Australians at War Film Archive

Michael Roberts (Mike) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:34 **Can you give us that 5 minute breakdown we were just talking about?**

I was born in Kadina, South Australia in 1944. Went to school there at the Catholic convent, St Joseph's. Then to Kadina Memorial High School. I left high school at about year 2 I think. Didn't do so well. Started life as a baker's and prover because I come from a farming

01:00 background and I didn't want to be a farmer. But I didn't like being inside as a baker, so I ended up in a farm. Life in the country at that stage was pretty boring, so I joined the army reserve, they called it CMF [Citizens' Military Force] in those days. Done about a year and a bit with those, then I joined the regular army. 1962 I served overseas, I served in Holsworthy, in South Australia, and

01:30 then over to Malaysia, Borneo, then to South Vietnam. Come home and got my discharge in 1967. I was married in 1966 and my first child was born while I was in Vietnam in '67. I didn't like being a civilian again after a fairly hectic 6 years. So I ended up back in the army. I couldn't find a decent job.

02:00 I had no skills, not that well educated in those days. Although I had gone on and done some education in the army. I ended up back in the army and went back up to Malaya with my family for 2 years. I volunteered again for Vietnam then. Came back to Australia, done the special forces training to go back as an advisor. Gough [Whitlam] got in, Vietnam was cancelled, I didn't go. So I just done garrison duties until, and various other things in

02:30 the army until 1982 when I was discharged from the army. I done the full 20 years by that stage. I then went into training. I run a youth project in Aldinga. Then I went with Santos, worked for them for several years up at Moomba in training roles. Then I left that and became a consultant in the oil and gas industry. Travelling around. Based in Jakarta travelling around Southeast Asia. I

03:00 worked in Oman for a while. Travelled through most of Southeast Asia and Asia. Papua New Guinea. Then I went to a mineral industry. By this stage I'd up around project manager area. I went into the mineral industry and got into exploration throughout Indonesia mainly. Spent many years in Indonesia in exploration. Then, later, project managing

03:30 a mine up there. An alluvial mine. When I came back I was not going so well and I ended up becoming TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated pension], and that's where I am now. Was that 5 minutes?

What are your earliest memories of childhood?

I was part of a family of five and

04:00 Mum and Dad. Two brothers and two sisters. Two brothers and a sister older than me and a sister younger than me. We lived in Kadina. Mum was from a farming background, but my father was a painter. Contractor up there. So I lived on a farm quite a bit and grew up in a farm setting. And a town setting almost. I hated school of course. I went

04:30 to St Joseph's Convent in Kadina, which was run by some very Irish Catholic nuns who were quite tough on us, to say the least. I hated it with a passion actually. Got through it. I just guess my childhood was quite normal. I can't recall any major traumas or dramas in my life. It was good. I had a bike and drove around town with

05:00 kids in the country, with the other kids. My Mum was great. She was very active. Dad was very quiet. He served in the war, in the Second World War. He was always in the background, Dad, for some reason. Mum was active. She was the president of the Ladies' Auxiliary and she convened the Diggers' Ball and she run this and run that. She was into everything.

05:30 Legacy, everything. Dad was very much in the background. We weren't rich, we weren't poor. We were just an ordinary average small town family. My brothers and sisters, I was what number 4. I think Mum and Dad were a bit tired by 5 and 6, 4 and 5. So I was pretty well left on my own. I had the protection of

those two guys, my two brothers and older sister. One of those is,

06:00 my oldest sister is now gone. So is one of my brothers. Just mucking around Kadina. Rabbiting, shooting, getting into all sorts of strife, but nothing significant. Nothing major. I went to, I don't know whether I go into high school period. After the convent I went into the Kadina

06:30 high school. I done fairly well at athletics actually. I won all the junior cup, running and jumping and all that sort of stuff in the area. Didn't do so well at high school. I done very well at primary school, but I didn't do so well at high school. I don't know. I just thought of other things I think. Whilst I know I had the ability to do things that I was interested in, I just didn't

07:00 perform at all. In fact I left school towards the end of second year of high school, which wasn't unusual in the setting up there because we were all destined to go back on the farm, or back to the farm and drive tractors and utes and stuff like that, so you didn't have to be too well educated. That's what I did. I left school and then I decided I didn't want to go on the farm so I got a job as a baker's and prover's apprentice. I hated that with a passion. Am I going too far too fast?

07:30 **When you went rabbiting, who provided you with a gun?**

Well, everybody had a gun from about 12 onwards in the country. Just a .22 single shot gun. Later on you got a real gun which would be a .303 or something like that. No, everybody had guns. On the farm there were guns everywhere. Always. I didn't particularly like guns, but you had to be one of the boys. So guns and dogs were it. Guns and dogs and

08:00 bikes. We used to go out, get on our bikes with our rifles and, I mean we had to hide them, because you couldn't have a licence until you were 15. We would cycle out to the scrub, which wasn't far away. We'd have traps and stuff as well and get rabbits. But we'd shoot. Sometimes we'd get a bit carried away with the shooting. I remember once, we shot through some, in those days all telegraph wires were all copper wires. These great

08:30 clusters of them on lines. I know one of the guys aimed for that cluster to see if the bullet would hit the wire. Well, it did. The odds of him hitting it was pretty good, because there was hundreds of these wires there. Brought bloody Port Broughton's telephone system down for 3 days because it wasn't all this satellite stuff then. So we took off. I also remember once we were over at the dump.

09:00 We used to go round looking for copper and brass and bottles. All kids did that. Take them down to the junk man and, Albie Plum was his name, and sell them. Sometimes we'd nick it from the back and take it around to re-sell it to him. I don't know how old Albie survived. We lit a fire down at the dump. It was a windy day and it took off. We didn't have country fire services in those days and this bloody fire took off and

09:30 we took off into the bush and hid. Then all these jokers came down fighting this fire. Almost burned the town down. So we were chastised a bit after that. Self-chastised and yeah, that's the sort of thing that we done. We just got up to all sorts of things. Some not so mischievous. Can't think of any great things I done in those days. It was just

10:00 a country kid.

Did you help out on the farm?

Yeah. We had our jobs to do. When I was living in town it wasn't a problem. But when I was out on the farm I used to ride horses. I had to feed the pigs and the chickens. We were up 4, 5, 6 o'clock in the morning, doing all that sort of stuff. Breakfast. You do a couple of hours work before breakfast. Do your jobs and then by 9 o'clock you were free. Then generally by evening you had to be back for chickens.

10:30 Luckily we didn't have milkers, so we didn't have to milk cows, which was, so you'd have to help there. We had jobs on the farm. During harvest there was always something for you to do. Even as little kids we had to help with the bag sowing because it was all bag sowing in those days, didn't have bulk handling. Turning the bags over if they got wet and keeping the men supported with hot and cold water and all that sort of stuff. You had a fairly hectic life during the busy periods of farming. During

11:00 reaping and during, well harvest and planting. There was always something going on. Then you were shearing. So you were running around sweeping up after the shearers and all sort of stuff. You done that from a very early age. Soon as you could pick up a broom you were. That was one thing, it built into you that you had obligations. You had freedom, but you also had obligations and it was quite clear to us. We never ever even dreamed of not going and doing that work. That

11:30 was just part of it and then the free time was yours.

So you had a sense that you were contributing to the family.

You had, yes. You had to. In those days, I'm not sure what it's like now, farms are very much a business enterprise, but in those days it was a family enterprise. You must, everybody had to pitch in because the family had to survive on it. It was hard. Couple of seasons and it was all over for you. You had to pitch in and do what had to be done. The

12:00 men were pretty busy. They worked hard. In the early part of it we were actually clearing the scrub.

Now we'd be considered to be rapers and plunderers of the earth. But those days, this is back in the '50s, we had to clear the scrub before we could farm it – the Mallee. They used to drive stuff from the war, old tanks and bulldozers with great chains and go through and pull the scrub down. It was only low Mallee. Then it had

12:30 to be chopped up. Chainsaws were nonexistent in those days, if anybody had one it was, I never heard or seen one before. It was all cross cut saw. I always remember that they'd give me an axe as a younger guys and I had to trim off all the branches of the Mallee trees. I could never figure out why because then they'd bulldoze it all into a big heap and burn it. I did never know why I was trimming that. I figured out later it was just to keep me out of their hair. So they'd give me and axe and say,

13:00 "Trim all those branches off," and I was out of their way. Took me a while to wake up that I was being conned. So I wasn't so enthusiastic about trimming the branches. We cleared that area, cleared that scrub. Our family was pretty good. They still farm on that land. The grandfather, who was dead by this stage, but in the early days he was very, very smart man. He never burnt his property off.

13:30 Whereas a lot burned the old crops off, he always ploughed it back in and he always kept big stands of scrub in every paddock. So if we had a paddock of 4 or 5 acres, it'd be at least a third of that left to scrub. That's still there today. Now, that farming area still has the highest production rates because it left, the earth didn't blow away. In fact, that farm now

14:00 grows all the wheat for, special wheat the durum wheat for the pasta that we eat here. It all comes from there. A bit ahead of myself there, but.

Your grandfather seems to have caught on to land management quite early.

Very early in fact. What happened, he knew about the environment or something. I don't know. It's sort of catchy stuff nowadays.

14:30 Trash-farming, as it was called, which wasn't believed of a lot of people. Because, when you plough the straw back into the ground, it takes a while for it to break down. So they developed ways of chopping it so that it went back and broke down quicker. All hand-built stuff up there. Later on in life, when my cousins who took over the farm, my two cousins who were the sons of the two men that stayed on the farm when grandfather and then died,

15:00 they developed better techniques and the agricultural mob from down here in town went up there and watched what they were doing and saying "Why is this farm producing 18 bags and acre, when everybody else are producing 9?" sort of thing. It was because of the trash-farming, because of the stands of scrub and because of the way the land was managed and looked after. Whereas others just ploughed and filled it full of super phosphate and just kept forcing the ground to grow.

15:30 Then one day it doesn't. It takes a while, but it doesn't. Whereas the super phosphate inputs that was still required, but nowhere near the amount. It was affective and sensible too. It was less expensive to produce more. So he was a pretty smart guy the old fellow, he actually opened that land. He built the first roads up in that area, up thorough Bourke in Kadina. Owned the first motorcar, owned the first motorbike. My Mum and her brother were

16:00 the first people to roll a car coming down the Bourke dance one night. Drunk of course. They're still farming up there.

You grandfather was a pioneer in farming and you were out there killing rabbits, was that in due part of the destruction they were causing?

16:30 I don't know. I never connected it. We needed the rabbits to eat. They weren't just killed, that was before myxomatosis was introduced. We'd go out and get four or five rabbits a week and they would all end up in the pot for Saturday. Rabbit was a big feed, rabbit pie and all that stuff. We also fished. That was another thing. So there was a great sense, I mean, we weren't rich people. The rabbits were good. People used to go out

17:00 trapping. Saturday in the pubs, men used to come round with their wicker baskets full of pairs of rabbits. While you're having a beer you'll buy a couple of rabbits because, I wasn't drinking in those days. Not that anybody knew. You'd buy rabbits, and rabbits was fairly popular. I never had much do to with, we never had much chicken. We had chicken there but they were for growing eggs. We'd kill chickens for Christmas

17:30 or for any special reason, but I think we ate more rabbit that chicken. They were a damn nuisance too, rabbits. They used to eat all sorts of stuff. We considered them to be a nuisance. Then the government introduced myxomatosis and we couldn't eat rabbit after that. It was disastrous. All these rabbits were just laying all over the road. It was awful thing that myxomatosis. Whatever they did. They had all sorts of programs to kill the rabbits. 10-80 was

18:00 a, I think it was like a cyanide thing they used to put in baits all through the rabbit warrens so that they. It just wasn't doing it, they just breed faster. So they introduced this myxomatosis which is spread by mosquito if I remember rightly. It sends a disease right through the rabbit population. Popped them out for years and years, but they bounce back. Many, many years later, the rabbit population in areas where it's not settled, are big up

18:30 around Moomba and places like that. Millions of them.

Was high school much further away from home?

No, it was in Kadina. Where I come from, I was living in Kadina most of the time. We had a house in Kadina. The farm was only about 1 hour away. There was a school bus thing. Great times in the school bus. No, Kadina high school is

19:00 in the town there. It is quite a good high school. Having been educated in a very restricted Catholic convent under these domineering Irish nuns who were just fanatical. All I can remember is being on my knees and praying all the time. I can't even remember doing classes. First thing in the morning was half an hour of prayer. Then you'd do some lessons and then you'd do morning tea. So it

19:30 was a 5 minute prayer. You go out for morning tea and come back and it was another 5 minute prayer. Then it was lunchtime and it was about three quarters of an hour prayer. Then you'd have lunch and it was half an hour prayer after lunch. It went like that. At night you had to go to benediction. I don't know, it sort of cured me for life. If you come from that background you'd know what I meant. It was just praying all the time. We were just going through the

20:00 act. We weren't praying. Then I had to be an altar boy and all that sort of stuff. We had this very, very agro domineering Irish priest. I don't know why all these people were inflicted on us. I'm sure but I guess they taught us something. Some sort of discipline or whatever. But I can't think of anything that I couldn't handle myself. I didn't like it at all. I remember the first week I was at school. Mum took me down to school and they belted me for a week. I just wouldn't

20:30 accept that I had to be at that place. They just sat me in the corner and belted me for a week. The family supported that too. I was being a naughty boy. The nuns say, what the nuns say is right. You've got to buckle under.

Were your family Roman Catholic?

Yeah. My uncle was the Archbishop of Adelaide. Gleeson. He died not so long ago. Very much Irish. My name is Roberts, but their name was Maroney. Very much influenced by the Irish

21:00 Catholic faith. Probably for a good reason. It supported them during bad times. And they supported it. I know my grandfather used to make sure that the nuns had wood chopped and wood to burn and all that sort of stuff. Carted rocks from Western Australia to build the church in Kadina. All sort of stuff like that. Everything was devoted to supporting the church.

You weren't enjoying high school, but you were enjoying the bus trips to high school.

21:30 Sorry, I didn't enjoy the convent much, but I enjoyed high school.

You did?

Yeah, sorry. The bus trips were great. We had a lot of fun on that.

Tell me about that.

All the kids in school. The guys would sit in the back and the girls would sit in the front. I can remember having lots of fun throwing things out of the bus and dropping the pants of people that were. Is it called mooning? Mooning people following

22:00 and all that. Of course you were reported because it would be the neighbours and they knew who you were.

Recognised your bottom.

Recognised something. Funny thing about that. My son done it at Aldinga when he was in, the bloke that was the skipper of the ship, my wife was following the car. The next thing she looks up and there's these three bums at the back of the bus. The bus going from Aldinga to Wallangra. As she went passed she noticed that one of them was Chris, our youngest son. He seen her.

22:30 Marilyn's a bit strict like that. Hell, didn't he cop it. I said "Like father like son I suppose." And with the girls. You had fun with the girls. I guess that's where you get your first experiences there. I don't know. Tried all sort of stuff. Yeah, just lots of fun. I think. Throwing things around the bus, giving the bus driver a hard time. All that sort of stuff. Get

23:00 to school and you'd knuckle under for a while. High school good, I liked it. That was the trouble, I enjoyed the social life in high school so much. I done well in sports and athletics, but academically I was a bloody disaster.

Was there anything you liked academically?

History and for some reason bookkeeping. I don't know why. I done well at history and bookkeeping, but maths was a disaster. To a point where

23:30 they were going to fail me. But I just scraped through. I don't know why. I think I was waiting, I'll have

all this fun and then I'll get stuck into the schoolwork later. But it never eventuated. I never quite got stuck into it. I can handle stuff I liked. I knew I wasn't stupid, although I think a lot of people thought I was. I used to read a lot. Always read. Read a hell of a lot. Stories you know. I knew what was

24:00 going on, but I just didn't like being in class and I didn't like teachers who were agro. You had a few. We had a poor old fellow called Balisi. They brought him out from England. The teaching staff in Australia was a bit light on it in those days so they recruited people from the UK to come out, immigrating. He'd been teaching in some private school in somewhere, and he came here and after

24:30 3 months here he just thought we were the worst kids he'd ever dealt with, worst kids. He'd just never seen any discipline. We thought we were great, you know, but he just seen us that we were an undisciplined bloody rabble. He told us quite clearly several times. He packed up and took off. I think he ended up in one of the better schools down here where they perhaps weren't as rabbley. It was

25:00 good fun, high school. A game.

You said a lot of people left after a few years of high school. Was that always your intention?

Well, yes, I didn't think I needed. I thought I. All my brothers and sisters got to intermediate. I think one of my sisters went through the matriculation or something like that. I never even dreamed of going that far. I just didn't think it was needed. Never even thought about it. 5 years of high school, didn't believe it. I always knew that I would end up on the farm

25:30 or somewhere in a job. I was just wanting to get through this until I was old enough to leave school, which most people did in those days. Lots of kids did in those days. I think 14 was the age you left school I think I was only 14 and a half when I left school. I stayed longer than a lot of them did. If you were smart, or if you knuckled under at school, you might have just got intermediate which was third year high school in those days. You just get your intermediate certificate.

26:00 Which was considered to be, I mean, in those days that's all you needed to get a commission in the army. Intermediate, third year high school. Bomber pilots and all those guys during the war, they had intermediate. They went into commissioned jobs in the air force. That was good enough. So I thought getting half way through my second year or all my second year and then get a job, I thought I was pretty clever. Some of the kids had left at the end of the first year. They were driving around in tractors and ripping around in Utes and having a great time with money in their pocket. I was still trudging off to school. Bugger this. I want to get

26:30 in there with the action.

You were excited to get an offer of a job?

Yeah. I took the job in a bakehouse because I thought 'It's in town. It's different' and I think my wage was, it was under 10 shillings a week, I remember that, which is under a dollar. 10 bob was a dollar.

27:00 10 shillings was a dollar, that's right, I think if I remember rightly. A quid was 20 shillings wasn't it? 22 shillings or something like that. So it was under 10 shillings. I think it was about 8 and sixpence a week, How in the heel I was. And I used to be able to sneak a few beers on that. 8 and sixpence a week. The second year it went up to 10 or something like that. Then I joined the, I was

27:30 old enough by then, I actually joined the CMF and I put my age up. They didn't look at the certificate or anything, birth certificates. I jacked my age up by 6 months and joined the CMF. I was earning more as a reserve or a part time soldier than I was on the job.

What were you using your money for? Did some of it go towards your family?

No, they were pretty self reliant. I just wasted it basically. I'd started drinking a bit

28:00 then. I don't drink now, but I used to drink then. I can't remember what a beer cost. I was broke most of the time. Get your wages, it'd be gone by Saturday night. Movies. They built a drive in theatre. A couple of the guys on the farm, we'd get in a Ute and go to the drive in theatre. Like everybody else really. Two in the front and five lying in the back with a cover over us and. Pop up

28:30 and watch the movie and piss off.

So you didn't have to pay as much?

Yeah, that's right. Didn't have anything much to do with girls in those days. Didn't have a Ute.

You needed a Ute?

You had to have a Ute. If you didn't have a car you didn't have a bloody hope, Ute and a dog and a rifle in the back.

29:00 No, it wasn't much to do with girls in those days. I was still only 15 I suppose. Started to notice them I think round about that stage of the game. There wasn't too many around if I remember rightly. Never was big on it, but some guys, that's all they seemed to think about all the time. Whereas others were more interested in rabbiting and fishing

29:30 and having a good time out in the bush.

You decided to pack in your apprenticeship. Were they disappointed?

I don't think they were disappointed. I think they were quite happy about it actually because I was being a bit rebellious because I hated it with a passion. I can still remember it. I'd have to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning, go down to the bakehouse and open it up with the other guy, the bread guy would be there. Then I'd have to chop up

30:00 mountains of vegetables for the pasties. This big vat I had to chop it all up and then grind meat and the freezing cold in the morning outside just stand outside in an open air kind of thing and mix it all up with you hand all this pastry mix. Then, the other guy would be making the dough and we had to cut it all up by hand. It was all done by hand of course in those days. There was not too much machine. We had a roller to flatten the pastry.

30:30 It was a hand roller, but then later they bought another one. We'd make the pasties and then drop a blob of meat in them and seal them all up by hand. The same time boil the pie meat to make the meat pies. Bit of a story there, I, one night I had been drinking the night before and I was a bit blotto [drunk]. Got home fairly late. Woke up just a bit late.

31:00 Got to the bakehouse about 4:30. I was half an hour late. We had to boil the pie meat. It's boiling away, this big vat of meat boiling away. They had a cupboard where they used to keep all the essences and that. Half way through the boiling you'd go and get this bottle of essence. Pie essence or whatever it was, beef essence or something, and tip it in. They also had other essences in there. One of them was peppermint essence.

31:30 So pretty obviously what happened. As I, bleary eyed and not quite with it, I filed this pie meat up with peppermint essence. It wasn't obvious until the pies hit the street about 9 o'clock in the morning and people's eyes would open as they were watering eating this pie. They're still talking about it in Kadina, the peppermint pie episode. Every time, if I get to Kadina and walk in the pub, "Ah, peppermint pie man's back." If I went up there tomorrow I'd still get it. People

32:00 ate them though, they just copped it sweet. Get this new type pies. Must be this kid of new continental thing that's going on. Spaghetti was hitting town by that stage.

Quite fashionable. Peppermint pie.

Peppermint pies, yeah. Known far and wide. So the guy that owned the bakeshop was pretty happy the day I said I was. I was in the CMF and I was getting tied up with that and I wanted to go away on their camps and so on. So I said, "I think I'll

32:30 give it a miss." And I went back on the farm. Not our farm. I went on neighbour's. Farm labourer basically. There wasn't enough room on our place. Spent most of my time driving tractors and reaping and all that sort of stuff. Again, I wasn't all that popular. I was just a stupid bloke. I was just a stupid young guy. I remember driving along on a tractor in the middle of winter all hunched up and pulling up,

33:00 the tractors were all open in those days. They were just old, old case we used to call them. Terrible old things. Kerosene. They ran on Kerosene. I can remember I was harrowing. You know harrows at all, the big wide thing that hang off the back of tractors and just sort of go along up the back on things. Harrowing with this big, wide boom harrow. I'm pulling up this bit of hill and I said, "Hell, it's pulling hard." I never gave a thought to look around because it was just so freezing cold. Been there for hours.

33:30 What had happened, the right had wheel of the harrow got stuck in the fence. I was actually pulling the whole, pulling out about 3 or 4 chain of fence as I was pulling up the hill. Quite a lot of strife over that. I then had to finish, clean up that mess, finish harrowing and then go back and fix the fence in my own time. Because the stock would get out. Sheep and cattle.

34:00 I can remember the chastising. "Bloody stupid bloke. Stupid young guys. What are we going to do with you. Should join the army." So I did. Eventually after all that. I couldn't muck around much there either. I done my job, but I didn't do it quite so well I don't think. I then thought it was time for me to leave town.

During this time you were still living at home, sleeping there and?

Yeah, at Kadina.

34:30 No, I stayed out on the farm by then. I'd left home. I never ever went back to my home after the farm. I'd just go there and stay on the weekend or the odd time and that sort of stuff. I never really ever went back. I always intended to go back, but I never ever did.

Did your parents advise you on what they wanted for you?

Yeah, Dad used to try. Mum was always fairly busy and she just wanted me to be in a

35:00 decent job. Being on a farm in her thoughts, because she grew up on a farm was a decent job. I was earning money, I was accommodated and all that sort of stuff. They knew that I was never going to be the local doctor. I just didn't finish school. They were disappointed that I run away from school and I basically ran away. They couldn't stop me at 14 from leaving, so I did. Dad was pretty disappointed. I

think he was hoping that I do –they always -- my grandmother always thought I was quite

35:30 clever, quite smart. Maybe she was right, I don't know. I just, I was detracted by other things for some reason or other. I wanted to live the day and I never ever thought too much about the future. They were disappointed when I left and I never ever got back to home, which I was sorry about later.

How did your dad feel about you joining the army?

I think he would have preferred me to do just about anything else than go

36:00 into the forces, but a lot of us went into the forces. The prospect of life in a country town in South Australia in the late '50s early '60s was just bloody boring as hell. I mean life was just terrible. Going back to girls and what you do, we'd done all the things you could do. I'd been in strife with the bloody police, the police sergeant had been around a dozen times and kicked me in the bum. Nowadays of course you'd be charged

36:30 with vandalism or fruit raiding or whatever we used to do. But in those days the old sergeant would come around and him and Dad would have a bit of a chat out the back and then I'd be pulled out and kicked up the bum and that'd be it. I did get, one of the, a new policeman come up from town. He wasn't a local person so he didn't have any fear or favour for

37:00 anybody. I remember one night I'd had a few drinks. It was at the local dance. At the local dance was another thing. But the local dance, outside, most of the guys were outside boozing in the car park and all the girls were dancing with each other inside. That's what country local dances are pretty well like, except for the smooth dudes that were in there picking up the dames. We often wondered what they were trying to do. I threw the bottle and hit a stovie pole and a policeman seen that. He grabbed me and

37:30 took me down and threw me in the can, in the jail. I thought that was a bit extreme, so I bunged on a bit of an act. Anyway, he let me out, but I'd been charged. Then Mum got in the act. The policeman turned up at home. Mum was a bit of a figure about town. She was the president of just about anything there. The policeman turned up and the next thing I know she's got he policeman a bee in his ear and running him off out of the place.

38:00 She was more important that the bloody copper. The magistrate, she grew up with the magistrate, they come from the next farm over or something like that. I remember going before the magistrate and then he took me out and give me a kick up the bum. So the charges never ever, the police was pretty upset about that. I think he was gunning for me forever more. Then there was another incident where I got – with rifles again. I don't know what happened. We were shooting somewhere

38:30 and somebody else had shot up something. They blamed us. Shot the wheels off a tractor. They knew that we were out shooting. The word got back to the police that it was us. Well, it wasn't us. We didn't do it. The police came round to take me away again and give me a clip under the ear, or they were going to charge me or something like that. It was funny, about 3 or 4 years later there was another shooting incident at that stage.

39:00 The police turned up to take me off. At this stage I was in Vietnam I think and Mum said, "Well, he is shooting at the moment, but not around here." So your name can be, you can be stuck with something for the rest of your life, can't you? What happened? Where were we? I was in the jail I think. That's right, Mum and the magistrate sorted it all out and I was free again.

39:30 It was funny because my cousin, that's right, I was the last guy in the old jail. They were rebuilding the jail and my cousin was the first kid in the new jail. You weren't really put in jail. It was just to scare the living crap out of you. You weren't arrested and formally charged, they just scaring the hell out of you. Although this new policeman wanted to do all those new things. I don't think anybody was ever charged with anything until he turned up. It was all dealt with

40:00 out the back. The old police sergeant in those days had to provide their own car. They didn't have police cars and all that sort of stuff. They worked on the network and just keep the crime rate down. Well, I don't think there was much of a crime rate.

It was just you.

Just me, yeah. And the boys. No, I wasn't any better or any worse than anybody else. I was just part of the gang, I suppose.

What had your dad told you about the Second World War?

40:30 **He served in the air force in New Guinea and right through the Borneo campaign. Not a great deal. Told us a little but about sitting on beaches and sitting and watching things. All that. He wasn't a pilot or fighter pilot or anything. He was involved in the maintenance of the fighter squadron that supported the 9th Division up through the islands and then through Borneo and Morotai.**

41:00 **No he didn't say much. He had a bit of a drinking problem, Dad. He developed a drinking problem later in life.**

Tape 2

00:43 **Your dad developed a bit of a drinking problem. Was that as a result of things he experienced during his war service**

I think so. I also think it was part of, I

01:00 can't blame Mum. Mum was a hard working, very good person. I could never understand. I used to think about it. They seemed to be so different. Mum always said he was different when he came home from the war. I don't know what happened to him or if anything happened to him, but Mum always said he was a much different man after the war. He didn't go to the war until he was about 40. It was only, he was too old

01:30 initially. Then it was when the Japs [Japanese] were bombing Darwin they thought "Hell, I think we all better go." So he went and joined the air force. He was too old to go as a soldier, infantry or something like that. He ended up in the air force. It's funny because, like Marilyn's father was 19 when he joined the air force and never left Australia. Didn't even get to Darwin. Served good service and all that, but he was– done the whole war.

