00 Confined to barracks, or a ten dollar fine, or something. But everybody had his delegated punishment ability. It seems to me it's sort of because we've been away from a war, a real war, because we've been away from it, the army's practices and institutions and
- 24:30 tried and tested methods are being eroded. As I say, if you see a soldier that's now complaining to one of the commissions that he hasn't been handled right, that never would have happened. I don't think it's an improvement. I don't think it's showing
- 25:01 an improved system. I think it shows a system that is not coping with the demands of picking out a good soldier. We've had a superb army. We've had a superb army in World War I, World War II, and all the wars since. We've never been found wanting. Look at Iraq. The Australians were revered. But you must admit
- 25:30 that the only real soldiers that were there were the elite of Australia. The crème de la crème. The SAS. But look at Afghanistan. Everywhere they have been, they are good. Now, why if we've got a good army, is the current sort of politico governmental system, trying
- 26:00 all the time to bring it back to mediocrity, by taking away its time tested methods of dealing with things. That concerns me. The more this happens, the more you are going to get military men at the top that are lawyers. They are going to say, "I know how to do things. I know how to get promoted."
- 26:30 It's not because they are a good soldier. It's because they are able to handle the press better, or they are able to do this better, or that better. And once you get that sort of fellow, he's going to say, "It doesn't matter a damn. You stop the bastardisation at the RMC [Royal Military College]." Now it may only be that somebody is grizzling because a senior student gave him a big fat telling off, for being late, or doing something wrong. Sooner or later they are going to grizzle about that. The army system
- 27:00 is an authoritarian, disciplinary system. People have got to understand that. It's not a damn girls' school. Everybody's nice to each other. It's not that, and it can't be that. If you have that there will be no discipline, no respect, no structure, no army, no morale. People don't have to fear. A good leader will have people that will follow him anywhere
- 27:30 out of the fact that they admire him. The best leaders I've seen are those that are understanding of the Australian nature of a fair go and all that. The worst leaders that I have seen have been British.

In what way?

Well, they have bought their commissions, they don't give a damn for their soldiers. They're cannon fodder.

- 28:01 I've watched that and I hated it. The British have got beautiful traditions in the way they do things, but that is one thing I dislike about the British army. The American army... In Vietnam, the American army wasn't good. But I've been with the American army since and they're absolutely superb now. The marines and the army are absolutely superb soldiers,

- 28:32 only eclipsed by our own. And again, America's in this dilemma about the dilution of the military way. The Americans are able to keep it better than us. They shave their heads and they do all sorts of things to make them more macho. But we are now allowing HIV positive people
- 29:00 in the army, and we are gradually going down the track of where the civilisation...It's the rise and fall of the Roman Empire.

You see and here a lot, in a lot of films, even stories from old vets [veterans], about

- 29:32 **some of the craziness of Vietnam. A lot of drugs with the Americans, guys leaning on alcohol in the Australian troops. Did you see much...**

I was the senior doctor there for a long time. And each time I was there, I was quite obviously aware... But the second time and the third time, I was aware that the Americans were,

- 30:05 and that's why I say, at this time, particularly in '66 and '67, they were pot smoking. Now, I looked for this in the Australian force, and I watched, for instance, we had a helicopter flight, a navy
- 30:30 helicopter flight, with an American company. They were a platoon of the company of helicopters. And these helicopters... The chief naval bloke in Vietnam was very, very concerned that there was a lot of drug taking by the Americans. I went down and spent quite a bit of time, as a doctor can. You're
- 31:00 not seen as a line officer. You're seen as a doctor. And I was able to get into their minds, and I can honestly say, I was so proud of them. That they knew they had a responsibility. They knew that if they had taken drugs they wouldn't be sharp and all the rest of it. And they did not. They were actually very strict. Anyone that even looked or...
- 31:31 I'm talking about the other ranks as well as the pilots. The whole lot were just so strict. I honestly....When in action, or when in camp, I have personally not seen any degree of drug taking, apart from alcohol. Soldiers and alcohol...
- 32:00 When on leave, soldiers and alcohol will mix, and they do. But this is, again, part of being able to healthily withstand any stresses one's got. One lets it all hang and has a few beers with the boys, and it's a different world, sort of thing. Have a good night's sleep, a good feed and a few beers and you're all right. And that's the attitude.
- 32:30 So alcohol I remove from all this. Apart from one or two episodes that I reported in Vung Tau where somebody was slipping things into the grogs of some description. I sent them off, but we never found out what they were. I can honestly say, with truth, and I reported this many times, that I don't care how much people talk about it, the Australian force,
- 33:01 I don't think there was anyone in that force who would go into battle in any way affected by any drug. And if they did, I knew them well enough to know. I'm not bloody blind.