02:00 Dad joined up and was immediately, he was a dad with a family. He had two sons and a daughter at a very tender age growing up and a wife. A relatively young wife, I suppose. He was, he got married reasonably late. He was shot straight off up to New Guinea. From New Guinea, went right through the New Guinea campaign in the 9th division, supporting the 9th division. It was a pretty

02:30 rough trot. Then came back briefly and then went right through the Borneo campaign. The whole lot. He didn't get back till 1944 sometime. I could never understand why a poor old bugger at 40, 40 in the forces is old.

I would have thought he would have been in essential service in the war being a farmer.

He wasn't a farmer, he was a painter. My Mum's family were the farmers. I'm sort of between the two.

03:00 Well even the men on the farm, most of them went to the war. Only a couple, two young guys stayed, and they were the guys that inherited the farm. Actually it's a good point here. My grandfather was very, very Irish. He didn't believe those men should have gone and fought the war from the British. That's a very big point in the catholic background in a small country town. There was a feeling that we should have been more loyal to Ireland than to

03:30 Australia. The younger people of course wouldn't accept that. That was a very, very rural attitude amongst the older people.

How would he have wanted that loyalty to Ireland to play out?

They should have stayed home on the farm. The boys ran away. Two of his sons ran away out of the, thinking that. Two of the sons ran away from home. They got in the mid 30s and took off to Western Australia in an old Ford

04:00 backboard truck with 400 gallons of water on the back to get them across the Nullarbor. It took a hell of a long time to get there. They got a job in the mines at Kalgoorlie eventually. Hated that, because they were farmers. And the government wanted to contract, wanted somebody to build the road from Kalgoorlie to Leonora, which is interesting later. They bidded the contract and got it. They didn't have any money and didn't have any equipment, but

04:30 had the way to put it all together. Anyway, one of them stayed over there as a major contractor in Western Australia, made a fortune over there. The other bloke joined up when the war started and took off as a soldier and ended up coming back here to South Australia and Uncle Jim stayed over in Western Australia. They were, because he was domineering. He was a smart old bugger, but he was a very domineering man. He died in 45 I think.

05:00 **Just before your dad came back?**

Yeah. They didn't want, he didn't believe that they should have gone and fought England's war. Maybe his attitude changed when the Japs were on their doorsteps. But in the early days, these guys joined up very early, before the Japs got involved. Some of them went off to England and all that sort of stuff. Certainly into the desert. In the 9th division that went into the desert war.

05:30 It was, growing up in the Catholic school system in those days, and in the Catholic Church. They were always very proud of their link with the Irish heritage. I can never quite understand it, because I never see myself in that way. I remember my Mum's cousin I think it was, yeah cousin, Mum's cousin and uncle, who was the Archbishop of Adelaide, they almost believed they were Irish. Nobody being,

06:00 they'd come from Ireland in 18 bloody spud famine. Run off out of the place. What the hell do you want to go back there for? But they had this very proud link to their Irish heritage. Almost to the point that they believed they were still Irish.

They were bitter still towards the English?

Very bitter about the British. Still bitter, or had this thing against England. If you get into aid work, you'll find a lot of Irish people in aid work. That probably why I'm in it, maybe it's a heritage thing. Because again

06:30 because of the old spud thing. You had to help yourselves. You'll find in humanitarian aid, a hell of a lot of Irish people there. Involved in that. This desire to help people that are unfortunate. I think it stems from the troubles of the famine because it was a pretty bad time in Ireland.

Given the great Irish writers and playwrights and so on, those stories

07:00 **remain quite fresh for people.**

They were. The old blarney and Irish could tell a good story. They could.

You were saying the campaigns your dad was involved in. He must have seen some difficult things.

I'm sure. He wasn't an infantry soldier, which I was later on in life. Infantrymen can be pretty, what do you call it? Chauvinistic about

07:30 the service, because we reckon it's in your face stuff. I guess, I mean he went through Tarakan and Balikpapan, the bombings and all those sort of stuff. He was away for quite a while, and he came back and Mum always said he was a very different man. Very quiet. This drink thing developed later in life and to the point that they didn't sleep together anymore. In fact I slept in Dad's room with him down in one of the bedrooms. I can always remember the smell of the alcohol. He'd drink,

08:00 he'd knock off from work, go to the pub, have a couple of beers and he'd grab a bottle of cheap plonk or something and go home and drink. He always tried to hide the fact that he drank. We all knew it, but he tried to hide it. Poor old bugger. He never, we weren't allowed to swear in the house. As he come older, he almost faded off into the background. Later on when I think about it, I never really knew

08:30 the guy. Never really knew him. I don't know whether that affects me in any way. I've not really got into that much, but I guess a lot of people don't know their fathers.

Especially not from that era.

Even with me, I was away a lot. Sometimes the boys say to me "We wish you'd have been around a bit more, Dad." I say "Well, I was more interested in getting you through a good education." I could earn a lot of money overseas. I can't earn it here. I had no qualifications in Australia, but I can do anything overseas it's an odd thing.

09:00 **Your dad would have been in that position too. He'd have to work hard for his family and then he went away to the war and possibly felt his role was as the provider.**

Very much so. He did provide. We never went without. We never had a lot, but we never went without. As we grew away, as the family grew away from the brunt of the family that were on the farm still, that's what happened, as we sort of

09:30 grow, we grow away from the farm. My older brothers never had anything to do with the farm. I did, but they didn't. Then we weren't getting the meat that we used to have and all that. So Mum and Dad, in fact Mum went working for a while. She actually cooked at the hotel at the old Wombat Hotel. It was a Kadina hotel. For a while to keep us going. But then that was in the period where

10:00 we were all in school. Three of them were in high school and myself and my younger sister at primary school. So the outgoing, and I know very well all about that. When you've got 3 kids at school, the outgoings increase. Blazers and all that sort of stuff. It was important for Mum that we looked just as smart as the other kids. I think it was a bit of a struggle. Then Dad was sort of fading,

10:30 gradually sinking off into the background when the grog got to him more and more and more.

He wasn't an unpleasant drunk, though?

No. You never even seen him, he was just. I often wonder what it was. He'd just sit in a room and drink. If I walked in the room, of course, you wouldn't see it. You could just smell it, but you'd know that he was drinking this flagon of wine or whatever he was drinking. I used to just shake my head and say. Maybe it was the war.

11:00 I think now, after my own experiences, I've seen and nearly fell into the same trap myself. You can give up pretty easily. I don't think you had the diversions in a small country town that you can find elsewhere. There wasn't the help available that there is now. So there was a lot of bitter old men.

A lot of them had trouble getting jobs when they came back from the war.

11:30 I think they were better off than people in the city, because they go back to their communities. Someone went back on the farm and they got back into what they done before in one way or another. I remember lots of his friends used to sit around and they were, stopped talking when you went into the room and then start after. Then there were others that discussed the war quite a bit. We grew up with that war, in

the years after the war. I'm talking within 10 years of the war. I was born in

12:00 '44, so by '54 I was 10. 8, 9 and 10 I can remember listening to stories of dare and do of the guys from the desert and through the jungles and that. But my Dad never used to speak much about it.

What impression did you have? Did they sound like adventure filled stories, romantic?

Some were, but there was another group, and now I know the difference between them. Some were, it was all a great adventure. I sort of picked up on that. But others were very, very

12:30 quiet and bitter. I remember old Jack Altman who had lost his leg and later on I read the story about how he lost his leg. He was a prisoner of war and it was hacked off with a bayonet and a file. All these sorts of things. There was that group that didn't say much, but I wish they had spoken a bit because all we picked up from it all was the adventure of it all. Here we were, 16-17 years of age and born in a country town with bugger all prospects and ready to go. Obviously the army's the place to go.

13:00 **You were 16-17 and decided to join up.**

I joined the CMF as they called it. I thought, well, I didn't know that I was going to go into the regular army. I thought the CMF would give me that bit of. They used to go off on camps and all the other guys were in it and it was almost like a club.

13:30 You couldn't call it the army. You got a uniform and bigger guns. Bigger version of the scouts. It was a proud little unit there, the old depot at Kadina. People had marched off to the First World War through there, and the bloody Boer War even. There were still old Boer War guys around when I was a kid. Talking about galloping across the veldts of Africa. I can remember sitting down talking to an old guy about the Boer War. He was showing me his pictures and all that.

14:00 Great stuff.

It would have seemed very exotic.

Absolutely. Then we had other grandfathers who was in the wider family who had served in the First World War. I have family member who have served in the. They'd, that was a pretty awful business. Some of those guys didn't have a great deal to say if they'd survived. Not many of them did. There was a few. I knew

14:30 an old guy who was 15 or 16 when he landed at Gallipoli. He'd gone back to England, was wounded and repatriated to England and married a barmaid in England and she was living in Kadina. They were friends of my Mum and I used to listen to stories. All he'd done was, he'd joined up, got on a ship, went to the desert, gone on another ship, got off at Gallipoli, got shot, back on a ship, back to England and back to Australia.

15:00 It was all over in 6 months. He was lucky he just got wounded. There was others. He was back here and he still wasn't old enough to go in the pub. He always said he got kicked in the bum for going and having a drink. He was, they wouldn't believe that he'd been there. We grew up on all that. Later on I find out of course that they weren't combatant soldiers, they were support troops and all that. They'd just seen the better side of things. Obviously some of them were bombed and casualties, but

15:30 then even when you did get the brunt to talk about it, they never talked too much about the bad side of it. It was always a bit of fun. Of course you always remember the fun.

Why do you think that is?

Don't know. I don't remember much about the fun in Vietnam. Wasn't much fun there at all. It was just an awful place. There wasn't a great deal of fun. Funny things, but I can't remember much fun.

16:00 That was compressed into a year. Whereas the Second World War, they were away for 3 and 4 and 5 years. The amount of time they spent in action was nothing compared to, with Vietnam, you were there for a year. You were in the shit for a year.

Right in the middle of it.

Well, you know, talk about the 9th Division. They spent a lot of time just sitting around camps in Africa. Then they got stuck into Tobruk.

16:30 My grandfather was up there, my wife's grandfather and father, two of them were both at Tobruk. 9th Division. Then in Syria doing nothing for quite a while and then El Alamein and then back to Australia. They sat around here for months and months and months until the Papua New Guinea campaign and the Borneo campaign. So I don't know, somebody's worked it out that

17:00 how many days the average Second World War soldier spent in action. Relative to 5 years it wasn't a great deal of time. Not that that diminished it in any way at all. 5 minutes in action's enough for anybody. That was just a different sort of thing. There were times that you could have good times and fun and go in to Cairo and whatever they did.

Once again very exotic.

Belly dancers and

17:30 the whole nine yards. It was great, so I was ready to go by 16 ½.

You thought at 16 that's what you would encounter.

I always remember I seemed to be waiting for something. When I was 13 I was waiting to be 14 so I could leave school. When I was 14 I was waiting to be 15 so I could get my rifle's licence. When I was 15 I was waiting to be 16 so I could get my drivers licence. When I was 16 I wanted to be 17 or 18 to join

18:00 up. After that I don't know what you're waiting for.

How old did you have to be to have sex in those days? What was the age of consent?

Did they have that for a bloke? I always thought it was 16 for the girls. 16 or something like that. I don't know. Never knew anything about age. Or sex even. Never even knew about the consent thing. No. I can remember hearing about it. With that,

18:30 I was never big in that sort of thing. I didn't sit and mull. There were guys that were talking about how many they'd had in the last – and I knew it bullshit anyway. There just wasn't that many girls around. Some of the girls they were talking about I knew, I thought I can't believe that. I actually asked a couple and got slapped. No, I don't know, but there's always those guys that seems to be their whole life. I don't know about the age.

19:00 I don't know that I even had a sexual experience in those days.

You had other things on your mind.

Yeah, I'm not sure I wouldn't have had one if I could. Oh yes, I did actually. A couple. Bloody fumbling and all that sort of thing. I didn't do very well at all. I don't know. I don't know that I. I can't really think why. It didn't seem to be that important to me quite frankly. I think if it was

19:30 before me I would have got into it, but it didn't seem important. Now as I look back maybe it was at the time.

Did your mum and dad instil quite strong morals in you?

Dad, yes. Mum was a bit of a renegade in some regards. When nobody was looking she'd drink beer and play darts and all that. When people were looking she didn't do any of those things. Dad was a pretty straight

20:00 sort of a guy. We couldn't sear and he wanted us to be, he wasn't all that full on on the religion side. Mum was very full on with religion. I think that if you went to church and looked the part, you were okay with Mum. Whereas Dad was a deeper moral. The swearing and respect of others and consideration of others and all that was very big with him. Whereas I don't recall Mum being too heavy on that sort of stuff. As long as you looked the part and went to church and

20:30 was seen to be praying and that, she was quite happy with that. Then she was always a very busy lady. Always very busy. Not to say that she never had time for us. She always had time, she always looked after the family. But she always was very active in many other things. Whereas Dad wasn't. And he used to keep an eye on us. He faded away.

He was worn out.

I guess so. I don't know what it was. I can see it. It was funny,

21:00 I thought that there wasn't a great deal of love between my mother and father. But when he died, I've never seen a woman so bloody mortified. She just couldn't believe. He died early. He retired at 60 because he was service pensioner. He was injured overseas. He had a repatriation pension. So something happened. He died and I was away. They flew me back from Malaya

21:30 to his funeral. I thought "This will be an odd thing" because I didn't think that Mum had a great deal of love between them, because they were sleeping in different rooms. I couldn't believe Mum when I seen her. She was absolutely. She was just, he was just so much a part of her life, that when he died, she just couldn't accept it. Couldn't believe it, I thought "Christ, you did love the guy after all." Amazing isn't it? Same with my brothers. They used to ridicule him a bit because he used to drink.

22:00 But when he died, God struth – it didn't affect me so much because I was away a lot. But they'd stay at home. So it's funny you tolerate things and you look at things and then when they're gone they're gone aren't they? Gone forever and you don't know what you just missed. Same with me sometimes, I feel like I would have liked to sat down and had a yarn with him, but I never got that opportunity. I'd like to talk to him now.

22:30 **A lot of people end up feeling that way with their parents. We could have spoken about this or that.**

I'm not sure what I wanted to speak about. He never caused me any problems, but I would have liked to know him a bit more.

As a man?

I often look at him. I sit here and I look up there and I say "What sort of a guy were you?" Everybody said he was an absolute gentleman. Thorough, perfect gentleman. Nobody even knew he drank.

23:00 They said he was a thorough gentleman. Very considerate of people.

He sounds like a very moral, ethical man.

He was. His family were very nice people too. He had very little to do with his family. His sisters and that. In fact I haven't seen them. They're all dead now. I think there's one still alive here in town somewhere. I should go and see her. Never knew them. We always knew my Mum's family. They were at Kadina.

23:30 The others were from town or from Kalgoorlie. It would have been nice to sit down and have a talk with him.

It seems like you've ended up with quite a few of his traits though.

Maybe. Well, if I had anybody's traits, I'd prefer his. Except the drinking of course.

24:00 **When you were 16-17 you were in the CMF. You'd left Kadina?**

I'm still in Kadina. Travelled in from the farm and go to the parades. I started to become more interested in what the army was doing. Then there was an old boy called Jock Gordon who was the regular army fellow that used to look after us. Jock used to get a bit of a few shillings I think if he'd

24:30 get recruits, because they were recruiting. The army in the early '60s was very small. A very small army. So the recruit requirements weren't that great. So what they used to like to do was keep an eye out on the CMF, and if there were any likely lads there, joined them up. You'd got that little bit of experience and etcetera, etcetera. I remember when I came down to do all the tests. You had to do all the same tests and everything that everybody else

25:00 done. It was about 25 people trying to join the army at that particular period. They didn't do it all that often. Only about 3 of us got in. We'd all had army reserve background. We all had similar background. So we all packed off over to do our training. Old Jock Gordon sort of spotted me and started working on me and taught me. I'd serve with Jock later on. I was a sergeant much later on and I

25:30 served with Jock. He said "I thought you'd do all right in the army."

Did you sign up in Kadina?

No, you had to come to Adelaide. For CMF? Yeah you joined all in Kadina. That's how I got in 6 months under age because the local lieutenant was the pharmacist, or the local commanding officer was the pharmacist or something. It was funny in those days. You might be, his boss was one of the soldiers.

26:00 He was the lieutenant because he'd done his metric or something or got to year 3 or tear 10 or whatever was the 3rd year of high school and joined the CMF and done his national service in the 50s, the early national service system. Stayed on and ended up getting commissioned in a CMF commission. But his boss, who wasn't much older than him, just like being a soldiers. So they'd have to swap positions. It's crazy.

26:30 There was a lot of that in the country. We were able to handle that. You're the boss today, but tomorrow I'm the boss. You just accepted that. That was normal.

So 3 of you got in.

Into the regular army. The time in the reserve was just jolly good fun. Lots of grog lots of cash. Don't know quite what we were actually doing there. We shot off guns and stuff like that.

27:00 It was just fun. Just a bit of fun. It was a club. It's different in the regular army of course.

What years are these?

'62. 1962. I was in the CMF from 61 to 62. Early 61 I think to the end of 62.

You sign up with the regular army. Can you tell me about

27:30 **your training?**

Well, we went by train from Adelaide across to Kapooka in New South Wales. There was three of us I think. I learned to play chess on that particular journey. On eof the guys was a crazy chess player, so I learned to play chess. We played chess the whole way across the thing. Then we were met at Kapooka camp by the drill instructors, which

28:00 are almost like the nuns. Not quite as bad as the nuns, I don't think. That was the first cultural shock.

All of a sudden you were just reduced – they used to say they'd break you down and then build you up. Not sure if they were terribly successful at that. We could always tell that they were sort of acting, so we went along with the game. Not like the gung ho American drill that you see in the movies.

28:30 It was a sort of element, some of those guys were pretty soft hearted really, helped you through and things. It was rigorous and very hard, very hard. I thought I was fit coming form a farm where I could throw bags of wheat around and do all that sort of stuff. That place tested us. It really tested us.

What kind of physical training?

Just endurance. Running. Up and down hills and sort of up at 6 or 5 o'clock in the morning straight into it. It's go all day. Drill and learning

29:00 how to do drill, it's boring and it's physically demanding. Standing still, not moving with your rifle out here somewhere for 5 minutes while they go along and correct all the positions. We didn't think much of it anyway. Do all this stuff – we were more interested in shooting in the bush. Going in the bush. So we also had I guess you could call

29:30 it academic stuff. For us guys, for instance for me, because I hadn't done my intermediate at school, they run what they call army class three education course. So I actually got my intermediate in about three months in Kapooka, or intermediate equivalent. It was a bit of a break from the grind the physical side of things. You got

30:00 that bit of education with it.

You were talking about your training there. What training were you getting in the bush?

We had to do field craft like camouflage and concealment and learning basic ambushing and just the very, very basic infantry skills that you need to have some idea.

30:30 We had more of that later on in infantry training, but. So you covered all sorts of things. It was an introduction almost to drill, parade ground stuff which is not that we're any good at that, the Australian army, we weren't in those days. Also it was very hard because the Australian army budget was pretty low and we were using Second World War stuff. When I first joined we were still wearing khaki and blanco in our belts and that

31:00 green stuff. Later on we went into all jungle greens with boot polish to our boots and stuff. In the early days it was all khaki drills all left over from the Second World War. Boots were, we got them when they were red and we had to make them black. Boots in the army during the war were tan. Tan and black. So we had all these old things. It was also at a certain stage when the army was changing. They were starting to get all new equipment, so we were still using all the old equipment at Kapooka.

31:30 Being introduced to new equipment, more modern rifles and more modern field equipment.

Easier to use?

A lot easier to use. Trouble was you could carry a lot more of it. You didn't get any less weight, you just carried a lot more. You didn't sort that out until much later. You were very, very busy. Then you had duties. You had guard duty and mess duties and all that. It was

32:00 full on from 5 o'clock in the morning till sometimes 8 at night. It's all different now I understand. One of my sons went through there much later. I was briefing them up on all they had to do and they just breeze through it. You had to be immaculately ironed and clothed and pass various phases of the tests. If you didn't you got back squadded and you had to go through it all again. If you got back squadded more than three times you got kicked out. We lost a lot of people. That was my first encounter, not personally, but

32:30 with homosexuality. I never knew that such a thing existed. They caught one of the guys there, couldn't contain himself. He was bashed to within an inch of his life and then thrown out. Brutal treatment. They could have just kicked him out I guess, but.

Do you think that's changed?

I think so. I don't know what it's like now. During my time in the army we

33:00 realised there were homosexuals probably there, but we adopted the American system of don't ask don't tell sort of thing. Just leave it at that.

Who bashed him?

The other soldiers and the staff. The staff brought him in and then you got those people to sort of bash him. There's just people that do that sort of stuff. Also thieves were bashed. Anybody caught thieving were lined up. One of the biggest crimes, worse than homosexuality

33:30 was to steal from your comrade. That was almost killing offence. Taken into the bathrooms and, you know those big bass brooms, the big that all the straw head that you do concrete with. They were scrubbed with those and all sorts of horrible things. I never really thought that was appropriate. I didn't

get involved in that myself. But I didn't stop it either. That's the way they deal with it.

That was their

34:00 **culture.**

Culture, staff culture. It was inculcated into all the soldiers. But you find brutal people in anything. Although, later on as we went into further training, those people didn't come out in general, didn't make the grade. Generally the guys that come out the other that went into the regular units to serve the full term

34:30 were not the gung ho brutal domineering types. They certainly filtered them out.

It's been our experience of the people that we've met, they've been nice types. Essentially they've been very good people.

It's a pity because the general public have a vision of certainly soldiers and I guess Vietnam veterans in particular as

35:00 being baby killers and all that. When we're in fact quite the opposite. Very much quite the opposite. Even such things as the environment and all sorts of stuff. Even such things as the environment and all sort of stuff. I think we were pretty responsible. Those people just didn't get through. Even later on, I might be jumping ahead, in the national service squad. That national service, we got the best the country could offer us. The guys that

35:30 came into the army they were selected anyway. Then the ones that got through and came into the regular units and reinforced us, you couldn't have wished for better men. They were great guys. Really – and of course we dovetailed in very well. We were all soldiers in the unit and we didn't care what your hierarchy or your antecedence were. You just were serving together. There was no such thing as reg national service. These divisions were in other places and came out later, but while you were actually serving they were there.

36:00 You never found objectionably people. They just didn't make the break. They just didn't make the grade. They were filtered by some sort of a leveller in there somewhere, I don't know how it works. But it works. We were all pretty much the same sorts of people.

Maybe the leveller has got to do with some kind of moral fibre?

Could be. Yeah we had, yeah I think so. I don't know. I think the

36:30 system found people it wanted somehow. It found them and filtered them and got them. We never had any sort of extremes. Later on I seen people change, but the conditions that changed them were extreme. Even in myself to some extent. Some stuff happened that you prefer not to think too much about. I'll get into that later.

37:00 **Then you moved onto corps training which was more specific.**

You got a three or four day break about halfway through, round about the 6 or 8 week mark. Then you went back and I was so proud because you got to wear a little blue thing on your epaulette and you were one of those new kids, you had been there 6 or 8 weeks and had passed X amounts of tests and.

You must have been proud of passing your intermediate.

Yeah, it was a busy time. Well, my brain was working, it was a whole

37:30 thing, was new. It was like being alive. You were really pumping I guess. Fit and everything. Those distractions or whatever it was, I wasn't performing in high school weren't there any more, I could see a reason for things. A very good reason. And I've always responded to reason.

What was the reason?

I just had to get to a level of these other guys. The army said "You've got great potential but your education is rat shit. Come in here you've

38:00 got three months to do 3 years' work." That certificate that you got was equivalent to the civilian intermediate. I went on with education in the army and ended up in university here in Adelaide through the army education system.

It was quite positive for you?

Oh yeah. Once I got the hang of learning stuff and that I enjoyed it. Particularly the stiff that I liked.

38:30 I went on to -- after that you graduated from Kapooka and went up to Ingleburn then, which was the school of infantry. I was actually posted to armoured corps. You didn't have much say as to where you went. I wanted to be an engineer. Army engineer. They weren't taking army engineers at that particular intake. They only took intakes every three months

39:00 or something. They said "We'll put you in armoured corps." But all my mates were going to infantry, that's where most people went. I'm not sure why they chose, I think I've done fairly well on the

technical test. You done a lot of batteries psychological testing there. They tested you backwards and frontwards and up and down, all sorts of stuff. You done all sorts of stuff – wheels going this way and all this sort of. I think I done fairly well. They thought, “This guy can go into technical”. I said “No, I want to go into the infantry” so I appealed against the thing and ended up

39:30 in the infantry. Which was the stupidest thing I’ve ever done in my life. The other guy, just a bit of an aside. I remember years later, the other guy that was posted to Armoured Corps went. In Vietnam years later, not that many years later, I was a section commander and we’d had a pretty rough trot. I’m on the side of the road digging a hole. Hadn't had water for a couple of days. My section is there and we’re digging in and I could see these armoured

40:00 vehicles boring up the road and dust and crap. They go past and this joker yells out, this armoured vehicle pulls up an APC [Armoured Personnel Carrier]. He said “Roberts what are you doing?” I looked up and it was this guy. He was a corporal tank commander. I said to my guys, “I could have been that bastard” He kicked a big drum of water off for us, bags of water and just kicked one of these jerry cans of water off. So the connection was helpful at the time. I just

40:30 think to myself, “You bloody idiot. You could have been sitting up there in this armoured vehicle with water and brew gear and lots of tucker and not carrying your bloody bags.” We’d just cut out of the jungle, we’d been there for weeks. Pretty messy, hadn't washed for 6 weeks or something.

You took the hard road?

Took the hard road. I sure did.

Tape 3

00:38 **You joined the artillery?**

Infantry.

Rather than the artillery because your friends were doing it?

Yeah. I joined the infantry rather than the armoured corps. Tanks. There was another reason too. The tank corps in those days, or the armoured corps in those days

01:00 had a half dozen tanks down at Puckapunyal and a few Second World War armoured cars in the corps going nowhere. About 3 months after I elected not to be a member of that particular mob, that’s when they got all these beaut American modern equipment. The whole corps was totally redeveloped. It was just so different. And I’m still humping my bluey around. I missed

01:30 out there. I was stupid. Funny, later on I did end up in the armoured corps, but in a different way. I went off to Ingleburn. We done what we call infantry core training, which was pretty exciting stuff. It was the more advanced training that you carried on from your basic schools training at Kapooka. It was a lot of field work and all that sort of stuff. Doing

02:00 exercises out in the bush and lots of lectures. We done lots of people stuff and history and they done a fairly good job on us in those days. We were pretty well trained. You had to pass everything. Testing was rigorous. One of the other things was, the guys who were teaching us were nearly all Second World War people that served

02:30 and stayed on through the Korean War. They were fantastic men. They were still only corporals and sergeants, but when the army expanded from two battalions to nine battalions in a matter of a few years, these guys went from corporal straight up the ladder. They had all the knowledge and schooling there just wasn't the vacancy in such a small army. They stayed on. They were professional soldiers. They were good men too. Good, compassionate, hardworking guys who believed that

03:00 their whole life to be a soldier, that’s what it was, they wanted to be and that’s what they we doing. They kept it simple. I never encountered too many gung ho drill type as you see in American movies. We were a different army. We knew each other by first name. Core training was good fun. The skills that we learned, we learned to shoot better under lots of different conditions.

03:30 There was no doubt about what our business was. Our business as infantrymen was, the role of the infantry is to close in and kill the enemy. That’s still the role today. There was no business about what we were training for. But at that stage, apart from a battalion in Malaya on garrison duties, there was no major conflict that we were involved in. Except that in 1962 when I first joined the first advisors, went to

04:00 Vietnamese forces. But we never thought we’d be involved in it. They were all sergeants and warrant officers who were going up there and working with the Vietnamese soldiers. We never thought that in a few years we’d get us all caught up. Still going up there and just Kennedy was putting special forces and they had advisers join them and then the whole thing started. But we’re hearing stories, “Wouldn’t it be great? Going to exotic places.” They

04:30 weren't actually heavily in combat. Sometimes you'd get caught up with it. But it sounded good. Of course, the aim in those days in infantry centre at Ingleburn was to get selected for the next battalion that was going to Malaya. So that was the only exotic thing happening at the time. So I spent 3 months there. Again we did guard duties and peeled spuds and all the basic stuff

05:00 you do. They don't do that now of course as a contracted out.

What did you enjoy best about your time in core training?

I think being in the field. I loved being in the bush on exercises. Field camps, field rations. I love walking. You were fit and I enjoyed that. The bonding or the camaraderie of being in a group of people is,

05:30 you've probably experienced it, it's like you feel you're very much a part of something. Whether it's worthwhile or not is somebody else's decision. We felt we were very much a part of something. We felt we were contributing to, or may be able to contribute to Australia. We had a very heavy strong belief in Australia and the whole concept of Australia. Not much of that English thing or that Irish thing was

06:00 ever obvious to us, was every dominant in us or what do you call it? We didn't think we were transplanted poms or Irish people or whatever. We were Australians and this was Australia. We had a proud heritage of Australian military background to follow, which was very important to us. We were as good as those guys that served in the desert and in the First World War and all that sort of stuff. We had to

06:30 be as good as those because they were the guys that were training us. We've still got guys from the First World War floating around back in the 50s and 60s. So we had a heritage to live up to. A very proud one as it was put to us. Later on in life you found there was a few wrinkles in there that I'd preferred not to have known about. There was also that feeling of the domino

07:00 theory. I guess you've heard all about that.

You were being told about that in core training?

Yeah, you know, it was starting to be thought that one day we're going to have to do something up there somewhere rather than have to do it here. I think Vietnam surprised everybody, but Malaya was, or Malaysia was probably the obvious place, and Indonesia. Because Indonesia at that stage was fairly heavily

07:30 – under Sukarno – was a bit ambivalent to everybody. The communists were getting control of that place. Funny, they used to say to us in the core training, we used to have these lectures and they said that "Over the next 100 years in Australia, the major threats will come from firstly Indonesia, secondly India and thirdly Japan again." That's what they used to teach us. Nobody mentioned Vietnam. Not that they was a threat to us.

08:00 It was never ever thought that was going to be what it was.

What problems did they foresee arising in India?

I think just the pressure of population. Remember that was the early '60s. It wasn't too long after the Brits had left and there was great struggles in India going on for the domination of communists was still fairly active over there. All sorts of oddbods and stuff of promoting. I think just the burgeoning population there.

08:30 China was never mentioned. I don't know why. Never mentioned China. But I remember India, Indonesia, that was obvious, India and Japan again in the next 100 years. That's nearly 50 years ago they were telling us that sort of stuff, 50 years to wait for Japan. No, 40 odd years ago they were telling me that. Maybe they just inflicted us with key (?) and I've got a key here. It was Korean wasn't it?

09:00 We done a lot of history and we were being briefed on what may be. A lot of it was to put up bogey in front of us. To give us a reason to. It was very hard. We had to tolerate a lot of personal hardships. We didn't get much leave. Couldn't figure out why. We had crappy gear until this new stuff started

09:30 to turn up. For instance, we never had anything to keep us warm. Because the Australian army and grew up and fighting in the jungles. So the Australian army had two things for keeping you warm, a jumper and a grey coat. The jumper was too light and the great coat was too heavy. So what we used to do was cut the bottom of the grey coat and wear that. So in the field, we had no field gear to keep you warm. We used to wear sandbags. Cut sandbags down to make and put them on. Then of course

10:00 all this American stuff started to arrive and all the drill kit, so smart then. Our uniforms were fairly basic. To go off on leave, we had to wear uniform on leave in those days. It was just your jungle greens. Highly starched in summer and battle dress in winter. I don't even know if many of us had much in the way of civilian clothes then in those days. Just quite happy to go out in uniform.

10:30 **How did the public treat you in uniform?**

In the '60s, yeah, you were treated fairly well actually. Because it wasn't that long, it was only 20 odd years after the war. People still remembered. I thought we were treated okay. We had our own pubs we

used to drink at and so forth. There was never any, I

11:00 never experienced any negative attitudes against soldiers. We were generally a pretty well behaved mob. As distinct from the bodgies and the widgies.

Explain briefly the bodgies and the widgies.

Well bodgies and weegies. They were generally hanging around cities. They were, I guess, I don't think the bogans of today would be

11:30 quite the same because they're a distinct breed on their own, particularly from South Australia. My own boys reckon they are anyway. I remember they used to hang around this part of the world more than anywhere else, this part of South Australia. They used to dress with, I remember rock and roll was big. Bill Haley and the Comets and Presley was on the way. They had Presley purple shirts and Sinatra

12:00 red jumpers and little goldie fleck jumpers and stove pipe pants, which I think was imported into this country by the Italian immigrants. They used to wear these very tight pants. Then they had what they called brothel creepers on, which were the desert boots with ripple soles and you couldn't hear them coming or going. They were a pretty aggro mob if I remember rightly. We used to come down from the country to Prospect

12:30 and pick a fight with half a dozen of them and have a big blue and then jump in our utes and head off back up the country after you'd knuckled a few bodgies. They used to have widgies that used to hang around with them. They were basically a gang. Street gang in the suburbs in South Australia.

And the weegies?

They were the female equivalent. They were a bit like, I guess the closest I can describe them, remember that Effie that's on, Effie the Greek girl? They sort of looked a bit like that if I remember rightly. They used

13:00 to wear their hair out and funny hairdo. All the bodgies had big, long sideburns and hair up in Elvis Presley style. Very cool dressers, some of these guys. Some of them probably weren't bodgies, they just dressed that way. But the real bodies were gangs. If they got you on your own they belt the living crapper out of you.

So the army boys were considered to be better

13:30 **bets than…**

We were yeah. We'd submitted ourselves to forms of discipline and service of the country and all that sort of stuff. So we weren't treated badly. We weren't in that breed. I don't know what they had in Sydney. I don't know whether they had bodgies and widgies over there. I'd done all this in Sydney. I was in Sydney by this time. Living in Sydney. Holsworthy. Big city and a boy from the country. I remember going in and asking for my first

14:00 beer and they said "An old one or a new one?" I said "I bloody don't want and old one." A schooner over there is about that big. A great big glass, whereas a schooner over here is the average glass. "Do you want a schooner or a middy?" I'm not going to have an old one, I'll have a new schooner. So you get a great big bucket in front of you and. You know what I'm talking about old and new? Toohey's old and Toohey's new and all the various types of beer in New South Wales. Used to be able to tell where you were in Australia

14:30 in those days by what [beer] the pubs had out in front. If it had West End you knew you were in South Australia. If they had Toohey's or Tuth's, you knew you were in New South Wales. If they had VB [Victoria Bitter] you knew you were in Victoria, XXXX in Queensland, but you don't know where you are nowadays because they're all over the bloody place. We only used to go out on weekends.

15:00 We used to do a lot of social things in the canteen. There was no girls involved. Some of us had girlfriends and that sort of stuff. You didn't have much time for that. Certainly not during Ingleburn and recruit training and advanced training or core training as you call it. Then I went into an infantry battalion and we were in what you call a regular unit ready for deployment.

How long did it take before you went into

15:30 **the regular unit?**

3 months at Kapooka and another 3 months at core training at Ingleburn. Then you graduated from there and went over to the battalion. There was a battalion on Malaya, a battalion in Sydney, and a battalion in Brisbane in those days. 1 battalion was in Holsworthy, which is the one I went to 2 battalion was in Malaya and 3 battalion was in Brisbane getting ready to go

16:00 to relieve 2 battalion in Malaya. Up in Malaya they were just doing garrison duties. Nothing much. It was the tail end of the emergency, the guerrilla war that was fought in '48 through to the early, I think it ended in '62, against the communist terrorist guerrillas who were trying to upset the formation of Malaysia and take over the Malay peninsula. Run by a guy called Chin Peng.

16:30 A Chinese terrorist. He was decorated by the British in the Second World War because he worked for them at the time. He didn't want the British to come back there. They did so he fought them. A bit like Ho Chi Minh with the French. Except that he didn't quite make it. He's still alive. Interesting.

Were you disappointed to go to a battalion that wasn't getting ready to go overseas?

I really wanted to go to 3 Battalion. So I went

17:00 to 1 Battalion and my cousin was serving with 1 Battalion. He'd just come back from Malaya. He was a corporal in 1 Battalion. So going from a training unit into a regular battalion with guys that had served, some of them had served in the Second World War, the Korean War and been to Malaya a couple of times and all that. We were just young kids and hadn't had many reinforcements and so we got the rough end of the stick there for a while. We had to be

17:30 remoulded and go through the mill again. Luckily my cousin Bernard was there, and he gave me a few pointers and tips. Unfortunately Bernard was killed later in Vietnam. He was a good guy, a good mate. We were cousins. But we were more good friends later. Close mates. Life in

18:00 1 Battalion in those days was just garrison stuff. Just an extension of training and going off on major exercises where the army tests itself on logistics and we'd just wander around the bloody Blue Mountains and stuff, carrying our packs and keeping fit and all that sort of stuff and hope that one day we would get to Malaya. Then down the line a little bit, I'm not sure how long I was in 1, just over a year or about a year, they decided to expand

18:30 the army. Things were changing. The army was going through a great deal of change then. It was expanding and they formed a 4th Battalion here in Woodside. So they asked for anybody. That 4th Battalion was going to relieve the next battalion, 3 Battalion, in Malaya. So I couldn't make it to 3, but I could see that within 2 years I would be able to go to 4th Battalion. It happened to be in Adelaide in Woodside. So I ended up volunteering for that as did a lot of others. They pinched guys from all the units and

19:00 built this other battalion, or the carder of it up anyway. Then reinforced it eventually and built it up to full battalion. I was actually on the train coming over to join the 4th Battalion on the night the HMAS [Her Majesty's Australian Ship] Voyager was sunk. I don't know if you remember one of our ships was run over by the HMAS Sydney [actually Melbourne], a destroyer. It was in a collision with the HMAS Sydney and sunk and lost most of the crew. I think 80 or 90 guys

19:30 were killed when she sunk. Sliced in half. I'll always remember that night, because I was on the Spirit of Progress from Sydney to Melbourne to come here. He always went by train everywhere in those days. Nobody flew anywhere. That was a tragedy. My brother was in the navy at that stage of the game. No, sorry he'd just left the navy. He had served on the Voyager previously.

20:00 And the Endeavour. We got to Woodside and a whole new battalion. So we all started the game. That took us right back to day one as if we'd never been in the army before. Here we go again. Learning it all again. That was just displacement activity. Just to keep you occupied while they figured out what they were doing with us all. So the battalion trained up and started to train and become more serious. We started to get all this new equipment.

20:30 Lightweight equipment, stuff to wear at night, sleeping bags, life was just so good in those days. We got all these luxurious articles that we never had before. Before that it was the old army grey blanket. That's all you had in the bush. Was a few things. We were training for the jungle in South Australia. It's pretty hard to simulate. We were going through rubber plantations

21:00 in Kaipai [?] state forest. Someone figured pine plantations were probably the closest we could get to rubber plantation. Nothing like it of course. Done all sorts of stupid things. We had to train -- the whole idea of helicopter started to become important. We only had small lightweight helicopters in those days. We used to call them Possums. They had a bubble on the front and like a clothesline hanging out the back.

21:30 That was all the army had used, but they were getting re-equipment. Somebody knew something was going to happen I'm sure, because all this gear was turning up. So we had to learn how to get in and out of helicopters. We never had a helicopter. Some bright spark got six chairs and lined them up on the parade ground and made a tape outline of the helicopter with white tape. Then they got the battalion

22:00 gardener to sit in the front chair with his lawnmower. We'd all line up on the side of the parade ground in our chalks. 6 or 8 guys that would fit in the helicopter. There's this guy sitting. Everybody's very serious. We're sitting there and of course you can't get on the chopper until the pilot gives the thumbs up. So the old battalion gardener would give the old lawnmower a bit of a rev, give

22:30 you the thumbs up and we'd all run out. If we didn't do it right, we'd have to all go back and back at it again. We'd all fill in these seats, sit in the seats and tap the pilot on the hand and he'd rev up the lawnmower. I guess we'd done a bit of a lap and sat there like bloody Molly Dawks. We obviously landed at some point, because we got the thumbs up and we all ran out. If we didn't do that right, because it's just a bit of white tape on the ground with all these 6 seats on it. Jump out. We used to get caught up in it and

23:00 go home at night and just shake our heads I think. Just nothing like a bloody helicopter. It done nothing for us. Just kept us busy that's all. But the guy that thought the idea up probably got a medal or something like that. The old battalion gardener, who was an old Second World War soldier, they kept him on in the army because he'd been there for so long. Get a bit of continuity. He used to get down in the canteen on Sundays and spin his wisdom and worries

23:30 and all that sort of stuff. We'd all sit around and listen to him. Then walk out and say "Bullshit" and all. He become the chopper pilot. Somebody made him some pilot's wings. I don't know what happened to old Billy. It was all good fun. We done lots of stupid things like that. Jumping off the backs of trucks and we had some casualties. Because the training was becoming intense. There was something happening. The battalion was forming up. I know what it was. It was that

24:00 the Indonesian thing was starting to happen. The confrontation against Malaysia from Sukarno. We were just starting to get fairly serious about our training. We thought we were going to be in strife in Indonesia here. We'd been told that Indonesia was the next one. I don't think the guy that told us that knew it was going to happen so quickly. Training was starting to take on a real meaning. We felt that. And the whole thing.

24:30 Also the advisors in Vietnam were starting to take casualties and that was getting worse. The whole domino thing was – this guy whoever come up that. Looked like there was trouble in Thailand. We deployed engineers to Thailand to build air things and all that. So things were starting to happen. I was impatient and I wanted to get up to Malaya as quick as I could.

25:00 So one day I didn't have any money. We used to have a long weekend once a month to make up for the days that we worked on the weekend. So we'd have a three day weekend once a month. I didn't have any money, so I stayed in the barracks with a few other guys. Out of the blue this officer turned up one day and said "Any of you guys want to go to Malaya? 3 Battalion needs reinforcements. They want to take them from here." So luckily, by being broke,

25:30 I got my name on the list and I went to Malaya within the next couple of weeks of that and joined 3 Battalion up there.

How did 1 Battalion feel about that?

I had well and truly gone from 1 Battalion. This was from 4 Battalion. It was a good idea because it was about a year before they were going up there. If we went up there as reinforcements you had to do 2 years there. That would give people who'd been there a year

26:00 that continuity when they arrived. They had people who had been there for a year. That was the normal thing. They'd just whack somebody else in to spot them. Nobody's irreplaceable. So it was all part of the plan. I was just lucky that I was one of the guys sitting around broke, and got away a bit quicker. So I took off to Malaya via train from Adelaide to Perth and then

26:30 onto a Qantas flight to Singapore. I had two guys with me that had already served in Malaya.

Were the guys you'd been training up with jealous?

Yes, very much so. They thought that was not fair. There was guys that had been around a lot longer, waiting to get somewhere that missed out too. My platoon commander at the time was a bit cranky with me because I volunteered.

27:00 We'd spent a lot of time, I was his radio operator at that stage. He's still here in Adelaide now. He's the commodore of the Op Squadron actually. We're still good friends. He said "I've just got this team working right and you're shooting off. Please don't go." I said "No, boss I've got to go." He turned up about 3 months later as a reinforcement himself. So he would have bloody left us.

27:30 That was good. But again, I had to go into another battalion. A whole new bunch of guys that had been together for a long time. So you had to break into that thing again, which was not all that hard. While I was at 4th Battalion, it was a bit unheard of, but I'd actually qualified for my promotion to corporal, which is a fairly long course. How I got on it I don't know. I can't remember how I managed to get on the course. I think it was by

28:00 default. Somebody didn't turn up and they just said "You go and fill the spot". I turned up in Malaya with what we called subject for corporal, which was an A, B and C, three subjects. One is parade ground, military law and the other one was, A was parade ground, regimental stuff, B was field tactics and our real job and C was military law and administration. So I turned up

28:30 in Malaya in this battalion. I'd only been in the army for 5 minutes according to them, ready to be promoted to corporal. These guys just couldn't hack it. I didn't get promoted to corporal because the officers up there didn't know me. They wondered what was going on in the army back in Australia if young joker like this can turn up and be promoted to corporal. We got to Singapore and I had two old hands with me that had served several years in Malaya.

29:00 We arrived at Singapore at 6 o'clock in the afternoon. Went to Nee Soon, the British military, it was British army up there before. So they take me out and introduce me to the nightlife of the steamy bars

of bloody Singapore. Singapore was a far different city then than it is now. The nearest thing to Singapore that I could describe,

29:30 you still had open sewer drains and which drunken soldiers used to quite regularly fall into. Open sewers and it was a pretty raw old town Singapore was at the end of ‘63-64. Yeah ‘64.

Prostitution?

Tons of it. I was introduced to that particular night.

30:00 We got blotto and the next day we had to catch a train on out own up to Malacca, which is about an 8 hour train trip those days on a rattly old train. Up to Malacca and joined the unit who was in a place called Tarinduk [?] in Malacca. 3rd Battalion.

Had you not been warned before you went to Singapore about STDs [Sexually Transmitted Diseases]?

Yeah, we knew all about that. Condoms and. They used to have prophylactics centres around.

30:30 Even in Sydney, they were still there from the war. We had regular lectures on it. In fact, the lectures were so effective that none of us, we were all too frightened of getting involved in it. Certainly in Sydney. Some of us had girlfriends. I had a girlfriend in Sydney for a while.

So you saw it in Singapore but were too scared?

I went to brothels with these guys that night, but

31:00 I was too scared. I was just too, the lectures were still ringing in my ears. No. Later on up in Malacca when we got settled in I had a girlfriend up there. In fact I had girlfriends rather than go to those brothels. VD [Venereal Disease] was a common occurrence in the army. Some blokes boasted they were on the 16th load. I thought that was a bit stupid.

31:30 Syphilis, was pretty bad. Not so much in the army, but gonorrhea was pretty bad. Thailand was considered to be the worst place in the world for what they called the ‘black jack’ I think they used to call it, which was some virulent version of syphilis. There were stories that were probably put around by the medical officers that if you ever got black jack you were never allowed back into Australia. There was a place somewhere in Malaya where these guys were just rotting away. That was enough to keep

32:00 you in check.

After your experiences in Singapore, the next morning you were off?

Yep. On this train, rattling up the thing. If you’ve ever seen the movie, was it Bowani Junction or The Planter’s Wife or any of those were shot about in the latter stages of the British Raj, it was just like that. We actually carried guns with ammunition. The train was full of

32:30 people and dogs and pigs and stuff. Open carriages. If you were in a hurry you got out and walked alongside it. You could get off the front and make a cup of tea and catch the last carriage. All that stuff. We talk about that on the trips from Adelaide up to Darwin during the war. All that was what it was. It took 8 or 9 hours to get to Malacca. You can do it in about 45 minutes now on a highway. So it was good,

33:00 eye-opening stuff too. Here we were in deepest Asia. Whole new cultures. Malaysia was an interesting place because you had so many cultures there. The Indians, Malays and the Chinese. Fascinating place. In those times. I’ve spent a lot of years there later and worked there, but for a kid form the farm, it was a whole new world. I thought ‘Jeez, I’m going to

33:30 like this.’

Can you tell me about the cultural shock?

Well, Islam, it was my first brush with Islam. Well, it wasn’t a brush. The acceptance that there were different cultures, there were different ways to live than you lived in Korea or in the barracks or in the army, boozing and

[TECHNICAL DIFFICULTY]

34:00 Australia too. You can play up all you like in the barracks, but you can’t play up outside in the public view. We had to be very careful about how we treated people. I didn't really know the difference between a Malay and a Chinese. You could tell the Indians because they were Tamils and they were very, very different, very black. I could see very quickly the different structures there. The Malay stayed around the villages and were fishing.

34:30 They were the political power. They were all in the police force. The Chinese were the merchants. The Indians seemed to be the labourers. Then higher classes of Indians, or whatever they were, seemed to run the communication of the place. Everything from delivering letters to the telecommunications. So it looked like it was a pretty workable situation up there. We developed a bit of disrespect for the Malays themselves, because they didn’t seem

35:00 to want to do anything. They just wanted to laze around their kampongs and fish and take money and stuff from whoever was going give it to them. They didn't seem to want to do anything for themselves. They had the Chinese and Indians to run the place for them. And the British. So we thought that they were lazy. Although some of us said "I don't know. Looks like a pretty good deal to me". Islam was so

35:30 foreign to us too. We just didn't understand it. I must say that the army didn't teach us much about that. They never dwelt on it much about the different cultures. We picked it up ourselves.

Could you buy alcohol there?

Yes. Grog was cheap and easy to get. It wasn't listed or anything like that. The Chinese ran all the bars. There was bars, big clusters of bars out in front of the camp at, we used to call it the strip.

36:00 I remember Serrano's Bar, I used to drink at a place called Serrano's Bar and the Sydney Bar. There was no Adelaide Bar, but Sydney Bar and Serrano Bar and the Bijou Bar and all standard names wherever you go. It's the same. They were just blood houses really. Laminex and a bit of a jukebox and Chinese girls that used to waitress us. They weren't hookers or anything.

36:30 They were waitresses and that's what they were. If you got lucky you cracked onto one of those. I was, I did. We stuck together for 18 months. Oh no, well over a year. Shirley. Life was pretty good there. Money, goodness me, I've never had so much money in my life. Because they doubled when we hit

37:00 Malaya. We paid no tax and our wages doubled, I was on about 30 or 40 quid a week. It was fantastic.

Did your money buy more there?

Yes. We all went up with tape recorders and it was all duty free stuff, tape recorders and movie cameras and good SLR [Single Lens Reflex] cameras if you're interested in that sort of thing. I think I've probably still got them here somewhere. Everything you wanted

37:30 was there. The British had their NAAFIs [Navy, Army, Air Force Institute] there, you could buy there, but it was better to go out. Singapore was a fascinating place. Go up to Penang. We had plenty of leave, all that sort of stuff initially. Then the confrontation things started to get serious and we started to know that we were going to be deployed. So then Sukarno started to challenge Malaysia, or the formation of the Malaysian states, fairly seriously and he decided to

38:00 challenge it militarily and then started to send people across from Sumatra invading the western coast of the Malay peninsula. We weren't allowed to be involved initially, the Australian government decided it wasn't to be. We were part of what they called the strategic reserve as part of SEATO [South East Asia Treaty Organisation]. The action against Indonesia was nothing to do with strategic reserve.

38:30 We were only there to be deployed in whatever they decided that a major invasion from outside of the South East Asian Treaty Organisation. So we couldn't be deployed against the Indonesians initially. The British and the kiwis were. So from Malacca at the base at Tarinduk, when there was an invading group of guerrillas that would arrive from Sumatra, they would be deployed out to get them. Round them up and

39:00 UNCLEAR. Then, all of a sudden we started getting white feathers sent to us. I mentioned this to Elizabeth some time. The Aussies were getting white feathers. You know what white feathers mean? Yeah, okay. So we didn't take to that very kindly. We didn't quite know what to do about it, because unless the government deployed us we couldn't get involved in the action. So these other two battalions were going out in Malay and we couldn't.

Was it them who were sending the white feathers?

Yeah, the bloody Brits. kiwis,

39:30 Anything the Kiwis could do to stick it up us. You know that thing. We love the Kiwis and all that sort of stuff, and they love us really I think, but when we're together we're just terrible.

Like siblings?

Yeah that's right. This great competition thing. When we're both in the shit. Later in I served in an Anzac Battalion in Vietnam. It was 3 companies of Australians and 2 companies of Kiwis. Couldn't have got a better bloody mob.

40:00 At this stage of the game it was. But I had some good friends there. in the kiwi unit. Down in the bars that night it was all over. Although sometimes a little bit of a fight would break out. Some of those Maori guys were pretty hard to hit. If you kept out of their clutches you were alright, but you got crushed otherwise. So in the end the Australian government decided that we would be deployed and we went out on coast watching. Just sitting on these coasts,

40:30 patrolling up and down the coast in little boats keeping an eye out for guerrillas coming across from Sumatra.

Tape 4

00:42 **You were up in Malacca at that stage?**

In Malacca in Malaysia.

You had a girlfriend of Chinese heritage?

Yeah.

Was that unusual for the men to have girlfriends?

Not many guys had permanent girlfriends, no.

01:00 You wouldn't get an association with any of the Malay because they were Muslim. Although two or three guys did in fact marry them. Very difficult. They weren't normal run of the mill guys. They were a little bit different than most of us. I don't know why. They were just different sorts of guys. I do know though, the three guys that I knew that married

01:30 Muslim girls, their fathers were rich tin miners and political people and all that. Those guys are still up there I guess. They had to turn Muslim. They used to come into the barracks and when they could see that none of the Muslim boys were around, the kitchen hands and all that, they'd get stuck into a big bacon sandwich. One got a beaut red sports car for his wedding present and all that. So they done all right.

02:00 Most of the guys stayed with the hookers I guess. Easy and.

What did your girlfriend's parents think of you?

She come from Ipoh and actually her father had been an old communist terrorist that the Brits fought. I met him, he's a good old guy. She was all, they were a bit worried because Chinese like to marry Chinese. She'd gone and was working as a waitress.

02:30 They didn't take too -- and in their view she was only one step away from being a hooker anyway. She got tangled up with a foreigner. She was great. She ended up marrying an Australian guy.

Was marriage on the cards for you two?

Well, it was. I probably would have married her had I not been injured in Borneo. That sort of truncated the whole operation because I never got back there – for long anyway. It probably was,

03:00 but several years later she ended up with some other guy and married him. I met her at a mess do here in Adelaide. We both agreed very tactfully not to know each other. Just didn't.

Probably a wise choice.

It was just, what's the point? I couldn't believe my eyes. Other story.

Life is a very strange thing.

It is. She looked like she was very happy and she had kids and

03:30 he was a good guy so good luck to her.

A good ending to the story.

Mm.

You spoke of the guerrillas in Sumatra.

They came across from Sumatra. They were using fishing boats and coming over in groups of 20-30, up to 80. Loaded with money and weapons. The name of the game was they'd been told that as soon as they got there the local Malay Muslim population of Malaysia, or Malaya

04:00 I think it still was then, would rise up with them and throw out the British dominating, Abdul Rahman was the king or the prime minister of Malaysia in those days, the first one, and overturn this whole concept of Malaysia. Sukarno was pretty pissed about, he believed that the Malay peninsula and the whole of Borneo should come in under Indonesia rather

04:30 than, and West Irian too, which eventually it did. Wants to get out of it again. Reading history now, we know that Sukarno was really trying to take his people's minds off their own problems. So he come up with this bogey. The Malaysian people didn't want that so the British army mobilised in and then we were caught up in the whole thing. We were there for a different reason. There was 3 battalions based in Malacca

05:00 as part of the strategic reserve in case something happened in South East Asia. What happened was never what they thought would happen. Something completely different happened. So then we were deployed to, we thought it was a bit of a joke. Because there wasn't a great deal of shooting. In fact the

first place that we were deployed, a company of us was deployed to a place called Muir. Where, incidentally the Australians first engaged the Japanese early in the Second World War

05:30 and beat the living crap out of them. Then lost, because of the sheer weight of the Japanese invasion. We deployed so rapidly and it was the first deployment since the Korean War into action. We couldn't find our bullets and we were all pissed and I think I left my machine gun magazine somewhere. We all get down there and the mortar guys have got their mortars, but only got dummy bombs. They don't go bang on the other end. So they fired two and all these jokers came out with their

06:00 hands up. We thought, "Well, this is easy". They had all this money. Bags and bags of money, which we kept. We had the best company funds in history. So we put it up in the roofs of the barracks and divvied it all up. We didn't personally spend it. We had what we called company and regimental funds to buy things that the army don't provide sometimes. So we kept all these Malaysian ringgits and

06:30 put it to good use. It would have only gone into somebody's pocket. Some corrupt Malaysian, because they were corrupt.

So the Malaysian people were happy to have you there?

I think so, yeah. We got on very well with them even though we didn't have a great deal of respect for them at the time. My whole thing about that changed later. I'm still going through this cultural change about different cultures and I hadn't developed any great sensitivity. I thought

07:00 if you weren't from a farm in South Australia and lived like that and grew up in the South Australia ethic you were just obviously so different that, you got to get like me or you're wasting your life.

Get into my program.

Yeah, or get like the rest of us, you know. Even meeting people from north Queensland was a big experience for me. They were different. Later on, whole new idea. They were

07:30 great. We had some amazing great screw-ups there. You know the three words -- pagi means morning. Selamat pagi. Then there's purgi, go and pooki, which is female genitalia.

Very similar sounding words.

We were all on this coast watching and sitting there on the machinegun watching out over the Malacca Straits and then all the people would start coming out of their huts, the Kampongs, in the morning.