Not even alcohol at times?

Alcohol, no. They're pretty clever about the way they use alcohol. No not alcohol in battle, they wouldn't even think about that. I've seen them smuggle alcohol in, I've seen them save up their pennyworth of navy rum

- 33:31 and keep putting it into the bottle until in the end they've got that much and they can have a real booze up. I've seen that happen. I've not seen anybody go into alcohol, truly affected by alcohol at the time. I've seen them with hangovers. They quickly realise that there is a lot of activity, and if you've got a hangover
- 34:00 it's your life there, and it's your mate's life. So they're not stupid enough to do that. I don't think Australian soldiers are angels, mind you, but drugs in Vietnam was not a problem. Other than alcohol, and alcohol will always be a problem if you let it be.

Given the extent of your experience,

- 34:30 **I just wanted to know on a personal note, what was your preference over the course of your experience? Whether the work you were doing the work in wartime or peace time for you? What was the better army life?**

You know a soldier without

- 35:00 going to war is unfulfilled. But anyone who says they want a war would be a raving lunatic. It's an unfulfilled life against being a warmonger. I felt fulfilled as a soldier, put it that way. I did my duty. I think I did it well. But,
- 35:30 equally, I've had an extraordinarily fulfilling life, outside of battle. You might say, what am I trying to do outside the war periods that I've had, and I've spent my whole peace time periods getting ready for war. Making sure we're better when we next went to war. And that's what I was there for. Otherwise I would have gone out and looked after civilians.

- 36:00 I was there simply because I knew more about... I was trained in surgery, military psychiatry, military medicine, tropical medicine and health and hygiene. So having been trained in those things, it was my job that this message was carried on. To make sure that people didn't start stitching wounds the next time they got into battle. As they did. Because I was the first one
- 36:30 that went overseas since World War II. The first unit to go overseas since World War II, when I went to Vietnam. And people had forgotten. I had been trained, I hadn't forgotten. That little time Malaya and I watched what happened there. Then I'd been trained in military medicine in London. So I knew. I was there. I finished out by writing a text book on field surgery. And that's why I became a Fellow of the College of Surgeons.
- 37:00 I wrote a book that was used by the college for field surgery. I felt that I was simply there to keep the seat warm. To keep Australian soldiers of the future from being killed by their doctors. To save them. To make sure that we saved as many as we could. And that's why I was there.
- 37:32 I felt that good physicians in civilian life were a dime a dozen. I was offered to work for the Professorial Unit in Adelaide, when I got my speciality. They asked me would I join? The Professorial Unit in Adelaide was pretty top stuff. And I was thinking about it. And all the old army blokes, including Mark, my mentor.
- 38:00 They all got around me and said, "Look, Bill, you've got something that only you have got. And you've got to pass that on. There is a thousand of you in civilian life, but there is only one of you in the military. So you go back to the military and don't be so bloody silly." And that's what I did. I already had twenty years in, but I went on and I had thirty-six.
- 38:31 I enjoyed it and I'm glad I did what they said. I probably would have become unfulfilled had I not become director general, or surgeon general, because I at least then had the opportunity to do what I wanted to do. I might say since I got out I've been disappointed, because things have not happened the way they should have. I just wonder whether or not they're ready for a big war.
- 39:00 If there is a big war, I'll worry. I'll go back as a teacher. I'm a bit old to go back as a soldier. I still run, every morning, and I still do six k [kilometres] every morning. But I don't think I could carry a big pack on my back any more. My fingers aren't real good now, either.

Thank you very much, Bill.

INTERVIEW ENDS