08:00 All the girls would be lined up. All the young women, all that sort of stuff would be limed up and you'd go round and say "Selamat pooki" you know. Pagi or pooki, and they'd all go into this giggling fits and bloody blundering bloody foreigners. So that was quite funny. A funny incident in those times, we were on a river Quala [?], which is where a river joins the sea. Delta. Small river. The fishing village was just upriver slightly

08:30 and all the fishing boats used to go out at night and fish and then come in very early in the morning in the dark. So we said "You're going to have to put a light on your boat because otherwise" we had this big rocket thing there. It shoots a big shell about that long. It's an anti-tank gun. It's the only thing we could find that was bigger than a rifle. We had that thing stoked up, pointing right in the centre of the river. In case an invading boat. This night we could hear this

09:00 boat coming and they didn't have the light on. So we flashed the searchlight a couple of times and got no response and said "Shit, we've got an Indonesian group coming in". So we stoked this thing up and let it go. It has a big back blast. It's like a rocket. It's in a tube and it's a big anti-tank weapon. It's a projective about that long and about that round. 120 millimetre. It takes off at an absolute

09:30 faster than sound type speed and it shoots this great flame out the back, which we hadn't considered because we'd never fired this thing. We let this thing go, because he didn't put the light on and it just missed him and a bloody great geyser of water went up behind him and all the lights on the boat came on. Then we went around and we'd set fire to about three huts behind us so we had to go and pull all these people put and they were screaming and yelling and so forth. They weren't real happy about us that time.

10:00 They forgave us.

They learned to love you?

They learned to love us.

Did you have any encounters with the Indonesians?

Yeah, we rounded this group of 80 up. They were pretty docile. They were cold and wet and muddy and if you've had anything to do with the Indonesian and the Asian people, they don't like to be dirty and muddy and cold and uncomfortable and all that. This was the pit for them. We rounded them up, they came out quite willingly with their hands in the air.

Where did they come from?

They'd come over by boats from Sumatra,

10:30 which was just across the way. Malacca and Sumatra is just a fishing trip. You go out in the middle of the Malacca Straits and you can see Sumatra. They'd come in and landed in the swamps. So they'd been blundering around all night in the swamps. We put a cordon around it and then we fired these two bombs in there which went "thum", "thum", you know. Then fired off a few shots and they said "Bugger this. Where's this uprising we're supposed to expect? Here we are stuck in swamps,

11:00 being bit my mosquitoes" and that was the story for most of them. They just weren't tough stuff. I don't think I would have been either.

Where did they go? Did you have prisoner of war camps?

Not us. We'd hand them over to. Under the Malaysian law at the time they were considered not to be military, so they were handed in to the civilian police and dealt with by the Malaysian civilians. We had no, we were just the agent that captured them. Then they were

11:30 handed on to the civilian system and dealt with as criminals.

Did the Australian public know you were up there?

They knew we were there, but not involved. In fact it was kept very quiet. That becomes a bit strange later on when we were in Borneo. Because we couldn't acknowledge that we were fighting with Indonesians in Borneo. We even happened to be killed there, but we couldn't say anything.

What was the thinking behind that?

I don't know. It's all out now because of the 30-year rule. I haven't bothered to read up too much about it. I do know.

12:00 This sort of business went on around Malacca and up and down the coast of Malaya for a while. Then we were warned for duty in Borneo. That's when it was beginning to get serious.

That was becoming a hot spot in Borneo?

The Indonesians were making great incursions in to Sarawak, which was part of the new Malaysian state before that it had been Sarawak, a British protectorate and Sabah up in the north. Prior to that

12:30 there had been major incursions in Brunei and the Gurkhas [Nepalese troops in British service] and the British stopped that. They tried to invade it because it was a much more Islamic country than Sabah and Sarawak, which are predominantly Dayak and Christian. They were making great incursions into there. Also there was another group operating within Sarawak, which was called the CCO, which was the Clandestine Chinese Organisation. They were communists. So you had two problems

13:00 in Borneo and Sarawak. You had this clandestine organisation operating within the country and you had these incursions from Indonesia. Indonesia at that stage was governed under the tripartite – what was it -- Sukarno had the communist party, the military and his political party. The communists were gradually taking control. It would all come out later when the great purges happened. The military hated the communists thank goodness.

13:30 There were elements of the Indonesian army that were communists and linking the CCOs and all that sort of stuff. Funny thing, because they hate Chinese, but the Chinese and them were sort of...

It's a very complex political situation.

So, that was just against the common enemy at the time. The CCOs weren't much of a threat to us. They were trying to blow up bridges and do things, but they weren't terribly effective.

Were you pulled out of Malacca then and where did you land?

Went by troop ship

14:00 called the SS Albee, it's an old troopship. We went to Kuching and then by road down to a place called Bau. We were deployed forward of Bau in 3-4 areas. We took over from the Gurkhas that were there. So a battalion has an area of responsibility. Then each company within that area responsible – the battalion area has a company area of responsibility. We were basically on forts

14:30 we built out of sandbags and tin, and Christ knows what. Bunkers, because there was a lot of mortaring and stuff going on.

What was your impression of the Gurkhas?

Good. Magnificent. I went over in the advance party. That's important. I went in the advance party and I had to do patrols for about two weeks with the Gurkhas before our main force arrived. They were incredible men. Fit, I thought I was

15:00 fit. But they were mountain people and we were in mountainous areas. It was the hardest jack I've ever done in by life that place. Up 8-9 hours just climbing upwards with all your gear on. Then going over the border and over there for 4-5 weeks and then coming back and going back down.

The Gurkhas didn't find that difficult?

Not at all. I was only 20 or something. 19 or 20 or something and pretty fit.

15:30 It pulled on me. They get up very early in the morning and they walk till 10, stop, then they have their breakfast, then they walk again on patrol and operating until about 4, then they stop. Have another meal and they keep going until about 8 o'clock at night. Then they camp. Then they make it as much noise as they can. As from us, we're like doggo and hope somebody comes along. They tried to attract the people in to them. And ambush them that way.

16:00 They want to fight.

Was there a fear of the Gurkhas?

Well, we had a great respect for them.

Sorry, I mean the enemy.

Oh I think so, yeah, yeah. Because they were fearsome. We had – like you'd be sleeping, or if you made a noise or after they had this rowdy period where if there was any enemy, Indonesians, would attract them in and then they'd just butcher them.

16:30 They did, I don't know how many times it did happen, but not in my patrols. Then if you had to wake one up at 3 o'clock in the morning for his turn to go on picket, you had to be very, very careful when you woke them up because they had that bloody knife which scared the living crap out of you. I carried one. One gave me one, I carried one for years myself. The kukri thing.

Was the myth true, if it was drawn…

I never seen that. I don't think so.

17:00 I don't think it was true. I don't know where that comes from. It wasn't true of these guys. Might have been some old thing, or in Nepal.

Their reflexes were very quick.

They were very quiet. They moved so well in the jungle. The jungle's not their natural habitat either. But mountainous areas certainly are. They are very loyal, very effective units. You haven't got all the problems of, they're happy to be there.

They're under

17:30 **British?**

They were part of the British army at that stage. Brigade of Gurkhas they called them. They were a formation within the British army. Which was disbanded later on and the British army just left them. Just walked away from them. Still going on, the fight for them to get their due, what they were due. I understand that if a Gurkha served 20 or 30 years in the British army, he'd go back to Nepal and be given a plot of land and all that sort of stuff. I think the Brits

18:00 later on started reneging on all this sort of stuff. When they disbanded these guys, they just threw them to the four winds. I remember – in fact there's a pot just around there they had a thing to try and get money for them to repatriate them back to Nepal and so they had something to go on. Which was done by other British people. The British government just didn't want to know. Some of the units were taken over by the Singaporean government, some of them stayed in Brunei and worked for the Brunei government. Hong Kong. They

18:30 became policemen, security guards and all sorts.

Very impressive group of people.

They are an impressive group of people. How the Brits could have just let them wither on the vine after the service they gave Britain – First World War, thousands of them we just butchered. Second World War. They were with the Aussies in the desert.

Do you think there'd be an element of racism there?

I just think it's the British, the British weren't so great with their own people either. Threw them to the…

…Australians.

That's right.

19:00 **Your camp set-up in Borneo was set up in very mountainous areas?**

Yeah, we were in valleys with mountains all around us. I remember the names of the features and so forth. We had these three forts across, then we had further ones back. They were just a reinforced bunker system where we used to live like bloody rabbits. I don't know why they went for

19:30 that system. It would have been much more effective for us to operate like we did in Vietnam where we lived out in the jungle itself. We used to patrol out of these forts and all crammed in. We had a gun and a big cannon there and all that sort of stuff, artillery piece. We'd patrol, there was about 8 hours to climb up the mountain ridge and then patrol across. The country was a series of ridges, razorback ridges.

20:00 You couldn't walk off the side of them, you had to be right on the top of them. They're almost like that. So you go up the sides. They were cleared up to a certain way because the slash and burn culture of the Dayaks, slash and then grow rice, pepper, but then you'd go into the primary jungle and the higher parts and just disappear. You then go across into Kalimantan. We weren't supposed to, it wasn't supposed to be known that we were operating over in

20:30 Kalimantan. In fact it took 30 years for it to be known that Australians operated and patrolled and ambushed in Kalimantan. The policy of the Australian government which to this day I never… I remember the first time we had casualties. Albie Kyle and a few. We lost a couple -- Bruno Whelan and that -- on mines. Then there was contact after it. A guy called Albie Kyle, I forget the other guy's name, shot a couple of Indonesians and they were wounded and they were back in Singapore hospital,

21:00 British military hospital. Some journos somehow got into the hospital and were interviewing Albie, Albie was a part aboriginal guy. He said "It was just like shooting ducks". This was quoted in the Australian papers and hell to pay. Questions in parliament, the whole nine yards. It turned out that it was very offensive to the Indonesian ambassador , it make bad relations between them. The Indonesian ambassador's wife was

21:30 the president of the diplomatic wives' pistol shooting club in Canberra at the time. Everybody was upset. The poor devils. We couldn't understand it. We were up there shooting each other and mining each other. I didn't think relations could get any worse than that.

Yet on the surface they're pretending that…

…nothing's going on. See, I can say this now, but I couldn't have said it until it was released after the 30 year. We had to clean our -- anything that showed we were

22:00 an Australian. Because we wore British gear. Anything that showed or indicated we were Australian we had to get rid of. We couldn't wear our dog tags. We couldn't wear anything when we were patrolling over in Kalimantan just in case we were captured. We weren't to be acknowledged as Australian. Disowned us.

Doesn't that make you a spy then?

That's what worried us a bit there at one time. We weren't, we never thought that we'd ever get caught because we thought these people were pretty hopeless.

22:30 The contact that we had with them, they were pretty hopeless. In fact not too many times did they really stand up and fight. There was a chance that we could be injured. I was injured over there and I had to walk back. My friend was injured and shot in the forehead. He had to walk back with the whole front of his forehead missing. 10,000 metres Andrew Dore. I could see his brain pulsing away and there was a leaf laying on his brain. He had to walk all the way back because we had no

23:00 helicopters in those days. You had to walk.

So you were in British gear?

Yeah.

What did you all think of that?

We just got on with it. Didn't put too much thought into it. We thought 'This is good. A bit of deep penetration spy-ship.' No, we didn't think too much about it. What hurt more than anything was that we couldn't smoke or cook food. It was totally, "The

23:30 silent war" they called it. "the silent war" or "the secret war". There's a book out now called "The Secret War" about it. People were very, 30 something odd guys were killed. It only lasted 6 months or so. We lost 30 odd people there. With SAS [Special Air Service] and us.

What were the SAS doing up there?

They were just doing patrols. The Aussie SAS worked in a different

24:00 area than we did. Further to the north I think. We had the British SAS working with us. We used to take them over into Kalimantan and leave them and they'd go and work with the local people. The British SAS. The Aussie SAS done different type of things. They were structured differently. They lost a couple of guys up there. In fact it's a bit of a move on now to try and find the bodies. But if this MIA [Missing in Action] thing started to happen around here. We lost people. I may be able to do something

24:30 about that, because I know that area. I've been back there. I've done a lot of seismic work through there. In that very area that I worked in later on, a few years ago. I know the people there and I know the country and I knew where these guys went missing. I don't think we could find the bodies, because they would have gone into this river and flooded down into the Kapos and probably out in the South

China Sea. That was a long time ago. These two guys were trying to cross the river and got swept away.

So they weren't actually

25:00 **assaulted by the enemy? That wasn't a contact situation?**

No, they were patrolling. They were going into lay up in a village and watch what the enemy were doing. That's why they couldn't get much help because they were surrounded. We used to take the British guys over. I know this guy had a shocking blond hair. I said "How in the hell is he going to merge into the villages and?" See, the Dayaks of Borneo or Kalimantan they weren't terribly interested in Sukarno either. Still aren't -- or

25:30 Indonesia. Because they were Christian generally. They didn't have a great deal of love for the Javanese anyway, which tended to dominate Indonesia until recently. So for instance Sukarno, the military forces gave all these Dayak people lots and lots of weapons and stuff, which they buried. When it was all over, the Indonesian army said "Let's have all those weapons then".

26:00 They're still there. They're all still buried. I know that. They thought they might need them for the Javanese later. I don't think that'll happen. This guy we used to take over, we'd drop him, about 6 weeks later and pick him up. We'd only go in so far. Ambush and patrol and nip where we could. If we had intelligence we bumped a group or

26:30 something like that. They'd go right back much deeper in because he spoke the language. How he merged into that area without attracting attention, I'll never know, unless he used to walk 100 yards off where we dropped him off and sit there for 6 weeks and have a nosh up and then meet us back there. He always looked magnificent. I think he was ironing his jungle greens while he was over there. I reckoned he had a good life.

Were they different kind of characters, the men in the SAS?

The British were. They were very different.

27:00 I got a lot of mates. I never went to the SAS. I went into 'A' Intelligence Corps later on in a different role. They're different types. The Aussie SAS always seemed to be different to the British SAS. The British SAS were more of a spy role. Whereas our guys were more of a reconnaissance and operational role. I don't know why the Brits to that.

27:30 In Northern Ireland of course they had a totally different role. They were almost spies, working with the local people. If they were caught they were knackered, but the British SAS were somewhat different I think. Talking to my mates that were in the SAS. And had done courses with the British SAS. They did different things.

28:00 I think our people we just as good in that respect.

You said in the operation in Borneo 30 people were killed.

Yeah. Across the board, during the period of our operations, not all from there. We only lost three. All from mine, and we had a few wounded. Yeah. 3 or 5. I forget. We had 10 or 12 wounded. But

28:30 SAS lost a few. The engineers lost a few. There was a lot of accidental deaths. Those two guys that drowned were accidental deaths. Couple of suicides.

There were suicides?

Mm. Don't know why. Maybe they would have done it wherever they were.

Any friendly fire incidents?

Yes. Is that on there? Yes, I was involved in it. In fact that was the first time I had ever been in any form of real

29:00 action. We were, the place was ridgeline. Remember? We were going over the border on our operation, a platoon patrol, and we were very much under strength. The platoon should be 30 men, but you'd be lucky if you had 17-20.

Why was that?

Sick, leave, no reinforcements, general wastage. Same in Vietnam. Sometimes the platoons were down to 14 men. Still had to do the same amount of

29:30 ground. So we were going over and 7 platoon were on their way back. We were supposed to be on different ridgelines. We thought we were. I'm not quite sure why we weren't. No, sorry, they were coming over, we were coming back. We'd been away for about 5 weeks. We were coming back. The boss said "Let's stop for a while." I was a machine gunner in the first section, leading section. So instead of being spread out in a formation we were all in single file.

30:00 So they had these big, in the jungle there's these big buttress trees. So we just pulled in behind a tree and then I'd prop the gun looking forward because somebody would be looking behind. We had two

more sections behind. Popping forward in case somebody should come. Then the forward scout of the section was propped behind a buttress tree just forward of me. So we light up a fag and we're having a smoke. We thought 'We're nearly home. 2-3-4,000 metres or something.' Down the hill we're home. Forget it for a week.

30:30 Next thing, bang, a shot rings out and Jock's shoulder disappeared and he was sitting with his back to the buttress tree and the other platoon had come along and spotted these puffs of smoke and slight movement. I know the guy that shot Jock, he's still a mate of mine, Johnny Chislitt, he just, he was the forward scout of the oncoming platoon and he upped and

31:00 squeezed off a quick shot at where he seen this movement and it got Jock right through the shoulder. Took his shoulder out. So I, being a good machine gunner, I spotted the movement of that and I started firing back at them. We didn't know who they were. Back at company headquarters "contact, contact", "contact, contact". "Uh-oh. Just check boys." By this time the fight's on. But we were all rotten shots and not hitting anybody. Of course everybody's

31:30 on the ground. We're all firing about three feet wide. This is the first time any of us had done anything like this.

The adrenalin would have been pumping.

It does. It gets, not like later on, but at that stage. Next thing "Stop firing, stop firing" and you could hear this "Stop firing, stop firing" at the other end. The interesting side to that was that what I aimed at was a tree about that round and I seen these two heads go behind it. I just seen the shapes.

32:00 You were looking at about 20 metres I suppose, on a ridgeline with primary jungle and dark. I could just see these two shapes and they're fighting still. I spotted this movement, so I pulled my Bren gun up and I sighted right at the centre of the tree. A Bren gun will go through a tree like that. I fired three or four bullets into that tree. Johnny Chislitt I think still got a mark on his face where one come passed him. The other guy that was behind the tree was

32:30 a bloke called Lieutenant Guest who was the platoon commander. The tree just put a turn on the bullet, just a slight turn. Had they gone through, I would have got he pair of them. Just put a slight turn on the bullet and apart form a slight burn mark on his face that was all that happened. By then the ceasefire thing had happened so it was all over. We all come out and. Then we had to get rid of Jock. There was a British helicopter

33:00 in the area, but they didn't have winches like we had in Vietnam, they were old fashioned helicopters. They just had a rope they used to hook onto a hook and hang the rope down. Jock was in a pretty bad way. He lost a lot of blood. We'd never seen too much of this before.

Did you have medicos with you?

Yeah. And we used to carry around morphine syrettes. They took them off us later on because people were, some people did. Not our, but some of the Brits were apparently having a bit of – freaking out on them.

33:30 So what we done to get, this was my first experience with helicopter medical evacuation. We tied Jock up with this rope. The chopper came and we cut a hole in a canopy and dropped the rope down, tied him onto the rope and they picked him up and then flew off down the valley. The last time I ever seen Jock Petrie was him swinging about 60 metres behind this helicopter down the valley. I've never seen him since. But I

34:00 understood he's okay. He's got a wingy arm. I haven't seen him since.

That would have done your head in if you had hit those two guys.

Yeah.

That was your first contact as far as you knew.

Anyway I got in trouble over that, because when I got back to company headquarters it was because it was a friendly fire incident there had to be an investigation. The company commander who many years later become my battalion commander – promoted me up to sergeant actually –

34:30 got stuck into me. What a lousy gunner I was for missing them. With any sort of gun I should have got them. I should have allowed that the tree would turn and all this sort of stuff. He was just shot at me. Kicked my bum and shut me out. So I had to think about that.

Strange logic.

That's right. Well, we were there to kill people I guess. Three bullets just wasted.

What would you have been like as a soldier if you had hit them?

I wouldn't have

35:00 soldiered on I think. I would give it away. It knocked me around as it was. I think that little effort after it to kick my ass was a bit of a psychology there too. Trying to get me to look at it in a different way, which

I did.

Which was necessary?

I think so. I think it would have been the end of me if I'd hit those guys. Particularly one of them was one of my best mates.

Thank God it didn't happen.

It was an important exercise because many years later in

35:30 Vietnam it was valuable, a lot of people were killed by friendly fire. We call it friendly fire, but does it really matter who shoots you? The confusion, the fog of war and when those first shots are out in a fire fight, you just don't know what the hell's going on. The end of it, in a fire-fight, it's the last man standing with bullets left in his gun, who wins. Nobody wins. Then you walk away from that bit of ground and "What the hell was all that about?"

36:00 but you got to wait for it to happen again because you ain't going to get out of this place. That's the whole point. So we went back to – B Patrol we went back to UNCLEAR. We had another couple of actions on patrols. We ambushed a group of Indonesians on a river. Unfortunately we think we killed them all. They were in boats coming up. It was pretty easy in terms of thing. I was absolutely. I remember it crossing my mind how easy it

36:30 all seemed. I remember a guy who'd been obviously wounded and he was crawling up the bank and we just shot him as he crawled up the bank because we didn't want anybody to survive. From a distance. Quite a big distance. I just used to think a lot about that. I used to say "Gee, I didn't think I could really do that." It come pretty easy. But, there's a lot of conditioning involved there. A lot of conditioning. In between

37:00 that we had that mine accident. When you see your own guy blown apart, that starts that conditioning exercise. When you start to lose the humanity for a bit I think. You start to think "You're on your own." I don't know. It's a funny, obviously human thing. It's a defensive mechanism I think.

And survival.

Yeah. So then after that we had one more ambush, Jock

37:30 Sneddon and I were also camped. We were harboured up. They call them harbours when you stop at night. Harboured up, or was it an ambush? It was an ambush I think. But an Indonesian group come along and actually squatted over the top of us. They done the same thing. We weren't looking at each other but hearing them talking. One of the groups, the Indonesian commander was having and O group, and orders group, giving the guys what they're going to do

38:00 the next 24 hours, within feet of a bloke called Jock Sneddon who had an Owen gun. He was shitting himself and one of these guys would lean over and smoke it would have put it all up Jock's bum sort of thing. So in the end he let fly with this Owen gun and got the lot of them pretty well. Then we just scarpered, just went for our life, because we think there was a major unit right behind them. So we got back out of that.

38:30 In action in Borneo we didn't lose all to of people in gunfire. I think we only lost, the only ones we lost were the mines. Except Andre Dore was wounded. That was on that one on the river. A few of them got a few shots away and took the front of his forehead out. Just lifted it right out. It was incredible. He said "I'll be right", but he wasn't right. He was never the same afterwards. Though they patched him up, he was out of the army. I think he had a bit of a problem. I think he did. A bit

39:00 not quite with it.

Did you know the area was mined?

No, the first one, like all minefields, the first one you find with your foot. Used to have a saying developed later in Vietnam was, "My feet are bloody killing me." Black humour I guess. These guys walked into the first one and

Were they in front of you?

39:30 Yeah, and they went off. Then a guy went up to try and help them and another one, tripped another one. That sound, I'll never forget that sound of a mine. It just seems to have a sound of its own. I've heard it many, many times later. Just got an awful sound. Artillery and bullets and all that, but a mine just seems to have a particular thump, thud. Maybe it's in the ground, but you can tell.

Is it a

40:00 **deep sound?**

Deep sound yeah. Deep thing. Then I went up and I was injured on the next patrol. We were going around, I think we took a couple of mortar bombs a fair way over into Kalimantan. The Dayak people, when they went around the jungle, used to use the jungle tracks. Then

40:30 you'd come to escarpments if the razorback ridge would jut or break away and you couldn't walk over. So they'd build these bamboo, we used to call them bridging around. They were fine for a little Dayak guy with his wife and a little bag of rice on their back, but for and I was half the size I am now, but I

41:00 still, with the machinegun and all that, all that broke away and I went down and fell about 30 feet I suppose. 30-40 feet and landed with my leg underneath me.

Tape 5

00:39 **You were walking across a flimsy bridge that wasn't fit to hold your weight and you came across a weak point and fell through. Can you tell us about that?**

It collapsed. I was the machine-gunner and we

01:00 were on these long patrols and carried quite a lot of weight, even though not as much as you should have been carrying. We had to not take any food that we had to cook and smoke and all that sort of stuff. It collapsed and I went skidding down a very sharp cliff face basically. Then landed on the ledge about 20-30 feet down. My leg got twisted in underneath me and

01:30 something snapped in there. It was the ligaments and cartilage. We had to go down there because there was some mortar fire on the ridgeline above us, so we were trying to get around behind it. I was in a hell of a stage, it was so swollen up. But we couldn't, we didn't have medical evacuation in those days and we were quite a long way over into Indonesia and we didn't want to get caught or captured or

02:00 anything like that. So I had to walk back one way or the other. You generally palm you gear out. Anything but your weapon of course. The guys carry it for you. You don't like to burden the other guys with your gear, but in this case. They made up a crutch and I just crutched myself back up the mountain and down through the ridgelines until we got back to the base, which was about 6 or 7,000 metres away.

How long did it take you to get back there?

02:30 A bloody long time. I don't know. All day I think. 8 or 9 hours. The country's pretty wild. You can go down off a spur line to cross over to another ridgeline, and you're going into re-entrants and creeks and rocks and all that sort of stuff and scrambling up the other side. So I remember it as a very, very painful and bloody hard day. We got back. Then I was sent back to the main base, the battalion

03:00 headquarters. Then into Kuchin, which was the capital of Sarawak and plugged into the British military medical system. I eventually ended up back in British military hospital in Singapore and then back up to Malacca. They operated on my leg up there. Cleaned it up and took... I stayed in

03:30 Malaya quite a long time after that in initial recovery. Then they decided to send me back to Australia. So I went up to Penang to the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] base at Butterworth, the hospital there. They had a collection point there for wounded and so forth from Vietnam. By this stage 1 battalion was already some months in Vietnam so the casualties were coming out of there and being transported from Saigon to Butterworth, collected there

04:00 with our guys and were all shipped home in Hercules. There was a big scandal about that back in those days. You know what a Hercules aircraft is? A big wide-body transport aircraft.

What was the scandal?

They were for carrying freight, right? The government had these VIP [Very Important Person] planes where they were zooming all over the place in these lovely back 1-11 Lear Jets and bloody well appointed things –these were the pollies and that. But the wounded soldiers were

04:30 basically strapped into old stretchers in the sides over all the stores that were being moved backwards and forth and tucked into places. We had people with gunshot wounds and bellies ripped open. The nursing sisters who were all RAAF were horrified at the conditions of these aircraft. They were only marginally pressurized, freezing cold, flying at 36,000 feet. You used to fly from Butterworth way out to Ceylon, because you couldn't go near Indonesia,

05:00 then down to Christmas Island, then to Pearce airbase in Perth and then across to Sydney. Then you were farmed out to what state you come from to the various repatriation hospitals. It was a horrific trip. 12 hours if I remember, 18 hours.

Did you know at that point what was wrong with you?

I had to just go home because I wasn't medically fit to continue in operation. So I was okay. I'd had the operation and everything but I was still having a lot of trouble. So they wanted to bring me home and put me into proper care for a while

05:30 and see. All it ended up doing was I was just sent home via that route and then I ended up here at repatriation hospital for a while. Then I was put out of there and put into a convalescing unit at Keswick barracks. It took quite a while for this leg to come good. It never really did, but I had to make it come good. Those flights from, get it on tape, maybe somebody will remember them.

06:00 Rigby the cartoonist used to have great jokes. He used to do the Advertiser cartoons. He was fantastic. I remember on the flight that I was on, we had old engines down the centre of the aircraft who were coming home and then these stretchers. They just canvas straps coming down. The stretchers that you carried people on the outside, wooden stretchers, they'd put them in and clip them into these clips. They got all the casualties stacked up the side.

06:30 They'd had operations and they'd had triage and they'd spent some time at the RAAF base at Butterworth and had some more treatment, recovery. But they were still in pretty bad way. Gunshot wounds for instance in the stomach. Chest wounds and all these sorts of things. Blokes with legs missing from the mines and booby traps. Then they'd stick you in this bloody Herc and away you go. On the one flight that I was on they hit a rough spot and the stretchers busted out.

07:00 Busted away. A guy with stomach gunshot wounds was thrown out of the stretcher and landed on this engine. How it didn't kill him I'll just never know. It just ripped him open. I remember the nurse, she had the same name as mine, Roberts, Flight Lieutenant Roberts, she was the nursing sister. She was just crying. She just couldn't do anything. So we all had to get him out and get him back in the stretcher. That was normal stuff. Nobody,

07:30 I don't know whether this was the theme through the whole thing, it just seems the government and our bosses just had no regard. They just couldn't give a shit. You done your job, you were now mincemeat and you're out of the system. Not their concern. The system you went into, whilst there was caring people within that, they just had nothing to work with. Nothing to work with. Just get them home, get them out of here.

That must have been a horrendous journey for you, not only with your own pain, but to see the suffering of the others.

I was in fairly

08:00 good nick. But to see what the others guys, this is where I first started. I'd seen casualties and stuff, but Borneo was a different sort of thing. We had fights and all that, but Vietnam was totally different. It was a mincing machine. These guys, my brother-in-law, he was terribly wounded in Vietnam. He'd already gone through the system and was already back here. But his flight, he remembers his flight. He had something like 47 wounds from the bottom

08:30 of his legs right up the back from a mine incident. He was shredded. He was not that much different from that when they put him on this flight to bring him home. I think they had some idea that "Stick him on a plane and we'll get them home". They tried to do something about it eventually when the media got onto it a bit and the cartoonists and somebody started to make them feel a little guilty over it. They jazzed up the Hercules a bit. Put better stretchers in or something like that.

09:00 But never did we get like Boeing 707s or like the Americans had. They were all flying home in jet planes. There used to be jokes by Rigby in the paper of this old double winged thing with bandages all over it and broken wings and, "Zoom goes Bob Menzies and his wife", or somebody in a bloody lear jet and "Look at that quaint old thing" and "Oh, that's the wounded coming home from Vietnam." Zoom, do two

09:30 loops around it and take off. "Bye", that sort of stuff. Eventually that sort of cartoon started to take an effect. But it didn't gain us much time. It didn't gain much, because the whole public opinion turned and it was pretty well the flavour of the month to beat up the Vietnam veteran, who'd give a shit if they were uncomfortable coming home. Why spend money on them? Even though in government seemed to have that idea, but they kept us there.

10:00 That's what we felt anyway. The commitment wasn't even right on that time. We only had one battalion up there. So I came home and during that period I was back here in Australia at Campsie, that's where I met Marilyn. I met her while I was at Keswick recovery. My brother-in law was there and a guy that Marilyn was a neighbour of, a kid she grew up with and played with, he was also wounded in Vietnam. We were

10:30 all together there. We used to come out to his place. Marilyn came over one time and I met her. We're still together, and that was a fair while ago, 1966. '65, '66 I think. Somehow we're still together, I'm not quite sure how. We're just both too lazy to break it up. I was pretty stupid at the time because I thought "Hell, I'm a regular soldier. If I can't get in this Vietnam War,

11:00 I'm not going to be much of a soldier." So I really worked on this leg bit to get it fixed up to get it passed a medical board so that I could go back to a battalion.

What did you have to do?

I had to tell lies for one thing. Like I'm doing now, lots and lots of physio so that I could build the muscles up, which replaced the ligaments that had all gone and the cartilage that had all gone. It was just bone

11:30 on bone and none of the ligaments that keep your leg. So by building the muscles around your leg you get away with it. But I had a lot of pain, always did. Used to lock and all that sort of stuff. So I went before a medical board. It was an old Dr Cornish, an old orthopaedic surgeon from here. Fantastic old guy. He was a colonel in the reserve also. I think he was the CO [Commanding Officer] of the medical unit here. He was the guy and

12:00 he knew what I was up to. You couldn't put it passed him. He said "What do you want to do?" I said "I'm right, no problems." He said "It's up to you. I'll board you FE if that's what you want me to do." I said "Yes, I want you to do that". So he boarded me FE. He said "Go for it, boy. You're going to have a hard life, but that's what you want to do." Had it been somebody else that didn't have the discretion and knowledge that guy had, he'd have said "No, you're not fit. You're out." So I was boarded FE.

12:30 Fit Everywhere that means. That means you're fit to be go and shot at again. Went and joined the 2nd Battalion again in Enoggera, which was the next battalion to go to Vietnam.

Do you still have trouble with your leg?

Yeah. I've had trouble with it ever since. Until next Tuesday when they take it out and put a new one in for me. What do they say? They're going to jack up the radiator cap and stick a new one

13:00 in under it. No, it's always been a problem. I've always had to keep it fit. Recently, in the last 5 years, I've started to get lazy. And then the weight comes on. So you get lazier because there's more pain. So I've had to, about 5 months ago I started to wake up to myself and said "You've got to get yourself fit. Start swimming again and get going". I can't jog and run any more. I was windsurfing 4 years ago, 5 years ago, 6 years ago. I've windsurfed for years.

13:30 As it got worse, my whole health thing started to go down. Your own attitude towards yourself starts to go down. So that was at about the time when I started to have some real severe problems with dealing with things, particularly people.

This is postwar?

Yeah. I didn't know what I had. I didn't even know what TPI was. Totally Permanently

14:00 Incapacitated. I thought you had to be gassed on the Somme in 1914 or 1918 to be TPI. I thought only that sort of thing. So I was a bit surprised when they made me TPI. I actually knocked it back the first time. I went back to work for a while. It was fairly obvious I couldn't continue dealing with people. So I just rejected the bullshit I guess of what we were talking about before – dealing with what to me

14:30 was insignificant pissant-y little problems from what I'd seen. I'm getting too far ahead.

So you'd been told you were fit and ably to go to service.

Yup.

At this time, what was your relationship with Marilyn?

We were engaged. No, just before I went back up to the battalion we'd become engaged.

15:00 That's right. We become engaged. So I went back to join 2 battalion at the time at Enoggera and ended up in D company, 2 RAR [Royal Australian Regiment]. When I got there I was promoted to lance corporal and then corporal, because I'd had overseas service. By that stage, the other, there were two battalions in Vietnam and we were warned for duty in Vietnam.

15:30 So we were into this pre training thing. We had first got our first bunch or national servicemen had some in. So we had to train and get the battalion ready for operations in Vietnam.

What did that involve?

Again, a lot of physical fitness. A lot of jungle shooting in close country jungle. I'd been pretty used to it. Not much different than what we'd done before into Borneo.

16:00 Patrolling, ambushing, laying, not moving for 8 to 10 to 15 hours in one spot, just staying awake. It takes a bit -- rain. Particularly trying to make like you're in the jungle in Southern Queensland in the middle of winter. It still gets cold in those hills. Chopper training, with real choppers this time. I couldn't believe it. I don't know what happened to the lawnmower.

16:30 All sort of stuff. We had leave and people were being processed through all sorts of things. Medicals and needles, make sure your equipment was all done and all that sort of stuff. For us older hands, which I was by this time, I was in command of a section of 10 men, it was all pretty ho-hum stuff. Intense. A lot of the officers were very young. They hadn't had much service. Even the commanding officer. The commanding officer was a magnificent man. Chip

17:00 Charlesworth. But our company commanders, like the majors, they were pretty hopeless. They had some weird idea about what it was all about. They hadn't had a great deal. The Australian army was lucky in those days when it expanded from two, almost under strength battalions to 9 battalions by the

cadre of senior NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] and warrant officers. These guys were the backbone of the whole thing. They run the thing. They were the strength

17:30 of the whole thing. A good sergeant major could negate the disastrous effects of three young captains or something. They were book learning soldiers where these guys were. They'd learnt the history and they were good and they could write words and all sort of stuff, but different in the field. We weren't particularly interested in outstanding matters of military history. We wanted to go make history rather than read about it. Having said that,

18:00 there were also some magnificent young officers. I will say that some of our better ones were young national servicemen who'd come in and done, maybe come into the army. Jeff Kennett was one. Victoria Premier. Magnificent bloody soldier. Completely disregarded authority. He was the most disobedient man I've ever seen in uniform. He was a young 2nd lieutenant and that was his thing. He just didn't care.

18:30 I remember he put the hard word on the CO's wife one night as a bet at some mess function. Somebody bet him so he did it. The CO in those days was a strict thing and very proper colonel and she was a very proper colonel's lady. He done duty officer, this is when we were in Malay later, he'd done duty officers for about 6 months every weekend after that. He just didn't care. It was all just a joke.

19:00 I got a great deal of time for Jeff Kennett. Knowing the guy I knew then I think he might have got a bit corrupted later on in life, but I got a lot of time for him. So we had some magnificent young officers. But the core of the strength of the thing was these hoary old sergeants and warrant officers. Luckily there was enough of them around that right through our involvement in Vietnam, those guys kept the thing together.

19:30 Right through. They saved a lot of lives. So where was I? At Queensland training.

Did you get to see Marilyn during that time?

Not a great deal, but I did get home long enough to get married one Christmas on leave. Next Wednesday's our anniversary. 17th of…

You'll be in hospital.

Yeah, jeez didn't I get the stick over that. I

20:00 completely forgot it when I booked the hospital. We got married here in Adelaide. Then I left within a month. Oh, no. She came back up to Brisbane with me for a while. We finished our training off at Canungra, which is the jungle training centre. We did really intensive stuff there for about 10 weeks. Then after that you get your pre embarkation leave, which is 7 days. I'd sent her back to Adelaide to live

20:30 with her mother. Then we had a little flat up in Brisbane. Then I took off for Vietnam in about May '67. She stayed home here. By this time she was pregnant with Malcolm, our oldest son.

What was the public feeling about Vietnam at that time?

I don't think they thought too much about it at all at that time, in mid '67.

21:00 If they did, ah yes, the moratorium thing started and the "Save Our Sons Organisation". But we were told by our people that "Save Our Sons" was the front organisation for a communist thing. I'm not sure that it was. There was a lot of paranoia and crap going on. The people that were against the war were viewed by the military hierarchy as just traitors. Absolute traitors.

21:30 For me, personally it was, because we were in a barracks setting and we thought we were going off to another great adventure. I had some ideas it wasn't going to be as pleasant as everybody thought it was. I knew. But I also recognised that I was a regular soldier for the moment and I had 3 years to go, or whatever it was, 4 years, no 2 years to go or something. Just over a year. I forget. I really should do this, so I did. It was fairly tough leaving

22:00 a pregnant wife. But for some reason or other I managed to be able to do that 3 times.

How did she feel about all this?

She was frightened as hell of course. She never told me. She never let on. She did say once, as we were going somewhere the day before I left, that she was so frightened. Because my brother-in-law was home and shredded. So it was no, and the bloke that she grew up with was in a mess.

22:30 So there was no illusions about what the bloody thing could do to you in terms of physical and mental damage. But there wasn't enough of those around. There were little funerals going on all round the place, but nobody cared. Bodies were brought back and just buried. There might have been a little funeral, just the family attending in some country place, you know. Wasn't like America. Marilyn

23:00 never says much about it at that time. She didn't want me to go. I don't know, and I must admit that I've been pretty ignorant or chauvinistic or whatever it is about it, that I haven't thought much about what the effects on her were. Apparently there's been a bit of work done on it. They almost say they've got

secondary PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder] a lot of them. They're just as

23:30 buggered as a lot of the guys were, because I guess it's pretty hard. It was – there was such an insensitive things happened when she was home. We were on the news. I think my company was mentioned once with a big fight we had and we were on the news. She knew I was in D company 2 RAR and there were so many casualties or something like that. 4 days or 5 days later the priest decides to go and visit some of the wives. So she's sitting home there, sitting

24:00 in the lounge room. Next thing an army car pulls up and out comes a padre. Well, you can just imagine. Her mother says she was rat shit by the time the bloke said "I thought I'd just pop around and see how you're going." Never thought. There's so many stories like that. Nobody seemed to. It's pretty hard I guess to -- back here, see

24:30 the country wasn't at war, there were just a few people from the country at a war. It didn't affect large slices of the community. At the maximum, or over the whole period there was just over 50,000 people went to Vietnam. So you spread that over 10 years, it wasn't too many there at any one particular time. So it was just a dribble. It seemed that the amount of concern you would show for people depended

25:00 on how big the war was or how many people were involved in it. But it's like "Oh, it was only a little war. You were only there for a year." But you've only got to be in one fire fight to know what war is about. War is just a series of those. Well, not war, fighting. Combat, I suppose. So Marilyn got through it OK. She gave birth to

25:30 Malcolm. I have a bit of a joke with Malcolm, because I remember when I found out he was born I was in a place we called the Light or Long Green. We'd taken some casualties from mines. I was just sitting there one day and the company sergeant major come up and said "Roberts, you're the father of a 7 pound 6 ounce baby boy". I found out. They'd radioed it through, just on the radio.

26:00 Now every time Malcolm has a birthday I ring him up and say "I know exactly where I was when you were born. Sitting under a bloody bush in the Light Green" as we called it. So I had the opportunity to come home on R&R [Rest and Recreation]. They introduced R&R from Vietnam back to Australia, because the Americans were coming here. But I chose not to come back here, because I don't think I would have gone back. So I went to Singapore and had 3 days

26:30 in Singapore and then went back to Vietnam. That was the only break I had in a year. I just went to Singapore and got blind, motherless, stoned drunk and pulled myself back on the plane and went back. I was flown out of the jungle, out of an operation to go on break 3 days in Singapore, went back on the chopper and straight back into it. 4 days later I was back there -- it was hardly a break. What's the point in going home? I would have got a 5 day break or 6 day break if I'd gone back to

27:00 Australia. But there was also a sense of not leaving the guy, the loyalty. It was a very strong thing about that. A lot of the guys that survived have a guilt thing about not being, about surviving.

How old was Malcolm by the time you first saw him?

He was born in November in '67. I came back in May '68. So he was 6

27:30 months or 7 months or something. You lose, you probably heard this, you lose all context of your previous life. Even though I knew I had a wife and a son and a family back here, they were some sort of abstraction that you just didn't consider. You were totally absorbed and totally involved in this other thing. In fact,

28:00 you never thought you were going to get out of it. You thought you were in some endless loop and the whole thing was to get to the next day. Thoughts of your wife, whilst you wrote letters and you had feeling thoughts and fond memories deep back in your mind, you never really believed they existed. Something sort of said that they're somewhere else. It's in another realm.

Why do you think that was?

I don't know. I think it might just be the psychological, the ability of the human to

28:30 put things away while you can't touch them and deal with them, and deal with what's in front of you right now. We probably are desensitised of those things in our normal societies back here, but when you're in extremes I think that you just learn to cope with that separation and all that somehow. I spoke to people then and since about that and we all have the same thing.

29:00 It may give rise to a lot of our problems, because we detach ourselves. That's what it was, it was some form of detachment away from your real life, your home. You couldn't even, your whole childhood seemed like it was some movie you'd seen at some point in time. This whole existence back here just, you couldn't let it impinge on you up there. So somehow you detached it and put it away in a box somewhere and hopefully one day you can open that

29:30 box.

Do you think you would have survived if you'd been unable to detach yourself?

That thought never occurred to me at the time. We all seemed to detach ourselves and live for each

other. I don't know if you've experienced it, but there's groups in the army. You've got your section and you've got your platoon and then you've got the company then the battalion. That

30:00 section is your life. Those 7 guys or 8 guys are your life. You'll do anything for those people. You're so closely bonded. Then it's not so, it's a little bit less to the other two sections that are in the platoon. There's 3 sections to the platoon. Then it dilutes a little but further to the company and it dilutes a little further to the battalion. There are guys in the other companies you don't know sort of thing. Not many, but.

30:30 Then outside of the battalion it's just another world. You don't even want to know anybody out there. They're just all strangers and weird people. As for civilians, that was just the way it is. So you lived for that section and platoon. You were so closely bonded and you depended on each other so much. That's' one of the problems soldiers have after his, the treachery that we find in general

31:00 society like in work. I've seen some treacherous things done by people you thought were friends. It would never happen in the forces. Never. So that's what protected you, that bonding thing. When we lost a member of our group, it didn't hurt us at the moment because it was two things that happened. One, "Shit, thank God it wasn't me", for an instant.

31:30 Then the second thing was, "Oh, what am I going to do to replace that? How are we going to operate without that thing?" Actually even once that gap was filled, you then detached that guy too. He was out of your system. He was in a box somewhere. The bloke you had just sent out. If they were dead or wounded you just sent them out and they were no longer part of you. While they were there, the relationships were re-

32:00 formed after. When I ran into a guy this time last year in Brisbane, the last time I'd seen him I threw him on a chopper and I thought he was not going to make it. All his lungs were practically gone, his abdomen was hanging out from underneath. I ran into him at a party at the thing. I couldn't believe it. Yes, you just detach things and that enabled you to survive I guess. You dealt with fairly superficial

32:30 things. You kept things fairly simple and pretty superficial. In fact, I do remember some worrying about, before I come back, about going back to this complicated society and how am I going to survive in this society where I've got to continue to work and mortgages and all those things. It just seemed so much simpler up there. Just had to get through the next 24 hours. And you only had to worry about not stepping on a mine or not getting shot. They were the only things you had to worry about, and get your guys through. So it's funny, you worry about coming back here.

33:00 As it gets closer it's very daunting. Same experiences I've read about guys in the Second World War, they were wounded and they would go back to England. They know that if they go back to the Somme they're going to get shot, but they go back, and they do get shot. And their pals. Same thing happens. There's a thing about leaving the guys. You had some idea that you were indispensable. Nobody is, but you had some idea

33:30 that you were and that sometimes when we lost guys you often felt guilty. I did, I was a section commander. Maybe it was something I decided that we should do that got them hurt. So you got to deal with that. I didn't have the, I wasn't the careerist or the professional, I was never going to go far in the army. I wasn't going to be a general or anything like that, so I didn't have the detachment that using these soldiers for my further career was just

34:00 part of it and detachment. I was very close, I was with them ever day. They weren't just a group of people somewhere down there that we deployed and some of them got hurt and we filled out casualty reports and got a gong. We were living together. I'll always be on the front line. Everything I do is with people in the front. I've got no great idea of being a general or a whatever.

34:30 The time in Vietnam was pretty awful. Quite often very boring. I was section commander in the infantry. They called it the infantryman's or section commander's war. Most of our fighting was done at section level between 7 and 12 men and we were fighting the Viet Cong. It got worse as it went on. Where we started

35:00 to fight North Vietnamese units. We had larger fights and so forth. I don't know whether I should deal with any of these issues. My introduction to casualties in the Vietnam War was not too long after I'd got there. We had a period, I went up there in the advance party and I operated with Delta Company 6 RAR, who had been in a major

35:30 fight some months before called Long Tan, you might have heard of it, where they had quite a lot of casualties and they got surrounded. So I worked with them for a couple of months and found actually a mate of mine from Kadina was a member of D Company 6 RAR. We worked together there. They sort of showed me the ropes a bit. I had some experience, but again, it was different. Got familiar with the area and realised very

36:00 quickly that I was in a very, very different war from the little introductory one I'd had down in Borneo, which was really a guerrilla active thing. We done some initial operations which were really just getting used to flying around in little choppers and using all this new equipment and all that sort of stuff close to the taskforce base. Then, I don't know whether you've heard of this barrier minefield that

36:30 one of the generals started to build up there. Can't blame him totally because the Australian government put him in a pretty crappy position. The task they gave the taskforce was way beyond what they gave him to do it with. Two under strength battalions basically and some supporting arms. The Americans probably would have put a division in there, which is 9 battalions. One of the things they had to do was cut the resupply routes of

37:00 the Viet Cong from a very heavily populated area to the hinterlands where they operated and based all that sort of stuff. There just wasn't enough soldiers to do that. So he come up with the idea of putting a barrier minefield from a place called the Horseshoe Feature down to a place called Long Hai on the coast. A minefield is, tactically a minefield is an obstacle.

37:30 It's not designed to stop anybody, it's designed to slow you up or channel you into an area where we could deal with. It really is a minefield of that nature was really designed for the Somme in 1914 or Tobruk or something like that. It was just to delay the attacking forces. They had to clear it or pre clear it or channel them into an area where our strength was. This guy's idea, against the advice of the previous taskforce commander and

38:00 just about everybody else, "Don't do it". But he decided to do it. His concept was that he had an agreement with the Vietnamese forces that they would patrol the western side of the minefield and keep it secure and cover it by fire, which means you have a machinegun watching the whole lot. This thing went 14 kilometres I think, 23,000 odd mines, and patrol it.

38:30 If you can't do that, it's not a minefield, it's a bloody depot for the other side to take mines from. We, my battalion, would patrol the outside in what we called Indian countryside of it and patrol that and keep them from coming, the main groups of them coming and hitting it. Then it was reduced to just our company to do it. So it went from 700 people to do it down to 90-odd people to do it. Then

39:00 we got deployed before we got a chance to do that into other operations elsewhere. So by the time we got down there, the final thing, the Viet Cong had learned how to get into the minefield quite safely and take the mines. So they lifted the mines. They even lifted the anti-lifting device which was under the mines, which is another little bomb. If you lift this thing it explodes. But they learned how to take both of them. I'm dealing with a group of people now that lost nearly 17 guys in

39:30 the minefield, by accident, in misfires and all sorts of other things. So we were patrolling and we didn't know that they were moving the mines. We weren't all that clever either at that stage of the game. So on this particular day we were

Tape 6

00:43 **Would you like to continue with that story?**

All right. So we have this minefield which caused a lot of casualties putting it in there. It wasn't being patrolled, the Vietnamese forces never left their little camp, they just stayed in there. When they did go on patrol they'd leave

01:00 the base, go and sit in the bush where nobody could see them and stay there for 24 hours, have a good nosh-up and then walk back in. Sometimes we had European advisors with them or mainly American advisors with them. And they weren't much damned different. So we took the job seriously and patrolled the western or the outer side of the minefield. It was quite a job. You may hear it come up time and time again, it's the place called the Light Green or the Long Green.

01:30 What the Viet Cong did, they were major bases for the VC [Viet Cong] and supply routes. Those supply routes were absolutely critical to them. So what they done, we'd been operating into those areas. What they done while we were up in those other places is they mined most of the tracks and areas around the tracks. They kept their own routes, some of them were underground, open. So that as we were coming

02:00 in from the north or south, we were striking these mines and they were still shipping all their gear back They'd go quiet while we were dealing with the minefield. We had these base camps in there. We, it's fairly heavy jungle and we were getting better and better at our job. Finding them, we used to do what they called search and destroy missions in those days.

02:30 We'd search and we were operating in platoon groups and then the platoon split down to sections. So we were covering a lot of ground. We were probably covering ground the battalion should have covered or certainly 2 companies should have covered. Very thinly on the ground. My section was down to 5 men, I should have had 10 often, you know. But you still had the same amount of ground to cover. Then when we strike something, if one of the platoons struck something then we'd concentrate and support each other somehow or other.

03:00 Well, one of the platoons detected this camp which had hastily been abandoned. You could tell when they took off pretty quickly. Remembering that we hadn't had anything to do with mines, we knew about booby traps and all that. I think this was the first incident that worked out mines had come from that

minefield that we laid, or the Australian laid. The other platoon propped and then my section was given the

03:30 job of going into the camp to clear it, see what was in there. We just started to go in. You've got to be careful obviously. We started to move in to the camp. I had my guys and my scout went. He was just in front of me. I thought I heard a noise and he heard the noise too, so I just propped. It's dark, it's eerie as shit.

04:00 I didn't quite know whether they were there or they weren't there because we could tell if they'd gone, they'd only just gone and were just at the other side of the camp. You've got to be careful of the crossfire with their machineguns and stuff. I was thinking along those lines, right? About machineguns and stuff and getting caught in a bunker fight. We were out, relatively standing up in the trees and light scrub still. I think

04:30 I and my scout was just into the clearing of the camp. We heard a noise and I propped and he propped and listened. He was about from me to that thing away and I just, we talked by hand-signals, didn't speak much. I just gave him an indication to head off a little out to the right and he stood on a mine. All I can remember was this flash and the compression. I didn't even hear the noise.

05:00 It feels like something's sucked out of you, you know? I come to a few minutes later, seconds later maybe. I was covered in blood and shit. He was gone. Just gone. I wondered "I'm hit. Where am I hit?" Of course it's him all over me. He took it all. Anyway, as I'm against this tree, I was whacked back against this tree

05:30 and blood was running down my face and I was feeling for this where I'm hit. I just got hit in the arm. I looked up and the trunk of his body was just above me in the branches and all his stuff and I'm just covered in him. Poor bastard. But he didn't know what hit him. He just disappeared, you know? That first mine of course was the first one that we thought we knew of that come from our,

06:00 because you've got a job to do. You can't muck for too long, you've got to shit on the commander here. I've got another guy right behind me. We've got to get over this now and start doing something about it, because we're going to start taking fire in a minute. They've hit us with a -- see I didn't realise it was a mine, I thought it might have been a command detonated bomb or something. Then I could see the whole in the ground.

06:30 What they'd done was, they'd had enough time when we were coming to pull the pins from the mines and shoot off at the back. We pulled another 7 or 8 mines out of that place. Checked the batch numbers and of course they were from our own minefield. We lost another three guys that day. Including myself. I got wounded slightly that day.

Who had not been controlling that minefield correctly?

On one side, nobody

07:00 patrolled because we were given the pass. But we were then deployed to other areas. So by the time we got down there to do the job they gave us, we didn't want to be deployed anywhere, but the whole thing was the concept they came up with "It'll be perfect. It'll be great. We'll put this thing here, the Vietnamese will patrol here on inner side," on the safe side you might say because they had all the little bases "and the Aussies will patrol the other side in

07:30 Indian country and intercept the Viet Cong resupply." It was the job of at least a battalion or more. We ended up only with just a company there. So we got caught a lot like that.

It seems ridiculous mismanagement.

We know that. Yeah. They've just brought out a book, the history of the war at that particular period. They call it "The Offensive,

08:00 67-68". That's when the Americans and we being with the Americans were what they called on the offensive. Search and destroy. Of course they now realise it was, people even then knew how stupid it was. But you get stuck with it. The guy that put it there, Brigadier Graham, wasn't a bad fellow, but he made a massive error in judgement there.

08:30 He believed the Vietnamese would do what they promised to do. Je believed the Australian government would do what they promised to do – send enough troops for them to be able to do this job properly. We needed another battalion. But they didn't do that. It took another 12 months before that battalion, I was on my way home, for the 2/3rd Battalion to turn up. We had to cover the ground. We had this area of responsibility. Our government had been up there shooting their mouth off about how they'll look after Phuoc Tuy

09:00 all this, and pacify the enemy while the Americans get on with the big war to the north, dealing with the main force unit, which in sizes that we didn't have. The order of magnitude they deal with is just way beyond us. We were very good small unit patrolling, ambushing, reconnaissance people. They are locked in battle stuff. They didn't get locked right either, but that's their deal.

09:30 So we were doing all this search and destroy and trying to destroy their logistics bases. Just trying to

cut things off so they withered on the vine. But their popular support was greater than anybody knew. The deal with the minefield was just an absolute tactical and strategic balls-up. I don't know how many

10:00 casualties that minefield cost. It cost me my cousin, he was killed by mines. How many Australian casualties from that minefield. I say a good percentage of our infantry casualties incurred in Vietnam was as a result of mines. I think we lost more to mines than anything.

Was Bernard killed by one of those?

Yeah. Later on, yeah,

Pulling yourself together because you

10:30 **have other men under your charge after a horrific incident like that must have taken a lot of courage and thinking back to training and trying to follow the rules. How do you recover after?**

I don't know about courage and that. You were there, you had a sense of duty to your job and to your guys. Panic and yelling around and screaming, I've never seen anybody screaming in Vietnam. Pictures

11:00 of people writhing and screaming in pain after they've been shot up, I've never seen that. They just die quietly or they just lay there. Yes, you're right. I guess those things did kick in. The job, I've got a job to do. And the only way out of this is to do the job. Let's not hit another mine. When I realised it was mines, you stop, you pull out your, you protect

11:30 yourself if you're going to get attacked by their rifle people or machineguns or whatever. You get your, we carried these things that we used to probe the mines. You start clearing the area around you to get a track in and we found all these other mines there. Had we gone in, had he not stepped on that then and I'd have got the rest of the men and started to sweep through, we would have lost everybody because that's how they knew we would come. They watched what we do.

Did you ever

12:00 **manage to catch them?**

Oh yeah.

From that village?

It was a camp, not a village. It was a Viet Cong defended camp.

Were you able to

We got some of them yeah. But you never knew. There was no tit for tat or satisfaction. It was just your job. Just get on with it and one day you got somebody.

How hard was it to control the men from retaliating on POWs [Prisoners of War]?

We didn't have prisoners of war.

12:30 I never had any prisoners of war. You know, when you attack or fight, I don't know at what point a person becomes a prisoner of war. Prisoners of war were an option. They were shot while the blood was up. It was as simple as that. If you ever do any studies on killing, I've done quite a lot of it since, once you get into a state you're almost outside of yourself in that frenzy of

13:00 action and adrenalin. When you do an attack, when you have an assault or in a fire-fight, it's just a madhouse. You make sure in that final sweep that people are dealt with. The prisoner of war and the shooting of prisoners is when you come back and there's people wounded there and you've got to deal with them. None of them were shot. We just never had them. You couldn't deal with them. What do you do with them?

13:30 We were way out on our own. Way out in the middle of nowhere. So we had, it was a trained thing. When you do an assault, you shoot. As you go passed you shoot bodies just in case they are alive. Because as you go through and you turn around and they pop up and knock you off. So you just made sure that nobody was around to. So we never had prisoners. If there were prisoners I wouldn't have allowed them be shot anyway.

14:00 It just wouldn't be part of it. Once you cooled down a bit, that's when you get out of that frenzy thing. They've got a name for it actually. I don't know what it is.

Can you tell me about the frenzy how that felt for you?

I don't know how to explain it. It's almost like

14:30 you want to take retribution, you're angry, you're in a mad state almost. I think you're not yourself. You're outside of yourself. But what it takes to get you there is when you see your first guys cop it. Whether you transform yourself into something or not just to get through that next 10 minutes or so, is, I've tried to read up

15:00 a fair bit about it. The Americans have done quite a lot on it. It generally only affects infantrymen in face to face combat. Gunners who are shooting at somebody 6 kilometres away or bomber pilots who drop bomb know what they're doing down there, but they don't see it. It's recorded way back into the Greeks talk about it. When they were fighting the Trojans and all that sort of stuff,

15:30 how they gone into these killing frenzies until such time as everything around them was destroyed. That's what sort of happens. When there's nothing left to destroy then you start to come back to yourself somehow. Takes a while. I think it's an adrenalin thing. I don't know. It's in your face and it's right there. They say that extended

16:00 experiences like that is what gives rise to the chemical change in your brain system which over use of the adrenalin and stuff don't in fact to something to the endorphins or something in your brain. That's where the anxiety and stress comes on later. You're constantly in a state of anxiety waiting for something to go. It might never go, but over a year you're so programmed

16:30 to wait for that next thing to happen, which does happen. But when you leave there you never get rid of it.

It's also what kept you alive when you were there.

Kicks in and makes your life hell afterwards. You can do all of it. A game. You learn to walk alongside it or put it in a box. Most of the time. So after the first mine incidences life was a matter of patrols and ambushing

17:00 and section actions where two or three of those jokers would walk into us and we'd ambush them and get them. Someone were tax collectors and we took their money and spent it if we could. Just angry farmers we used to call it. The Viet Cong. The basic levels of the Viet Cong. Then later on we started to hit what they call

17:30 Viet Cong main force. The Viet Cong structure, they had infrastructure in the villages, which were their intelligence people and women and kids and that sort of stuff. The young guys would go into a local VC unit and if they done fairly well there, they had potential, they were the ones that go out and put mines in front of you and blow booby traps and stuff like that and then run away. Then they go up into what they call a VC main

18:00 unit, which is forming into companies and battalion. Then they go into VC divisional units, which are almost like regular army. Then beside that again you've got the North Vietnamese who were different units. Later on they became integrated. The North Vietnamese were reinforcing the main force Viet Cong units. This is in the south, not in the North. Up in the north where the Yanks were they were fighting whole divisions of North Vietnamese. Who were

18:30 much well equipped. So that went on for quite a while. We had a number of mine incidences again. I was wounded again by another mine. We lost 4-5 guys that day. I think 19 wounded or some bloody thing. I stayed on duty. I didn't go out because my wounds were relatively minor. We were pretty short of

19:00 people. What did we do? Just patrolling, ambushing all sort of stuff. There were some funny incidences like booby traps for instance. I remember once we were going on, I had a situation where I had a forward scout whose name was Bosnack [?] and a machine gunner whose name was Wasniack [?]. When you got hit we had what we call contact

19:30 drills. It saved a lot of lives. These were developed by our soldiers in the Second World War fighting the Japs [Japanese] in New Guinea and other places. If we had a full section you'd have a forward scout or two forward scouts, then the section commander, followed right behind him would be the machine gunner, then the machine gunner number 2, then the section 2IC [Second In Command] who was a lance corporal and then some riflemen. Once the forward scout would detect

20:00 movement or bump into an enemy, quite often we'd bump into each other on the track. It was who got the drop on the other guy first. Generally we won that because we were always ready, they were carrying their rifles over their shoulders, the lower elements of VC. On any sort of incident we had a contact drill where the forward

20:30 scout would go straight to ground and put out a rapid volume of fire. He always had a fully automatic weapon. The section commander would be behind him. The machine gunner would go to the right or if there was high ground there he'd go to the high ground to dominate. We're talking about from here to my front wall. The thing was happening in the garden. Then

21:00 the rifle group would close up behind and protect your back. So you immediately formed almost this little ring of 9 men, but we often only had 7 men. So it was a much smaller ring. Then, as a section commander, your job then was to work out how you're going to take these guys out, because we always were offensive. We had this concept of the best defence was offence. Then we would make a decision and say "Right, I'm going to

21:30 so a right flanking attack" or "left flanking attack". So the gunner would stay there and pout

machinegun fire down to where these people were last seen. Myself and the riflemen and whoever else I could get hold of would go out to the right or the left and then assault through them. Quite often they'd gone by then. We'd pick their bodies up if there was any bodies. Or we might get a couple of straggler who never shot at you. They didn't like being taken prisoner either. They tried to get away. They'd fight to the bitter end.

22:00 So those contact drills were very effective. Charlie [Victor Charlie – VC – Viet Cong] never ever cottoned on to those. The Americans when they had a head-on collision with Charlie, used to just drop down and put a lot of fire down. Charlie used to come out and do a flanking attack on them. What used to confuse Charlie with us was that if it was bigger than a

22:30 section so there were two or three sections of us or a full platoon, they'd bump us, the first section would be down providing that base of fire and then the other two sections would go out. As he's sending his guys out, he'd bump them out there. He'd say "Hell, we've got something bigger than a platoon here". They didn't expect anybody to be out there. We reacted so quickly and were out there. So they'd go out further and then we'd be up further. Then in a matter of who got the

23:00 upper hand or who assaulted who in the end, it turned out you'd be having a fight going along the front. Generally when they knew it was bigger than they could handle, they'd take off. Generally if they had a 3 to 1 advantage on us they'd have a go.

Your tactics were similar to a frilly-necked lizard?

Yes. Our other tactic, which is what we called an ambush tactic, if we were ambushed, i.e. we were walking along the track and the ambush was set

23:30 and they popped the ambush. Anybody who survived was to assault straight into them. The quickest way out of their zone to fire straight out of their back. So if they didn't pull their ambush off right, the next thing they knew they had a bloody size 9 boot sitting on their backpack. It's the quickest way out of it. There's no point running away, you can't beat the bullets. You're going to continue into the killing zone or you go straight over their back. So again that saved us a lot. Generally we didn't walk into too many ambushes. We could smell

24:00 after a while. You got the smell and know when they were there as they knew we were there.

Is that literally?

Yeah. They knew we were there by our soap, so we gave up using soap and all sort of stuff. Because you develop and anybody will tell you, if you spend a long time in these primary conditions, you develop extremely good senses of alertness and third senses and all sort of stuff. It's primal stuff I guess. Your eyes and your

24:30 ears and your smell just become so finely tuned. So we done that. Then we were getting closer to the end of '68. My company suffered quite a lot of mine casualties as I've told you. Probably dealt with mines enough anyway.

25:00 There's a story in a book called Tracker. Peter Horan guy, he's a journo with the Sunday Mail or something like that. He was one of the tracker dog handlers up there at the time. He wrote this up in a book called Badlands. We used to call this place the Badlands. He was called out on the tracking job with was my platoon company. What happened was one morning some VC walked into us and we were just sitting there having a

25:30 brew or something. It was raining if I remember rightly. We thought, "Nobody would be out in this bloody weather so we'll just stay in here and be cosy". Next thing there was a couple of Charlies blundered right into us on this track. Somebody shot at them and missed them, so they took off. So we took off for a while. Chased them for a bit. Then run into a bigger group. "Wow, back off here". Then the commanding officer got involved and said he wants the trackers in to

26:00 track them, So they brought the tracker team in. We didn't really like the tracking dogs cause they used to go like hell and you were exposed cause you were running to keep up with the dogs. They wanted to use these things, so away we went. So I was on the right hand section off the track and there was another section platoon headquarters up the track on the left hand side. I'm saying that the tracks there, I'm about here and the platoon headquarters

26:30 is just passed the wall, very close, thick scrub. The tracking jokers are going along and they've got their own little protection group just forwards. We're either side of them off the track to protect them as best we can. You can't do anything about it if somebody got them on the track. The dog's going along and the dog props at a junction. Horan writes this up really well. I'd almost forgotten about this incident, or the detail of it. I don't know how he could pull

27:00 it out like he did, but he just got it so right. He wrote it in this book he wrote called Tracker about tracking dogs. The dog propped for a second or two and he's saying to the dog, "Go, come on, go", and it would move and it wouldn't move. He wasn't giving the point either. A dog will give the point if there was a human quarry within a reasonable distance. You had to watch for the point. It might have been just a flick of a tail or his ear flinched

27:30 or something like that to indicate. A good one would sort of tail straight out and point his thing, but he didn't have that. So you had to watch for it. Just as that was happening, platoon headquarters hit a mine to the left. The platoon commander himself stood on a mine. He was, no he wasn't killed, he lost his leg. He didn't jump. It was a jumping jack, but sometimes the devise

28:00 on the bottom that was there to blow the mine up to explode at waist level didn't work and so the mine exploded in the ground. That reduces the casualties, but it makes a hell of a mess of the guy that stood on it. So it reduces the overall casualties. So it exploded and took out platoon headquarters and the front end of the next section that was behind. I was just to the right of that and it took the pistol grip off my rifle, just sheared it

28:30 clean off with a bit of shrapnel. Then we had to protect the thing. So my immediate reaction as the section commander of right hand section was to swing out and form an all around protection while we looked after the casualty. The dog was still popping and Horan's yelling out, "There's something ahead. There's something ahead. Be careful, there's something ahead." I'd moved out further. What I didn't know, and we didn't know until later was there was a 500 pound bomb buried in

29:00 that bloody track junction, just in front of us, and a tripwire. If we'd hit that bloody thing, the whole damned company would have gone. That bloody dog, he saved us. But unfortunately we lost our people in another thing. That was interesting, in the fact that they'd now started planting mines off the tracks. So it didn't take long to twig that we won't walk on tracks. So it meant we've got to go further into the

29:30 scrub. You make more noise when you're moving, you're slower to move and all sort of stuff. Becomes pretty horrible, almost pointless at times. So that story's written up in Trackers.

Can you tell me what you and your company would be doing in an ordinary day? Where would you be sleeping?

OK.

30:00 There's two periods, when you're in Nui Dat, not on operation, your ordinary day consisted of make and mend your equipment, maybe maintenance of the area, doing pickets on the wire and the bunkers to protect our own perimeter. Mess duties, wandering around, shower, whatever. Just taking it off. But we didn't

30:30 have a great deal of time there. I was there during the offensive period and we were on the offence most of the time. We were out all the time. We'd get work, sometimes we'd have to go and do work parties for the bloody base wallahs because they were doing important stuff, whatever it was. So we'd have to go and sandbag their tents for them or something like that. We didn't go too keen on that. Plus we also had TAOR patrol, Tactical Area of Responsibility patrol where the Australians operated and

31:00 one of the things that stopped us from being shelled and mortared. We knew that was the fact that we controlled the ground from the wire out to at least mortar distance, which is about 3-5,000 metres. The way we controlled that ground, the Americans didn't do that, their perimeter and that was Indian country the other side of the perimeter. In our thing we have a zone out there and it's constantly ambushed and controlled by the off-operations battalion or unit. So when you weren't on full operation out in

31:30 the field as a whole unit you were at least once a week you'd be out doing and ambush that night or a tail patrol just patrolling around so that all around the taskforce there was little groups wandering around, watching and just interrupting if anybody tried to get in to set up a mortar or launch an attack or whatever. So that was pretty busy. You were doing a fair bit of that. Quite often we'd get a lot of the basies would want to come on with us and give our guys a bit of a

32:00 spell. That was their big war, they'd come out and do a tail patrol with us and go home and talk about it.

What's a basie?

Cook or a man from ordnance or a mechanic, the guys that weren't involved in field operations, infantrymen. Pogoes we used to call them. I don't know where that comes from. It's an American thing that's crept in. Funny about

32:30 that, pogoes. We had a feeling your degree of importance was how far from the front were you? As a section commander I had only one bloke in front of me, so I felt I was pretty important. I used to call the guys in the rifle section, who were all the way back all the way at the kitchen somewhere, I used to call them pogoes. "You bloody pogoes," and they were 5 metres back. So base wallahs, that's just a joke.

33:00 So they used to come out with us. Transport guys all those sort of fellows. They had important jobs to do, somebody had to do it. I wished to hell that I'd have been one of them.

What would you have eaten ?

We had a kitchen while we were in base camp. They had kitchens and they used a mixture of American rations and Australian rations. Sometimes we'd get fresh stuff. Somehow every now and then somebody'd make and effort and get a pallet load of steaks in from Australia or even America.

33:30 And we'd get fresh stuff now and then. Not often, but generally powdered spud and that wasn't bad. In

the field of course we used to get American rations and Australian rations. We used to pick the best out of the both. Australian rations for 24 hours was a packet about that by about that by about that wide in the plastic thing. It had three little tins of something and a bit of coffee and some biscuits and maybe a chocolate I think.

34:00 And some brew gear. We lived on coffee. The American ration was a big box of stuff and it had pork and lima beans and pound cakes and chewing tobacco because they never had to carry the amount that we carried. They were delivered a hot meal most days by chopper. So the ration they carried were for their breakfast and evening meal. They would get resupplied every second day or something like that. So they never carried the weight that we carried. We were carrying

34:30 5-7-10 days on our back because the whole idea was to disappear, not have a bloody chopper pull up over your head every lunchtime and chocolate ice cream and all that sort of stuff. I'm not diminishing the American soldiers, they were good guys. I'm just saying the different ways we operated and the different roles we had. Sometimes they wanted to attract attention. They wanted to bring these guys in so they could fight them so they could engage them with their massive weapon systems that we didn't have.

35:00 The aerial stuff, and their mini guns and goodness me, the amount of tricks those fellows had. We just had rifles and stuff. So we had different roles. So we would move very quietly and not talk, use hand signals. You could go for 10 days and not say a word. When you did it was at night or in the morning and you'd just whisper to each other "I want you to do this" and you just point to each other on maps and stuff like that. But generally we got so good we could tell what

35:30 we wanted.

Is that when you were going out on patrol from the base, you'd be testing the perimeter, you were doing that for days at a time?

Yeah we could do that. Sometimes patrols only lasted a night or a day aerodrome you'd come back. Then you'd get ready to go out on a big operation where you were all saddled up and then you'd go and fly out in helicopters and do a

36:00 heli-borne assault on some paddy field out in the middle of nowhere. It was pretty exhilarating business. If it wasn't for the bit on the ground afterwards. The biggest helicopter borne assault I had was 300 helicopters. Those Hueys. The bloody thump and the sound of it was just incredible. You'd go down about dawn in the morning on the big strip they build. All these choppers were lined up in two great rows

36:30 and you're waiting and waiting and waiting and waiting and you have about 2 hours of orders and what you're going to do and all that sort of stuff. How we're going to hit the ground and go to the right and go to the left and choppers will do this and all that sort of stuff. Then the choppers all start cranking up and all the blades start turning and the whole thing. I think the closest I've ever seen to it was in "Apocalypse Now". They had 3 or 4 helicopters there, or 5 or 6, but this was bloody, it must have been 100 of them.

37:00 They're winding up and we're all sitting there. You start to get a bit shaky then. I always used to like to be in the first wave. Get in the first choppers in what you called echelon and try and get in on the first choppers that land because nothing worse than being in the second wave. When they come back there's bloody machinegun shells rolling out of the choppers that come back and the big American negro gunner is saying "God, man she's hot in there"

37:30 and half the time they were bullshitting. So you didn't know what you were going into. You didn't know what you were going into the first time, but you had some sort of control over it because you we there first. Coming in second for some reason or other used to spook us all. So these things would crank up and we'd all get onboard. You didn't put seatbelt or any of that sort of stuff on. You just crowded into it. You'd have a couple sitting on the floor and then there was a seat row right at the back and we'd get in there and we'd

38:00 have 5 or 6 in each chopper. About a section. As a section commander my place was to sit on the right hand side and quite often you didn't get your whole body in there so you hung onto something and then they all lifted off together. It was just this sense of noise and like a large production. You felt you were part of something big, you were invincible. Away you go, and then you're flying along. You're just sitting in these things watching the choppers fore

38:30 and aft. It really was a buzz. Then you'd look behind you and the whole sky was full of these things. Just everywhere. The Yanks don't do things in small chunks. They really bung it on when they want to play. Then you'd come to the thing and over the air, you'd have this radio thing, and over the air was the plan that you'd spend 4 hours on the ground developing, all that's changed and you're not even going to that place anymore. You're going to somewhere else.

39:00 What are you going to do. We all had standard procedure when we hit. So as you were coming in, you'd see the target area because the artillery would be hitting it, shells would be hitting it, the choppers are coming in and the shells would be coming in, and then the gun ships used to peel off and they go down and shoot either side of the strip we were going to land on, the paddy field or the opening or the clearing or whatever it was. They were just ripping up and down and all these rockets and

39:30 bloody stuff and the artillery still hitting and smoke grenades are going off and you've got this big joker sitting behind you in a little cubby hole both of them, they've got these double machineguns. Then as you're coming in, it's a real buzz when you're in the first two choppers, then you've got all these others behind you. You're coming in lower and lower and lower and you're swooping down and you're swooping along the paddy field or whatever it is, and all this shit's happening.

40:00 Then this guy starts firing and the whole either side of the jungle there's trees falling down because of the amount of bullets and crap going into it. Then they sort of flare and jerk and out you go. Then they sort of swoop over you. Have you ever seen them take, when they sort of pause and you all jump out, they very rarely touched the ground. You just, the skids would touch the ground,

40:30 you'd get out quick, down on your firing positions. If there was enemy there, of course they were now firing back in. Generally those gun ships tried to keep them off so that you had enough time to get your bearings and start moving into the scrub either side, or getting your people together and getting going. Sometimes you got locked down behind a paddy and you jump out of the chopper and "shunk" straight up in the mouth because it's still a wet paddy field. You're stuck there, you just can't move. Takes a while to get

41:00 out. But at least you're protected.

Tape 7

00:46 **You were talking about going in helicopters. What was the standard procedure once the helicopter**

01:00 **landed?**

OK, you come swooping in and then if there was 100 helicopters they all seemed to kind of land on top of you on the ground because wave after wave of guys coming in. Remember that each helicopter carried about a section. Won't carry 10 men, but most of the sections didn't have 10 men by this stage, we were down to 7, 5-7 men. So each helicopter carried a section, so three helicopters made up a platoon with platoon headquarters, which

01:30 was also -- we didn't have many officers in platoons in those days. You'd get officers, they'd come in and spend 3 weeks with us and then they'd be sent off as liaison officer somewhere, they got their tick in the book and away. Mainly the sergeants were the platoon commanders. Or us corporals just handled it. What happened is that these things just kept pouring in onto the pad and all the firing was going on by this stage. There's green smoke and there's smoke everywhere. You don't know whether there's anybody there or not

02:00 until you hear stuff going over you. Then you're not sure whether it's your own or theirs or what. So it's almost like a pandemonium, just a cacophony bloody noise and smoke and crap. Your blood's really getting wound. You're really getting into this adventure crap. It's starting to get you going. Then a lot of people get on the ground in a very quick time. The choppers are skimming off over the top of you and then sort of lifting off as they get their

02:30 speed up, which is difficult for them in that hot, humid weather. They lift off up and you see them go. All of a sudden all the firing stops. The gun ships are gone, the artillery stopped and there's nothing. It's just quiet because nobody's shooting at you and we're not shooting back. This big American conglomeration of machines delivered you there and it's flying off somewhere. You just see this thing disappearing over the high ground, this big shape's going off in the high ground. There you are, you're on your bloody own. You could be 30 of you,

03:00 but it could be a whole battalion or more. So you're on your own from that point on. Then you just filter up if you get stuck in mud. If it's hard rice even, you just crawl off. If you're under fire you crawl off into the sides. They were always clearing and paddy fields and there was always jungle. You generally had a standard operating procedure when you hit the ground. Soon as you hit the ground, head for the north or head for the south. So I had my compass

03:30 out and I just point north or south and then we'd all make our way as best we could over to our RV point. Then form up into a manoeuvre unit, into platoon or section groups. Then if we had a job to do, generally as I said, as we were flying in, the LZ [Landing Zone] was changed, you landed in a completely different place, going in a completely different direction, doing a completely different thing. I think the only people that knew that, it might have been some intelligence trick, but the VC

04:00 seemed to know what was going on, it's just we didn't.

They were there to meet you?

Sometimes. Well, maybe that's why they changed things because they knew the VC were there and they delivered us to them. I often thought, sometimes I often thought it was a bit of an act. The amount of ordnance and stuff was shot into nothing. It was absolutely bloody incredible. I don't know how many tons of stuff they shot off there every day, but I think three days in Vietnam

04:30 equalled about the whole bombing of Germany during the war. It was just enormous stuff they poured into that place. When you flew over it you could see there wasn't a square inch of the country there wasn't a shell hole or a tree that didn't have a bullet hole in it. Then you would go in. If it may have been a major battalion assault on a particularly contested pad, once the assault was over, generally Charlie with that much stuff come in he'd bugger out, unless he had major forces. Because they knew

05:00 they wouldn't win against the full might of the American war machine. So they'd go. But our job was then, we didn't do a great deal of those. The few that I done were a bit of a buzz.

What was your job?

We'd go in and we'd form up and do our search and destroy. We'd split off, company groups would split off and one would go north, one south, one east. We were only groups of 60 at the most.

05:30 We'd go so far and form a company base and the platoon would go out further and form a platoon base. Then a section would go out and operate into the zones. So that you put this screen of soldiers across. What you were looking for was their base camps, their logistics routes, them, ambushing their tracks and all that sort of stuff. Our whole idea was to totally disrupt their logistics and their operation, their ability to move around and all those sort of stuff. We weren't,

06:00 our role in Vietnam was more of a pacification and intelligence gathering thing rather than those big unit fights with all the ordnance and stuff. We did have a few of those, but they were unplanned. Charlie prompted them rather than us go out to try and attack his bases. We had company attacks where we attacked bunker systems and platoon attacks, but most of our operations were

06:30 at platoon or section level. Out there on our own. You're very much on your own. 5 and 6 guys.

What was it like when you move into the frenzy feeling? When you look into each other's eyes before it all goes to hell, what's the look in the men's eyes?

There is a special

07:00 sort of a thing there. It's almost, When you're in a fight, when you're firing and you're shooting at people darting in front of you and you're shooting down, you're shooting at things and you're trying to determine who you're shooting at and you're making sure you're shooting at the right people. You really, the blood is up and you're really freaking. You're not freaking or mad. You're actually quite calm. I've watched the guys and watched myself be calm, but your mind is in this absolute.

07:30 Things are in slow motion in a sense. It seems that they're in a slow motion in a sense and things seem to move in a, you might have heard that said before, they say even in a car accident they're conscious of it happens in a slow motion. But that I understand, when I was talking with the psychs and that, the ability for the mind to slow things down so you can deal with it. Your body can deal with what's going on. Nothing

08:00 will stop what you're trying to do. You'll find you butcher things and kill things and destroy things. Because you feel your life is threatened. I'm not sure that it's a conscious thing. You don't do it consciously, you seem to get into that thing. There's difference between what I was talking about the frenzy on the chopper paddy, you're caught up with the machine. Caught up with the noise, the machine-gunning, the rockets, the bombs and the whole, it's like going into the fireworks display up here.

08:30 You're really "Wow, this is great" and you get caught up with the whole thing. It then continues, if there's a fight on your hands once they've all gone and there's still firing and you get in and you start taking casualties or something like that. Then, when you lock in, and this thing that I'm talking about, the real maddie that you go into, this frenzy thing. I'm trying to think of the name that the psychologist put on it. It's been described from the old Greek days.

You're describing it well.

It is a,

09:00 it's when the guy you're fighting is right there and he's into it too. He's into it too, because there's not a great deal of difference between us.

Did you lock eyes with any of them?

Oh yeah.

What did you see?

Fear and never seen loathing. Never seen that. I've seen fear, mainly fear I think. In the faces of the guys, there's a grim look

09:30 of grim determination and fear. Again, to try and get a good idea, if you've ever seen that Tom Hanks movie where they hit the beach in Normandy, the first 10 minutes of that film, somehow he captured the look on their face. I don't know how he done it, but he got the look of the horror of this thing that you're caught up in. You don't know how you're going to get out of it, only just to keep going.

10:00 Then all of a sudden it's over. It's over and your blood is up, but there's nothing happening anymore. It's just finished. It's just like that. It'll only last for minutes at a time. 10 minutes. I can't really get to it. The look in the guys' faces is one of fear and horror and, "Is this really happening?" Afterwards of course, the long look that you may hear of that we just sort of look

10:30 a long way. We're not seeing much, we're just looking a long way.

You're not looking at each other?

No, you're looking at anything. You're just trying to wish yourself out of there. I think. It didn't matter who you are, what your rank was, where you are, it was those little moments that you allowed yourself. You couldn't spend long at it because it wasn't over. That was one of the problems you had with new troops. I might tell you a couple of small stories about

11:00 booby traps and actions. After the action everybody "Wow, thank goodness I got through that", take their gear off, put their rifle away, make a cup of tea. We've got to kick their bums and say "Hey, it's not over boys. It's not an exercise. The instructors don't come out and say 'no, you did that wrong and did that wrong'. The bloody instructor's still out there and he's trying to shoot you again. He's just minutes away. Maybe. You don't know." I remember in booby traps a guy,

11:30 we were going along and doing the Tet Offensive, which we should come to soon anyway, somebody spotted something on the track. We hadn't had a lot of booby traps and mines. So I thought "I don't know what it is. It doesn't look normal". So I told them to stay back and I'll go forward and probe it and see what it was. So I crawled up on my guts and I'm probing this thing. I could see lots of wire going in on this probe. And all of a sudden I have this sense that somebody's behind me. I

12:00 turned around and 5 guys are standing behind me almost looking over my shoulder going "Oh yes, mmm, I wonder what it might." It could have been a bloody booby trap gone the whole lot. They were in a feeling of, there was a euphoric feeling after an action. We had had actions that morning. They'd have sense that it was all over and that we'll be right. Not long after that this anxiety comes back and you're waiting for that. After an action there was this sense of euphoria that you got through it

12:30 and that it was over. But then the sense or the realisation that it wasn't over started to creep back in and these anxieties come back up and then you're tuned up again. Didn't have long in that little moment of euphoria. That was dangerous that moment of euphoria.

Relaxation?

Yeah, and what we had to do as local blokes that had been there a while was we had to be quite brutal to jerk them back. If you're not frightened of Charlie you'd better be frightened of me.

Was there

13:00 **a time when there was a soldier that was so frightened they were not coping?**

No, I've never seen that. Never seen any of our guys drop it or leave it. They were frightened, so was I. Everybody's bloody frightened and so was Charlie. But I never seen any of our guys lose it. They were all good men.

Were you superstitious?

Yeah. I don't know, the book Valley of the Dolls.

13:30 It's actually been written about this a little bit. We had a book in the bunker that we used to live in back at Nui Dat. One of the guys was reading the Valley of the Dolls. He was killed the next operation and the book was still laying there. The book was still laying there, the reinforcement came in onto the offshore bunk. Take the only guy's blankets away, brings his own blankets and the book's still lying on the sandbags

14:00 on the bunk. So he started reading it and he was killed. Then the third guy comes, another reinforcement, about 3 weeks later. He came in, he started reading, he lost both his legs and I think he eventually died. Then that book just sat there for the rest of the tour. As far as I know it's still there. And I still to this day haven't read the Valley of the Dolls. It really spooked us. Sometimes you try to find some, I actually tried to go back to religion a little bit there for a while. I was brought up with all this Catholic upbringing and I thought,

14:30 "Maybe there's something in there that might help." But I couldn't find anything there. I couldn't put my faith in blind faith. I still had to rely on my senses and your training and your experience and stuff.

Did you develop a sixth sense about danger or

15:00 **that your number could be up if you followed through with a certain action?**

I think we developed a sixth sense, yeah, those of us who were there for the long haul. We become very tuned. I was talking about it earlier. Your natural sense became very attuned. Sense of smell, eyes, hearing. I think there was a sixth sense developed too. We had a feeling and it was very rarely were we

wrong that something was going down. We sort of sensed

15:30 they were there. I don't know that that was the combination of our natural senses to pick up the smells and stuff and register and all that and there were precursors that showed us that. I can remember one of the last fights I was in I knew I was going to get hit or they were going to hit somebody. I just knew it. But I couldn't stop, I had to keep going. But I knew that those guys were there. I just knew it.

16:00 I couldn't point to anything physical that would say that, but whether it was just the collation of all the senses working together just unconsciously registered in me that there was something. See, there were also very physical things too. Very practical things that you picked up. When you walk along, if you walk along a track for instance, imagine a track about a foot and a half wide and you've got high scrub either side. Sorry – talk with my hands all the time -- a bit of Italian in the background there

16:30 somewhere they tell me. One of my grandfathers. But anyway, high track. There might be a tree fallen across, which was not unusual because it was either blown down by shell fire or something like that. If you watch guys when they walk along, they'll, if it's a certain height they'll step on it and then step off it. But if it's about so round, say 18 inches round, they generally step over it and put their foot right down behind the tree

17:00 close to the tree with the back of your leg brushing the top of the thing. That's where they put mines. So you very quickly got the idea that you didn't step like that on a track. The new guys didn't know that so we had to show them why and all that sort of stuff. That was something you picked up. Or there was a broken stick on the track. There were those things that you become attuned to, those physical things that you can see. But this other sense that you had,

17:30 I can't quite cotton on to that. I can't quite think. I've been back in rainforests working in exploration. The very same rainforests in some instances, or jungle. I could almost feel that, certainly that high, I've been living the good life for years, and I could almost feel those heightened senses returning to me. I was put back into that environment. When I was in New Guinea working on seismic work,

18:00 I was often out on my own with three or four local boys, trudging up mountains and all that sort of stuff. Within a very short space of time it all started to come back to me. Also, I was looking at "There could be somebody waiting for me there", because we started to read the ground and where it was obvious that somebody, if they were going to hit us, were going to be. Yes, the sixth sense thing. Sixth sense. I believe we developed a 6th sense.

18:30 We just knew, I mean it wasn't proved right or wrong all the time, maybe it was just some sort of psychological mechanism that kicks in because of the anxiety or the stress that just made you suspect everything. But a lot of times we were right. We were dead on.

Were there times too

19:00 **when you just communicated**

With just a look.

And it was all there?

Just a look, yeah. You know, in 1988 when I got my section together in our reunion we could still do that. The meeting of the eyes and that sort of stuff. I hadn't seen these guys for so long. I hadn't seen them since 1968. 20 odd years. I met them again in 1988 in Sydney, in a Greek club in Sydney, and it was within minutes it was as if we'd never been apart.

19:30 Never. Just a look to each other and talking. We knew what we were saying to each other. Just incredible. It was a moving exercise. It was a very moving moment.

You're the only ones that know?

Yeah I guess so. See, you'll never form relationships like that again. Even though we've had nothing to do. The forward scout that I'm talking about, not the guy that was killed, but the one that came after him, he lives in Red Wood Park. I've never

20:00 seen him since then. We don't, but I know he's there and he knows I'm here. We've met one Anzac Day that's all. For some reason we choose not to. I'm not quite sure why, because we were very, very close.

Maybe there's too much there?

Maybe. I have the feeling I want to talk to him. It's only just starting to occur. And I think the same, because I can almost feel there's a message there somewhere, that we're communicating, but we're not. I haven't got the phone.

20:30 He's great that guy.

It's like you become a primal being.

I think you're right. I mentioned that before that the senses that were developed were very primal. Your basic instinct for survival and your sense of smell. Communication is only, what, the percentage of vocal communication is very small isn't it? Just a hand or a

21:00 flick of the eye or a thing supplemented by a hand signal system, we could go for weeks without even saying a word. Often we were off the plan. The plan only lasted as long as it took to make it. So it was really down to what we could do in the field as built as it went on. We were sort of writing our plan as it went. We generally knew what we were

21:30 about and that's all we needed to know.

I can see why it must have been difficult to come back from that war situation and form relationships because they'd already had such intense experience with a small group of people. Then to come back to reconnect with a wife or children.

22:00 Not really successful in a lot of cases at all. High casualty rate. Me too there for a while. We've still got to work on it you know. The boys and I are very close, but there's an arm's length there for some reason. I don't quite know why. Not from their side, but from my side. "You have a feeling", they tell me, "that you're protecting yourself because you from

22:30 these relationships and then the guy disappears in front of you and all you've got is his blood and guts all over you," and sometimes that's over you for 3 or 4 days, there's no washing you've got to wait for the next shower of rain. It doesn't get any more intimate than that. You've cased yourself in steel there somehow, or the shutter's fallen and you deflect the remorse and all that. In a lot of cases,

23:00 they say, the shock was one thing, but the remorse doesn't set in until later. I'll give you an example. We got rocketed by the Americans. We lost three guys and so many wounded and I lost my water bottle or something. That was the sum total of my thing. But I can remember that guy's body just flying into a million bits because he got hit right in the stomach with one of these rockets from our gunship. They were giving us a demonstration. Another mate of mine, Billy

23:30 Fields, was wounded horribly with a sucking chest wound. We had a triage, that was one of the things you as a commander had to do. You had to decide who you put on the chopper. 1 chopper, 6 wounded, 3 don't look like they're going to make it, which three do you do? You're 19 years of age or 20 years of age. So you've got to make a decision. So you make your decision and you put them on the chopper. 2 of the ones you put on probably died and 2 of the 3 that you left

24:00 lived until just before the chopper got back. So you made the wrong decision. But how in the hell do you know? Fieldsy was the last one. He's knackered. Fieldsy was my best mate. There was 4 or 5 of us which served in Borneo together and all that sort of stuff. So we left Fieldsy off, chucked him on the chopper, thought he was dead. Just gurgling and things It's over. The dust off guy brought him around. We're back in the base that night and we're dividing up, we used to have the will

24:30 written on a tape. We all had wills written on tape recorder. We all had Sony tape recorders we bought while we were on a break or something, in the PX [American canteen unit] or whatever. We're all listening there and there's Billy Fields talking about "All right, Mick you can have my bloody this and" I think I got the tape recorder or something. "Jonesey you can have so and so" and all that sort of stuff. So we're divvying all this gear up and that was a standard thing. The next thing the adjutant came along and "What's going on?

25:00 I want all that bloody gear back, Fieldsy's pulled through." So we were all a bit dark on Fieldsy you see. Fieldsey pulled through and he's still alive. He's a bit of a mess, but he's still alive. We had physically excised him from our team. He'd gone. Later on of course we would team up or we would, feeling's would be there again. We'd never forget them, but for the job at hand they were no longer part of the team,

25:30 so very quickly wiped.

You didn't have time.

No.

You had no time for grieving because you had to get on.

They say that's a big problem that the grieving comes later. You don't know that you're grieving, that's the point. You don't recognise it. So far removed. It's only when you've got time later that you sit down

That the floodgates open?

Yeah, sometimes. Some guys take it pretty badly. It can be worse if you happened to be in a

26:00 command position. You're always wondering whether what you decided to do was the right thing. The first one, that first guy, if I'd have said, "Just keep going straight", instead of, "go a bit to the right", maybe he wouldn't have stepped on the, but then he would have gone in further and then the 5 other guys would have come in and we would have hit 5 mines, 6 mines. So I've got to use that as the reason that I didn't kill that guy.

You can drive yourself crazy.

You could. It did for a while.

26:30 Luckily I didn't have the grog, and I've got a good mate out there. I've got a lot of pluses that other guys didn't have. They got on the grog and they lost it totally and alienated, or their families couldn't hack it and you can't blame their families because it just got too rough. Mine could hack it.

I don't think you can blame anyone in that situation.

Well, no I don't think so.

27:00 You wonder about your abilities. You wonder in say, when I was being counselled I thought, "I'm a weak person. Why am I like this? Why?" It's not like those guys in the movies you know. They're tough and bloody what's his name?

John Wayne?

John Wayne and all those, it didn't affect them. Of course years later when I was up there doing aid work in Vietnam

27:30 I realised talking to the Viet Cong guys they had exactly same problem.

You got to talk to some Viet Cong?

Met them. Worked with them. They were working for me.

That must have been extraordinary.

Yeah. I met some of the commanders who were D445 [Regiment] and the 5th Division people who were the ones we fought most of the time. Sat down, had a beer. Talked.

What a fantastic thing.

They had no bitterness towards us. The only business they said was "You bastards were so good that

28:00 there's not too many young men around here." But then they did say, "We didn't want any of youse here, but we're glad you guys were here", because they know that we didn't go out of our way to destroy stuff that we didn't need to. They seen Australian soldier become wounded and killed so that innocent people didn't get wounded and killed and that impressed them.

It must have been great to hear that from them.

Absolutely wonderful, yeah. It's certainly,

28:30 I say oh they're just saying that. But no, thy weren't. Because a bond had formed there too. Oddly enough. Sometimes we often think, and I've heard this from soldiers from the other wars, that they felt closer to the enemy than they did their own leadership. Sometimes you fell like you just want to say "Stop, let's turn around and knock this lot off." In those moments, Rogers, my scout up here, and I've experienced it, on a

29:00 dark, very much like that scene in Platoon. The dark thing walking down the track and come face to face with a guy coming from the other direction. Two guys. And it was just this pregnant pause almost. Roger was a roo shooter before he was a soldier. His reaction was just so much quicker than theirs. I think there was a moment that we just didn't want to do anything. Just that moment. I don't know how long it lasted.

29:30 Then we'd fire first. I often wonder, we call them animals and all that sort of stuff, but we seemed to be quicker and prepared to do more than they were sometimes. I don't know.

Sometimes it comes down to survival of the fittest.

Well, I don't know. In that moment, see, it was impossible for us to say "That's it" because there was people behind us. There was just that

30:00 meeting of the eyes and that meeting of the moment that you just think that, "This is ridiculous. Let's just stop." But you can't stop. Then you fire and one goes down and the other one gets away or is wounded or something like that. Then it's back to the reality of it all.

It's almost surreal.

It is surreal. It's very much surreal. It's just it's. Of course there that sense that it's not really happening. You don't feel that it's really happening.

30:30 **Because you've stepped outside of yourself?**

Yes, outside of yourself. As I've mentioned before, the longer it goes on, I'm up around the 6-month mark by now, the longer it goes on, your former life is sort of disappeared. This is you, this is what you do, you're going to be here for the rest of your life literally – it could not be long. Even if you, barring you don't get knocked off, you still feel that this is what you're going to be doing for the rest of your life. Just get with the program, I guess,

31:00 and stay with it. So you do. You just tune out and live from day to day.

I've heard stories of soldiers on R&R meeting Viet Cong on R&R.

Yeah, down in Vung Tau. They used to use it as a base centre too I understand. The big enemy in Vung Tau was the South Vietnamese police. Bastards. And the US military police.

31:30 **Why do you say that?**

They were just bastards to people. Our military police were okay. Sometimes they started to try and emulate the American. I guess it's a little like the USA, even the normal American police are so alienated from their public because of what their public is like. Most of the American military police were negroes who had a big shit on with us. It was black power days and all that sort of stuff. And a big shit on most of

32:00 the whiteys anyway, wherever they come from. They went out of their way to make life difficult for us. There'd be a grunt [infantryman]. They'd say, "We don't want you bloody infantrymen coming down here spoiling our little number". We got our 3 or 4 day break. It was. But you'd be in a bar and you'd be talking to somebody and it's become fairly obvious that

32:30 he was doing the same thing as you were. You were just having a, and he was probably Viet Cong or North Vietnamese. Probably Viet Cong. You just knew, because you knew they were field soldiers. You can tell each other. It's certain things about each other that we know. We weren't that different. Years later when I met these people we find that we weren't so different. We used to think they were little animals and all that. But the first

33:00 single contact we had, the first Viet Cong dead that I ever seen killed by my section, was a track incident face to face. The gunner got the first shot off. The gunner, a bloke called Wheeler. Killed this guy. We'd been told and though the Viet Cong were scrawny little fellows in black pyjamas with

33:30 this, that and the other and devoted communists and all that sort of stuff. This guy wasn't quite dead actually. He was wounded badly in the stomach. I was searching him. His rifle was still lying there like a fool I picked it up and threw the rifle away. He had a go at grabbing the thing and Bruno then smashed his arm with rifle butt on his arm and just locking his arm off and the guy gave up. He knew he was dead. As I was searching him I pulled out a pair of rosary beads out of his pocket, photos

34:00 of his family and all that sort of stuff. He was a VC. But they're nationalists, they weren't all communists. We tried to keep him alive, because we wanted him for intelligence purposes, but he died. I thought, and he was a big, strapping guy too. He wasn't a scrawny little thing. He was a bloody fairly well built fine stamp of a guy. I just looked at him and just sort of held him and said,

34:30 "Just relax. It's over for you, mate. Just relax." And he just slipped away. I was just looking at him and I thought, "Jesus mate. You're not what they told me you're supposed to be. Women killers and all that." The VC cadre were very bad. These were the, what do you call them, the political people. But most of the soldiers themselves were just nationalists. Quite often they were in it because the VC got them before the Vietnamese army got them. They were going to be fighting for somebody.

35:00 They may have had family reasons for being in it. In some instances there were some on either side in the same family. But he had rosary beads. I had a pair in my pocket. Crazy isn't it? Then we started to realise that this is just absolutely stupid and what can you do about it?

How did you keep going when you realised that?

You're in a machine. You can't fight it. You just stay there.

35:30 As I say you start to lose that sense of home and a sense of something else. This is what you do now. And you just stay there.

It's a very brutalising regime, isn't it?

Mm. It is. It would have been different in the bigger wars. The statistics, the average Australian soldier spent 314 days

36:00 of his year in the bush. The average soldier in the Second World War spent 40. So you had a constant year that you were in operation. You mightn't have been under fire every day, you mightn't have stepped on a mine every day, but you didn't know that. So you had to be in that alert state. There was no stepping back off the line. Even when you went back to the base camp you were involved in these TAOR patrols and guarding the place

36:30 and all sorts of things. Ambushing. So there was no great respite at all. You were constantly in that state and I guess that's one of the reasons why the Vietnam veterans too are subjected to a lot of this post traumatic stress, simply because 1, that extended period being under those conditions, which they say changes the chemistry in you mind and 2,

37:00 I just forget what 2 was.

You never had and off button.

Yeah. That's it yeah. There was no switching off. You were just there with it all the time. You don't quite

know, you think you're handling it all. You think you are, but other people can see that you're not later. I think Marilyn would say the same thing about me that I was a sort of different bloke when I came home.

37:30 **How could you not be?**

You tried not to be. You didn't think you were. But you obviously were. So our life was pretty well much that until things got really serious then when the Tet Offensive – we were deployed for the Tet Offensive in 1968. Again our own operating procedure saved a lot of lives because everybody else was shutting down for the Tet holiday, the Tet truce.

38:00 But we refused. We were out of the province now, where we normally operated up in Binh Wa province. Because the Americans wanted, we were very successful in what we were doing and the Americans said "Let's get these Aussies up in this real action into the big fight instead of wasting them down there doing pacification." The Australian government didn't approve of that, but our leader deployed us out into other areas.

38:30 We formed a fire support base in a place called Fire Support Base Anderson up in Binh Wa province. We thought it was going to be a pretty cruisy sort of a job. This Tet Offensive thing was coming up and we thought "That'll be nice. We'll just sit here and do our patrolling". We had this feeling that nobody was going to be shooting at us for 4 or 5 days. It'll be great. Well, of course on the night of the New Year, that's when the major Viet Cong attack, the

39:00 biggest attack of the whole war. It was just going on everywhere. I can remember it clearly. We personally didn't get attacked where we were, but just south of us was a village called Tra Bong village. The US 11th Cavalry were on their way through there and they got hit and ambushed there. They got butchered down there. So we could see explosions and the whole place just lit up. Then, Christ, you've never seen a fireworks display,

39:30 this was the biggest Tet that I've ever seen. You'll never see anything like it again. It was just magnificent in a bloody perverse sort of way. We were sitting there all eyes open "What the hell's going on?" Then luckily we hadn't phased down. We'd relaxed a little bit, but our ambushers were still out. They were hitting Saigon and they hit into. We happened to be on their withdrawal route. We all got in before they got there in their positions in Saigon. By sheer bad luck we happened to be

40:00 plonked right where they were all going to be coming back out.

And you're cut off from…

We weren't particularly cut off, but we were a long way out on our own. There was a company at half of us. So the next day this 11th Cavalry kafuffle in the night, so we had to go down and fight through this village to clear the enemy to relieve them guys in this village called Tra Bong village. We were in fighting there for 2 days.

Tape 8

00:40 **You were talking about the village at Tra Bong?**

The Viet Cong occupied that village in quite heavy strength. I just want to make a point here that this was in February '68. I'd been there since May or June

01:00 '67. So I was sort of on the back nine a bit and started to have a sense of, "Shit, I might make it out of this thing". But then this Tet Offensive occurred and that was the heaviest fighting in the whole 30 years of war ever in the place. The DaNang thing was happening and the Hue. Down where we were, Saigon was under a big attack and we were on the withdrawal to Saigon. The forces were all withdrawing back.

01:30 So they give us a bit of stick there for a while. But we didn't take a lot of causalities, but we inflicted lots and lots of casualties on them for some reason or other. Because we were engaging with this heavy firepower. This was an all out brawl, it wasn't this guerrilla sneaking around ambushing each other. This was face to face, hand to had, face to face stuff. In that village for 2 days we basically fought hand to hand. It was hitting people with the backs of the rifle and stuff like that. It

02:00 really got nasty. Then we cleared them and then we had some terrible things happen. Again we were in that bit of an attitude that you didn't really care what we'd done. The villagers of course were still there these poor bastards that were innocent to a large extent. War comes through their village.

02:30 They have defensive mechanisms like that. Dug holes and all sorts. They dropped down in these holes and all that. I got spooked one day when we fought through and I was reorganising and there was a temple and I kicked the door to the temple open and another door, somebody had put a stool against the door on the inside. As I kicked the door open the bloody stool come down on me. I started to fall, I didn't know what it was

03:00 and shot the crapper out of it. When I went into the temple after that and there was a hole where a rocket had hit the side of the wall and there was a body laying by it. It was one of the monks I think. Then, right in front of me was this golden Buddha. It was vast. It was a big thing. I just got spooked with the incense and the body and the door and we'd just been all sort of stuff. I really got spooked and I backed out of there and the guys said "What the hell's the problem?" They thought

03:30 there was a monster in there or something because I was just, something really spooked me and it took them a while to snap me out of it. I got out of it and we continued on. Then probably the worst thing that could ever happen to me happened. One of the guys, we had an incident before that in another village where we were clearing through a village and we were being very, very careful with the people. We didn't want to hurt people

04:00 we didn't want to hurt. One of the guys, a bloke called China, they called him China, there was a bit of stuff on the ground. We knew that the locals used to get into these holes, but we were trying to pacify the, saying "It's okay, come out". So he went up and he just kicked this cover off the ground and there was a VC in there with an AK47 and he shot China, just the whole magazine. Just shocked us. There was just that,

04:30 we just weren't expecting it. The VC was killed almost immediately I think. They butted him to death with rifle butts or something, I don't know. Just killed him. That happened about a week before. So we were clearing through this village and I think of all the incidents, this is the one that knocks me around the most and I don't really know if I'm going to get through this bit. Just give us a minute. We seen this covering

05:00 on the ground. It's just like leaves and stuff. I had this guys called Wolfie was one of my section. I didn't like him much. He was in my section, but he was one of my soldiers so I had to look after him. I said to Wolfie, "Just sneak up to that". We used to have grapple hooks with a grapple on it and we'll pull it and see what's under it. He didn't, he went up to it and took out a white phosphorus grenade. Do you know what a white phosphorus grenade is? Awful things. He threw it in. It exploded of course. I screamed at him not to do it,

05:30 but he threw it in. It was full of women and kids. They were hiding. It just tore them apart. Burned them and. God damn I was going to shoot that bastard that day. It was too late, they were gone. So what they did was they put their people in these holes, the women and kids on these holes to save them from a fate worse than death. We managed to deliver death to them, so they didn't get raped. We didn't rape people anyway. So that

06:00 particular incident turned me a fair bit at that time. I don't think I was ever the same after that. I just was like an automaton after that. I had a few months to go and I just lived from moment to moment, day to day. I seen that guy in 1988 and I still wouldn't talk to him. They didn't accuse him of anything. He didn't have to do that. All we had to do was pull that thing off and deal with it.

06:30 Why he threw that bloody thing in there I'll never to this day. I never asked him. It just happened.

He might have been a bit mad with fear himself.

He was, but he was a brutal sort of a bastard too. He was a bit of a, what do you call them? Not gung-ho, but he just, he was a reinforcement and he shouldn't have been with us, I don't think. He should have been in the stores or something like that. He was just not the type. He just

07:00 didn't have any humanity I didn't think.

So that was the one that broke your heart?

That knocked me a bit that. Well it has forever. Looking down into that mess and those poor ones that weren't killed straight away. White phosphorous just keeps burning until it's gone. It burns in water and burns in air and stuff. You can't put it out. Unless

07:30 you completely immerse it in water and you've got to dig it out. But it just keeps burning. It wasn't an instantaneous thing. This went on for minutes and minutes and minutes and minutes and what could you do? You know what you could do? You could just shoot them. That's the only thing you could do. We didn't have time. Again, we just had to keep going. We were still in that assaulting phase. So we just kept going. Let

08:00 the people sort it out. Their own people. You could hear the wailing and the crying and the whole thing. Just rings in your ears forever. Bastard. So we got on with it somehow or another. Was in a couple of days and it was all over. We went back and we didn't talk. The whole section, we never talked. I reckon we went

08:30 for three days, we had the ability to sit down and talk, but we didn't talk. We just all kept looking up in the sky for that moment. Then the war catches up with us again, so we were off again. What happened then? We went out patrolling and then of course we had to, the Tet Offensive was pretty well over and nobody knew who won.

09:00 The Americans wanted to be sure they won so we were ambushing all these people withdrawing from Saigon and they were wounded and all sort of stuff. Then they wanted to know how many. We were ordered to look for bodies, dig up graves and count the bodies. Body count was a big thing. So we went

out and we find a freshly dug grave and we dig down and we find the bodies and Roger, my scout.

09:30 Then we got word that there might be more than one body in the grave, so then the way to do that was dig them right out. So we dug these bodies out and then Roger sharpened up the stake and stuck it through one bloke. Then you could hear it going through the chest cavities of 3 or 4 people. Then we just looked at each other and said, “We’re not going to do this. We’re just not going to do this. This is bullshit.”

What was that for? Why would

10:00 **anyone, who was that?**

Some prick in the American forces wanted a body count. He wanted to know exactly. Very important

To justify?

The whole thing had just turned for them. They’d been bullshitting to their people how – [General] Westmoreland – how they’ve got this thing licked. Then the Viet Cong could launch an attack like that even took over the American embassy in Saigon. It wasn’t as bad as it seemed, but the newsreel and all that flashed back in the States because of the bullshit that the American military had been spinning,

10:30 it just made it look a lot worse than it was. Militarily we defeated them hands down. This was the end of the Viet Cong. We just about had them nutted. Their infrastructure was destroyed because they showed themselves. You seen the footage of the guy being shot in the head. Nobody says what the guy had done to the fellow that shot his family 5 minutes or 20 minutes before. Slit their throats. That wasn’t said. All that happened and

11:00 the Tet Offensive was just a bloodbath. Just look of the footage at Hue and Saigon. Where we were was pretty good really. We were still fighting in the jungle. It was clean. Wasn’t that, we fought 2 days on that town. So we just stopped doing it. We said “This is just demeaning us.” This just reduced us to bloody carrion or whatever.

And for what?

11:30 For some prick to tally it up. So we just sent him in some figures and they were happy with that. Not enough. They wanted more. Dig deeper, find more. There’s more in there than you know. “Are they doing it right? Are your soldiers doing it right?”

Where were they when they were issuing these orders?

They were in Saigon of course after it was all over, or in Long Binh, the big American base camp. They weren’t in any danger. They’d seen their war. That was the first time they even heard a shot.

12:00 Somebody might have got fairly close to them or rockets and stuff. So they hadn't lived it like we’d lived it. So we just said, “Enough”. It was almost later on, when we were talking to the guys back in the bases, they said “Yeah we did the same. We just sent them figures and keep them happy. Bugger it, we’re not going to dig up graves.” So as soon as there was no officers around we just went out and

12:30 stopped in the bush and, “Yeah I’ve got another 4 here, another 6 there, another 3 there” and give them the grid references – as if anybody’s going to go out and check. Couple of things there, the choppers were patrolling the skies looking for fleeing bunches of VC going back. Four of us are walking down this track, or 5 of us are walking down this track. Jungle greens, when you’re wet, become covered in sweat

13:00 and you look like you’ve got black stuff on. You’re pretty raggedy tag and we were as skinny as Christ knows what.

You looked like Viet Cong.

We used to wear rag hats too. We never wear helmets or flak jackets and the Americans were all easy to distinguish because they had these flak jackets and great entourage and helmets and stuff. So these two choppers started flying around and around and around us. “Jesus, those bastards are lining us up. They think we’re Charlie.” You could see them coming in for their

13:30 attack, and I said, “Take your shirts off and hold your weapons up and stand in the middle of the track”, So we all stood on the track with our shirts open, that was as white as snow, with our rifles up high. They come in I thought, “We’re buggered here. Maybe we should run”. But those things with the mini-guns on them, they’re pretty hard to escape. They had 6,000 rounds a minute, firing these Gatling guns on the side with all this rocket banks and stuff.

14:00 I radioed saying, “I think we’re about to be attacked by two gun ships”, and so forth. Whether it was the radio call or whether the pilot, as they came in closer, said, “Hang on, these jokers are not VC”, and watched those white bodies and those rifles look like Aussie rifles or something. It worked. They buzzed us a few times and then they flew off looking for more quarry. I was getting pretty scared. I don’t know what it was about that. That really scared the hell out of me.

14:30 **It would have been a lousy way to go.**

Wouldn’t it what. Christ. I would have liked to get a shot out away at them had they done it. I didn’t tell

you that. When that helicopter killed our guys at the demonstration, some of our guys fired back at them. We were so angry they started to fire.

Was there any…

Yeah, we were bloody angry. A few things happened – I'm chopping here a bit. When that rocket hit, there was

15:00 all the pogoes and the base wallahs and all the staff officers and all that, were standing at the back of the crowd. Probably about 100 metres or so away. When the rocket hit, it doesn't look a significant thing, just "Bang" you know. And 3 men die. Quite a few wounded. When the shock overcome, when we get away from the shock, you don't

15:30 expect to be killed there. We see these bits laying all over the place. But then there's wounded guys. So we used to carry shell dressings, or big bandages on our rifle butts. We'd carry as many as we could. They were like big pads of cottonwool. They were sterile and you could wrap them around and cover up a fairly big hole in the chest and all that sort of stuff. So we had some horrific wounds. So we're running around grabbing them off all these people and when we got back to these pogoes

16:00 they were all laughing. "That gave the boys a shock. That was a bit close". None of them would ever have experienced any of this. They didn't know the rocket had hit these guys. We – some bloody colonel we gave them a bit of stick over that. What made me angry was that in the newspapers when it was recorded, the brigadier, who was the bloke that set the mine, he was responsible for killing quite a lot of us anyway, was said to have been there when it happened and he had dived

16:30 for cover to miss the rocket. We know that he left the scene at least a half hour before that happened. He was nowhere near it.

What was his name?

Brigadier Graham. Why in God's name did, and he never corrected that. None of those guys were anywhere near the rocket. It come down where we were. With the grunts. Those were the little things that made you angry.

It would have been

17:00 **demoralising.**

The rocket was bad enough, but hearing that spin put on things just pissed us right off. We didn't have a great deal of regard for most of our so-called leaders. It because very obvious very early in the piece that they were not up to it. They weren't up to it. They couldn't even get the logistics right. It was just, there were some magnificent men, there were some magnificent exceptions to the rule and my commanding officer was one

17:30 of them. A colonel. A bloke called Chip Charlesworth. A fantastic great man, but my company commander, a bloke called Knell, was an absolute flea. Absolute flea. When that company was disbanded and we formed another company I got another flea.

Who was that?

His name was Carter. He was a bloody flea. He sent guys up on top of a hill for no reason at all. We told him, "There's mines up there. We know there's mines up there." "I want to take this hill,

18:00 take this hill." There was nothing up there, there was an old monastery. I've been back there since. My mate's section was the section that went up there. I waited at the bottom of the stairs. Frankie, my platoon sergeant said "I think we'll hear that explosion". Because we'd had a lot of mine stuff, this guy had never experienced them before. Then "bang". The terrible thing about that was there was a guy killed called Lyons. He

18:30 only done two operations in Vietnam. The first one was that camp that I was first wounded in. He was wounded. He stayed in the base camp acting as a steward for us in the canteen because he didn't want to go out until he was well enough to go. When the company was split he was posted with us to B Company. This was his first operation back in the platoon and he was killed. So he only went out twice.

19:00 Wounded once and killed the second time.

How do you hold back? I imagine out in the field like that you could get away with a few things.

Yeah. Well it happened of course, but not with me. You had that discipline. There were fraggings [murders of soldiers] and that, but I didn't seen any of it. I'm sure …

There must have been a few people that tried to put a bullet through him after that happened.

Oh yeah. Yeah. That's right. I've been back to that temple and

19:30 seen it again. Later that day we were walking along the track. This was after the Tet Offensive. We'd been back to our own province. I remember walking down the track I was the lead section. I was often lead section, because I could navigate quite well.

Dangerous position.

Well, it was, but I preferred it because I knew what was happening. It was terrible being at the back not knowing what they were shooting

20:00 -- was it big combat, little combat. If you were there for some perverse reason you felt happier if you were in the point section.

You don't have time to imagine what's going to happen.

Yeah, and by this time it was only two sections. The platoon which is normally 33 members down to less that 17. Between 15 and 17 now. So we only had two sections in a small platoon headquarters, which was Frank and the sergeant and a radio operator. So we weren't really an effective fighting

20:30 platoon but we were doing the job of a platoon. Then we were walking down this track to RV [?] with some people. I looked eventually and I said "I don't think this track's been walked on before. I think the references they've given us are wrong." So I stopped for a while and Frankie came up to me and we looked and had a bit of a pointing thing. It was open country just south of a,

21:00 it was open country generally, but the track went through a stand of scrub. As I went I said "This track hasn't been walked on" and that 6th sense thing started to happen. All the inputs were coming in. I looked up and there was a skeleton lying on the side just off to the side. I thought "I think we're off, we're on the wrong track. I think we're in a bloody minefield." So everybody stopped. This incident is also in a book called Trackers.

21:30 We had a tracker dog with us and what happened was, we stopped and then probed around us and between myself and the forward scout there was just this little clump of grass and another little clump of grass and in between it was a mine. Probably the next step would have been, because I wouldn't have stood on the grass. Just something told me that this was wrong.

22:00 It was one of our mines, this bloody barrier mine, the lot number and all that sort of thing.

Who do you reckon was looking after you?

Don't know. You don't know how many times that happened because the chance of you stepping on one was pretty, I don't know what they are, but there was a lot of them there. We don't know what's the difference between surviving and not surviving or not even being in an event.

22:30 Don't know how many times you just missed out.

Or how many times you brushed passed the Viet Cong while they were watching you.

There were some amazing things that, we were going through a clearing once and I was again getting very close to coming home. I was starting to realise that there was another place I could be going to. We were moving around the edge of a clearing and we didn't like being in clearings; a) because you could be seen and

23:00 2) because they were red hot with the sun belting down in the grass used to hold the heat. We spread out. I asked them to spread out into what we called arrowhead formation. So if there was anybody on the other side of the thing we weren't just a single file coming across ready to be fired on from one point in the front and one bullet could theoretically get the lot of you. So you spread out into various formations as you spread out into open country. I'm walking along and old Frankie, my sergeant, was just to my right

23:30 and he was a Second World War veteran and a Korean War veteran. You had enormous amount of respect for this guy. Got so many of us through it.

What was his name?

Frankie Moffat. He's an old man now. He's up in Queensland somewhere. Somehow he got through it. We were walking along and very cautiously I again felt something's not right. All of a sudden it caught me unawares, I felt this tripwire on my leg and then it was too late

24:00 to stop the movement on my leg and "fssht" this flash and it was an old American trip snare that had been left there from an American defensive position. Flare, harmless really. But that moment just jolted me. I sat down and Frank had to come up and pull me up and give me the old, "Come on, corp. You've got to get your shit together." He knew what I was going through because all I could feel was that tripwire and I knew it was too late to stop and then you hear it ignite or

24:30 hear the cap go off and "bang".

Not expecting it.

I'm rat shit. This is it. I thought I was. Then all of a sudden I realised I wasn't. Hell.

That's heart attack stuff.

It certainly was.

He got you up and going again?

Yeah. Just take that moment. It's pretty hard to describe how the sense

25:00 that just before it happened I knew there was something wrong. Then to feel this thing on my leg. I could just feel it, that's a tripwire, I can't stop, I'm moving my leg, "fsht" I've had it. Here it is, this is it, this is where it all ends. All going through the mind. "Oh it's not so bad." Then I got Frankie slapping me around.

Might be good to have a rest after all that?

Yeah you got a couple of minutes and then you've got to get up and get on with it. Frank said, "Let's get the hell out of here. What the hell

25:30 are we doing here?" Back into the jungle.

Did you find as you were getting closer to coming home, that you were getting more cautious?

Yeah, trying to be. It was starting to become real, you may have heard the other guys talking about like we had so many an a wakey. You're counting off every day. 365 days an a wakey you'd just arrived.

A wakey?

Wakey. 365 and get up and you go home that day. The wake up every morning.

26:00 365 and a wakey and you wake up and you're on your way home. It's 364, 363 and then you're down to 90 days and 89, 87, you say "Shit this might actually work". The war was getting worse. We were into that offensive period and the Tet Offensive. There was lots of little major actions after the Tet. The Battle of Balmoral and the Battle of Coral. I wasn't there but I was still out in the field on another operation.

26:30 Then all of a sudden, all that happened, I was very close to the end of my tour. In fact I was over my tour. I'd done nearly 13 months. They forgot about us.

You would have been pissed off in you got killed in that last month.

Wouldn't I? So was Frank and Terry Graham, my other mate, he runs the World Food program in northern Iraq at the moment.

27:00 I don't think that, we had a period there where things were pretty quiet for a while. I was quite happy not to go – oh no, that's right. What happened was that I had, the company commander who was a flea, and Frank Moffat, the only guy that had more operations time in the bush with was me than them. So they wanted to have the record of having more operations time in the bush than anybody else. So we were

27:30 going on a minor operation for about 5 days somewhere. Just a minor village search or something like that. Then they decided to leave me back what they called rear detail. So I was pretty angry because I thought I'm going to, some stupid idea that was a good thing to have more operations time than anybody else was just stupid. So I had to stay back in the base. So they all take off laughing that finally they're going to beat me by 5 days. But what happened the next

28:00 day was the mini Tet happened down in Baria not too far away and the Viet Cong attacked and captured Baria. The only battalion that was left was the 3rd battalion and a mini taskforce headquarters. The other battalions, our battalion and the other battalion and the main taskforce headquarters was in this other place. Quite a long way away. Of course that's why the VC attacked because the main force was gone. That's a subject of debate now by

28:30 the historians. Our leaders' ideas of sending us out into other places and while we were out there playing around we lost all that we'd achieved in 2 years down in Phuoc Tuy in the first place. So all these guys from taskforce headquarters came running around and saying to all the rear details people that were sitting around keeping the bloody kitchens going or whatever we were doing. I was running the technical operations centre, just a local

29:00 patrol guard. "What do you do?" I said "I'm in infantry." "Right, you're coming with us." So away we went. They put a scratch section together. So now I'm commanding a section of bloody sick, lame and lazy and wounded and Christ knows what. We're roaring off down to Baria. All we were doing, 3 Battalion were doing the fighting, but we were guarding taskforce headquarters. So I was ended up dropped off at this place at the water tower at Baria, which

29:30 was a fairly focal feature of Baria, this water tower. My job was to block anybody coming up this road. It wasn't too far from the provincial headquarters of the Vietnamese army provincial headquarters. They were a colonel. In this compound of the provincial headquarters their families lived and all sort of stuff. So I've got this polyglot lot set up there and

30:00 there's cooks and bottle washers and some of them didn't even know the back end of a gun and all this

sort of stuff. But there was three grunts there so we kind of handled it. We had this machinegun set up. All of a sudden, the next thing, we're seeing this VC, which, "Hang on, this is not supposed to bloody happen" darting across the road heading to us. So we engaged them a bit. That scene stopped. The main force is going on 2 kilometres away. Then

30:30 I'm sitting there, there was only a few of us, next thing I'm watching this movement about 200 metres away. I could see people darting between buildings. We were in a town. I said, "There's something happening over there and I'm not quite sure what it was." So I grabbed the two grunts that were with me and we took off and ran up the little street. I then seen quite a body of VC sappers, the guys that attack with satchel charges and

31:00 they almost commit suicide. I thought then, "What the hell are they doing?" Then I twigged that they were going to attack the provincial commander's compound, which is the administration centre of the whole families and those families would have been murdered. I only had three guys, but I had distance and a good shoulder and an element of surprise. So we engaged them with this machine gun. I had

31:30 what they called a grenade launcher and I just kept firing into them. It disrupted the whole thing. Turned the whole thing around. They didn't know where it come from, what it was – they didn't know we were there. They thought they were being engaged by a much bigger force. They split and all took off. They must have been new chums because if they'd been good old North Vietnamese sappers they wouldn't have worried about it, they would have just cleaned us up and done what they had to do. I still wasn't aware of the significance of it and how big that group was, but it turned out there was a lot more not too far away.

32:00 They all took off.

The headquarters was safe?

Well, it was, yes. But I didn't think it was anything that I'd done. I went back and I'm sitting there that night. Then the next morning the provincial commander himself and a couple of American commanders and the provincial commander guy come up. He was a colonel, he was the guy that was in charge of the whole province. He wanted to know who was who and all that sort of stuff. They said "He's our boss".

32:30 They said, "Who was the guys that disrupted this attack?" because somebody had seen it going on. They said, "Corporal Roberts here", and the American guy is doing the talking. This guy sticks a medal on me. The next thing I get a medal and we shook hands, I saved his family, his wife, I didn't realise all that sort of carry on. Then they all jumped in their bloody APCs and take off in a cloud of dust and I'm standing there with a. We used to call it the Budweiser medal.

33:00 It was the South Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry. They used to throw them around a bit too much actually. So we used to call them the Budweiser. They used to, after every trip to Vietnam they'd bring a bloody truckload down and hand out – take your name out of a hat to get this thing. They weren't recognised by the Australian Government, although they are recognised now if you want to write in and say so and so, they say you can wear it but it then becomes an official

33:30 Australian thing. So that was my big, good deed.

That's a huge good deed.

I actually lived in that compound many years later. I lived there for over 2-3 weeks. I actually re-walked all that stuff. It was interesting because the bullet marks were still on the wall, this was 20 odd years, this was 1994. The water tower's still there and all that sort of stuff.

34:00 That wasn't the end of the day. The next day, that afternoon they disbanded the whole thing. It was all over and we won I think. Then we had to go back to Nui Dat by helicopter. So we're all just a bunch of, we weren't a formed unit or anything, so we just waited on the pad. Then we were called off by the Americans and got into little groups and into the helicopter,

34:30 and four helicopters took off heading back to Nui Dat. All of a sudden the chopper I'm in got into strife. I don't know whether it was ground fire or whatever. It was falling. They auto rotate. The motor cuts out, but they can still fly, they just fly down. Bugger me dead, this thing's auto rotating down and it's going into an area where there's no friendly forces or anything. Although the gun ships circled it and that sort of stuff.

35:00 The bloody thing hit the ground with such force, I was sitting on the left hand side of the chopper and there was an American guy there, he was thrown out and killed by the disintegrating blades. I never got a scratch. I just fell on the ground like I'd just fell out of the seat. That guy was sitting inside of me and he just was, the force had somehow spun him. The other guys were thrown out the other side, but none of them were hurt. They were bruised and stuff.

35:30 I just couldn't believe it. The chopper was wrecked. Gun ships come in, picked us up and away we went.

Someone was definitely looking after you.

I reckon. I got back to Nui Dat and they all come stomping back from their 5 day jolly wherever they were and thought they had beaten me. No, I hadn't been back, they were back wondering where I was. And they said "He's down in Baria. He's been bloody fighting down there

36:00 for 4 days or something." I staggered back in and old Frank and the OC [Officer Commanding] hadn't beaten me. And to that day I think I still hold the record. I don't know. Maybe I do, maybe I don't. It wasn't much of a record. After that, not much happened. I did become very cautious of things. If we stopped I'd dig a hole for myself and so forth. We had a few major operations and

36:30 supporting other battalions, B52 strikes and operation whatever it was, I forget he name of it. But apart from another couple of minor contacts it was pretty well over for me. I was pretty close to going home, until the last day. The last day I was there, I think I've covered it haven't I? The last day I was in Vietnam.

With Moffat.

Where we, yeah. The morning I was going home, we got the word the night before

37:00 that Moffat, myself and Terry were being winched out the next morning UNCLEAR high. We're going to be winched out to go home because we'd all come up on the advance party. That morning, about 5 o'clock in the morning, we stand to every morning before dawn and after daybreak. They were the two periods, and we did that just before dusk. We stand to, everybody's 100% alert and after that you

37:30 relax to 50% or something. Depending on the threat. Bugger me dead if a party of VC didn't walk into my machine gun, came blundering into my position. Took us by surprise a little bit because we just didn't think they were there for some reason. The track was a dead track. Nothing had been on it for a long time. A fight developed and we knocked a couple off and then the boss said, Frank

38:00 said, "Right, we're going to follow up because we don't know, we might have got some more and we want to see what's going on. Are they the front end of a big group or are they just a reconnaissance party? What are they? We want to know what they were. The commanders would like to know, the battalion commander or something." So the word came down from company headquarters, which was some distance away. To follow up on 500. But he didn't say pacers or metres. So I said to Frank,

38:30 "Frank, I don't really feel like – I'm going home at 10 o'clock today. This is really not on. Can't somebody who's just arrived do this? Hell." He said, "I'm in the same boat, mate", so we went. I took the left hand side of the track, only had 4 men left by this stage of the game. Took the left hand side of the track and I just kept going, walking up the track. We found another body. Then kept going and then I could smell it. I said,

39:00 "Jesus, there's something up here. I don't know what it is." I don't know, I'm looking, I'm really crapping, I'm really scared. I think "This is bad news". I look over and I see Frank on the track. Just knowing that he was there, I just relaxed. He just said, "You'll be right", just like that. We used to support each other quite a lot. Old Frank just gave me that confidence and I said "Five" you know? He said, "That's enough". It was 500 paces, not

39:30 500 metres. There's a fair distance between 500 paces and 500 metres. Probably about 100 metres. He said "Enough" and he turned around and went back. That was the end of it for me.

You never knew what was up there?

I didn't care. Nothing happened after that. Then, 10 o'clock the chopper come, we were winched out up into the chopper. Back to Nui Dat and then, that was Balmoral, started that day.

40:00 People came down to try and get anybody that was around and they said, "How long have you been here?" I said, "I've been here bloody 13 months." They said, "Jesus, stay out of sight." So I stayed out of sight and then later that day we flew and I was home writhing, 24 hours later I was here. Not here, but home. That alone was a bit of a jerk. It was hard to realise that when I was back here, sitting home, seeing my

40:30 baby and all that, that 24 hours before that I was in a fight.

Tape 9

00:40 **You come back from 13 months in Vietnam. What are you coming back to and how were they bringing you back into the country?**

We got to Saigon and it was still a bit of a mess. We flew from Nui Dat in these bloody

01:00 American C123s. They were jet assisted transport plane. And we'd file on and of course there was no seats in them and you sat on this metal floor and they just run straps across and you hooked your hands on the straps like that. That was your seatbelt. You only had to do that because this things used this jet powered takeoff to zoom on the short run strip and then zip off into the sky. That alone was a bloody thrill

01:30 because there was about 50 of us in this thing, not only from my unit, but people that had reached their 12 months were being ferried back to Nui Dat to jump on the 707s. The main battalion was going home

by ship, but because I flew up there we were flown back. So we got to Saigon and then hung around. The airport was all blown up because the Tet

02:00 Offensive wasn't that far back and they hadn't fixed anything up. Pretty busy airport. Jets were zooming in and zooming out and bombing the hell out of everything. Then finally the Qantas 707 pulled in. The guys who were in the advance party of 4RAR, this 4th battalion which I had been in early in the day, they were coming out and we were going in. Not much spoken. It was almost just a bit of a nod and

02:30 "You'll be right, mate" and we were just so happy. Couldn't believe this day had actually arrived and we were actually going to step on it. We're thinking "UNCLEAR thing UNCLEAR with us, a bloody rocket will hit the friggin' thing on the runway" or "A jet will fly into it".

Something will go wrong.

So we got onto it. It was probably the only Qantas flight I've ever enjoyed. I haven't got a great deal of time for Qantas.

03:00 Better not say that. So we were in this thing and we were on our way. We took off and then we had to fly round in circles because artillery shells were occupying some airspace we had to fly through at the time, and then away we went, heading south. On our way home. Couldn't quite believe that we were actually on

03:30 our way home. It was, I don't know, it wasn't a euphoric thing, it was almost a disbelief that that day had come. When we were on operations we used to often watch the passenger jets fly over. Up to Hong Kong or bloody Bahrain or something, so far up. It was just another world going by. People may have been looking down and saying "That's Vietnam, they're having a war down there."

04:00 We arrived in Sydney about 11 or 12 o'clock at night. They had a sausage machine set up where you come out of the plane, handed your weapon in, ammunition was given up up there, handed your weapon in. Then you went through this sausage machine of clerks and pay guys and leave all done.

04:30 **Did they welcome you home?**

No, they just, you're just going through a process. There was none of that crap. Then the customs guys got stuck into us looking for broken down pistols and ammo; they give you a hard time. And immigration guys.

Nobody said, "Welcome home"?

No. Wasn't the thing to do, was it?

Did you know what the political climate was?

Well, we had heard it, but really didn't care because it had

05:00 really gone bad by this stage. This was after the Tet thing. It was really spinning in America they were really turning against it. Of course it was catching on in Australia to turn against it. I had to get to Adelaide of course, whereas Terry and Paul and those, their families were in Sydney. We went out and then we had to catch domestic flights down to Melbourne. They put on a special domestic flight.

You're still in uniform?

Yeah, just our light polyester

05:30 grey khaki things. They were all stained and spotty. They'd been stuck under in a trunk in the tropics for a year. So they welcomed their guys home and I was sort of on my own. I had 3 other guys that I was looking after. Blokes. We had to go to Melbourne. So we got on this flight to Melbourne and that arrived in Melbourne about

06:00 2:30 in the morning, I guess. It was June in Melbourne. We had tropical, a lot of thought put into this. So what do we do? The flight to Adelaide wasn't leaving until 8 o'clock, just a normal domestic flight. So we were just left in the airport and had a sense that nobody really loved us anymore. But it didn't bother me that much, because I was going home.

06:30 We pulled the, they had these seats with a vinyl cushions on them, which you could lift up. We were bloody freezing. So we laid down on them and took the other one and put them on us. We just crashed and slept. Only to be rudely awakened at 7 o'clock by this bloody officious security guard kicking these things. Shaking myself and he said, "Oh, not another bunch of you bloody Vietnam jokers arriving home.

07:00 It's bloody making my airport look scungy. Start acting like soldiers", and all this bloody stuff. I'll tell you these jokers were going to tear their bloody damn throat out, but I just let it go. So we sat up and didn't want to cause any strife or anything like that. We just wanted to get home. Then the time came and we got on an Adelaide flight and I arrived home. Marilyn

07:30 didn't know I was coming home. I'm not quite sure why. She knew roughly around that I would be on my way. I just turned up out here, got my cabin turned up.

It must have been a weird feeling.

So she just looked out one morning and there I was walking down the driveway. Too keen to see this kid. So I just went in and laid down and I just slept and slept and slept. Don't know how long I slept. I like

08:00 sleeping. Then emerged and then tried to take stock. I had a lot of leave to take. I think about 50 days or something like that. So I just lost myself. I had nothing to do with the army, or nothing to do with any of the guys. Just totally let it go. I still had some service left in the army. Not long. So I got through that time and then

08:30 went back up to -- the battalion by this time was home. Came home on a ship. I had a lot more leave than most of them. Then by the time I rejoined the battalion up in Enoggera, all the old people had gone and all new officers and all new senior NCOs and all these people were all there because the battalion was warned to go back to Vietnam after it had re-equipped and reinforced and get going.

09:00 So I was only there for about a month. They tried to get me to sign on, but there I was. I remember Wosniac was my machine-gunner for a year. I had to teach him how to operate the machinegun. We had to have these formal lessons. We had these new officers and they were going to lick us Vietnam veterans into shape. They weren't going to have any of this. So there I am, trying to teach Wosniac to operate a machine gun.

09:30 There was juts no sense that we might have had something to contribute. They just put us all to the level. I was a senior corporal in the army. Had I stayed in Australia I probably would have been a sergeant by now, but I wanted to stay with my battalion by then. We had a fair bit to contribute to a unit that was going back to Vietnam, but they had this idea that they had to level. Of course I just couldn't take it.

That's insulting behaviour.

It was insulting. It was an absolute insult. The only thing,

10:00 the saving grace was that our company commander, a bloke called major Dudgeon, was a good guy. He called us all in one day and said, "This is the way it is". He'd served in Vietnam for 2 years himself as an other rank and then as an officer. He done his best to cut this crap out. But it was the new commanding officers dictums and all that sort of stuff. So they called me in and the adjunct

10:30 was a guy that served with us in Vietnam. He said "What are you going to do corporal? We want you to sign on. You'll be promoted to sergeant and go through the training cycle and hopefully come back to Vietnam with the battalion." I said "No, thanks. I'm finished. I can't stand this." So I took my discharge, come back to Adelaide.

When you came back and was walking up the driveway and saw Marilyn. What was that like?

11:00 Almost surreal I think. I think we just hugged each other and just "That's over. That's over".

Did you feel like you were home?

Yeah. Straight away. That's over and just, "Where's this baby?"

11:30 So we went and had a look at the little fellow. It was just, it took a while to tune down. There was still a sense of, "Am I really home?" It's a funny feeling isn't it? "Am I really home? Is this really happening?"

Were you still on alert?

I was actually. That just never left and it still hasn't. That anxiety and that alert thing is

12:00 with you for the rest of your life. You're not sure, you're always waiting for something bad to happen. 99% of the time nothing bad does happen. But even then you still had that feeling that the phone would ring and you have to go back. Because you didn't belong here, you belonged there. Well, that's what you thought. You still belong there. We were really just home for a bit of a break.

12:30 You got to go back. It was also senses of guilt that I had to leave my section, the guys that I was in command of for a year some of those guys. I had to leave them there. But they were all right. You got a feeling you were bloody indispensable.

What was your reaction when the troops were pulled out of Vietnam? Were you pleased about that?

Yeah. Well I was about to go back actually.

13:00 I was disappointed in a sense. Because once all that goes, once it fades a little bit into the memory, you're left with this anxiety still there, but you're also left with the buzz. I don't think you'll ever, ever, ever reach the adrenalin levels. That can be a little bit addictive that a fire fight, a knock them down, last man standing fight, this crazy frenzy stuff,

13:30 I don't think you can ever reach that again. Once you've done it a number of times it just could be addictive I think. I think it is. It probably explains a lot of our behaviour after. You're still looking for it.

Trying to get the high?

Or you're looking for something that might get you the high. Or you want to be in extremes. I hated the time after that

14:00 because it was just too dull. It was just so mind-boggling. Fortunately I had the kids.

It must have been difficult to have been right on the edge of existence to come home and listening to small talk.

You didn't really get into it. You just fringed. People

14:30 noted that you were a little bit off the edge of things. You could act for a while. Grog takes over a bit there. You start to drink a little more. I was never a great drinker, big drinker, but I was after the war. So I guess you sort of lulled things a bit for a while. But fortunately, grog makes me crook, so I can have grog, but I have horrible hangovers, so it is a natural thing for me

15:00 not to drink. To the point now that I don't drink at all.

Did your dad see you when you got back?

Yeah. I went up to Kadina, home and seen everybody. They all wanted me to get out and all that sort of stuff when I was only. We didn't talk much about it. He just acknowledges that I was home, shook hands and

15:30 just got on about his stuff. Whereas I was involved with my family. I didn't see much of my own family much after that. I had things.

Little ones.

Yeah, well only Malcolm at that stage. We didn't have a job and I didn't know what I was going to do after the leave. So starting to get all these complications. "Shit, it was much simpler up there." You forgot about a lot of the shit, so it seemed to be a little simpler.

You didn't have to worry about

16:00 **mortgages and jobs and food shopping and changing nappies.**

Yeah. And you start to run into the little petty bureaucracies and all that. You say, "Christ, this is terrible." And that stays with you for the rest of your life. You just can't be bothered with pettiness and what people perceive to be things of great moment and great importance. Really when you boil it all

16:30 down it's just absolute crap.

Is that a valuable thing that you've brought away with you?

It is because I can cut through. It made me a fairly good project manager because I could cut through the detail and deal with the major issues.

Quick decision making?

Do it quickly and the ability to make decisions. Not everybody can do that. I don't know if you know that or not. Some people cannot make decisions.

17:00 I've had to make some very, very hard decisions and they don't get any better or easier, but you've either got the ability to do it or you haven't. It's no in between.

You've had to make the hardest decision.

Absolutely. A couple of times. You've got that to live with you, the result of those decisions to live with you, but it's not, it certainly had affected me, but I don't think It's destroyed me. Not yet anyway,

17:30 That's one of the problems about being TPI, you've got time to think, so that's why you've got to get your bum into gear and get into something and do something. Perhaps if you can do the two things -- you can get your adrenalin thing going again and you can maybe do some good.

Which is where you are now?

Pretty well, yeah. I've been in and out of that, doing that sort of stuff for a long time after I left the army.

18:00 **You were involved in clearing mines?**

Yeah. I went to, I'll just wrap up the army bit. I then went back into the army and spent from '68 to '82 in garrison staff. I went to uni during that period trying to find some answers.

Did you find any?

No. I done 2 years then figured I was wasting my

18:30 time. I was doing stuff like economics and psychology and arts and all that sort of stuff. I realised at the end of the 2nd year, it was a hell of a struggle, by that time I had another two kids and I'd been back to Malaya. I did garrison type duties up there. We had 3 kids by then. I furthered my education and then went into uni when I was back ere. I was actually a recruiting sergeant here in Adelaide for a couple of years. During that period of time I crammed

19:00 a couple of years in as a mature age, I think I was the first mature age intake of Flinders University when they opened that program. I was absolutely amazed I got in, but I managed to cheat or something. I got through the thing. I did enjoy a lot of it, and it did instil some disciplines in research and writing and stuff like that. So it was handy. But I felt I got what I could get out of it and then I was posted out of South Australia.

19:30 While I was at university I ran into one of my old officers who was actually an intelligence corps officer. I was invited into intelligence corps. So I ended up in intelligence corps. Nothing big time about that. I was just an operator and spent some time in strategic intelligence in Sydney. Then, you might have heard of ONA [Office of National Assessments] or JIS [Joint Intelligence Service], some of those outfits. I wasn't

20:00 a spy or anything. More analysts. Then I was in counter intelligence in Sydney. That wasn't of any great moment. Not too many Russians spies around, so we done a lot of work looking at defence contracts and stuff like that. That was far more interesting. They needed a lot more work done too, and it's still going on. Those people in the future, look at your defence contract organisation,

20:30 generally needs some looking at. Still. I spent a couple of years in a cavalry unit. Remember I was posted to the armoured corps? So every now and then you had to go in and to a couple of years in uniform. Because in intelligence corps you're not in uniform, you're in your civilian clothes. So I was posted to the 2nd Cavalry Regiment, which was a reconnaissance unit in Holsworthy. I was the intelligence man, because it's an intelligence driven reconnaissance unit

21:00 and tactical intelligence. So I spent 2 years there and they were probably two of my fun filled years in the army because I just didn't take things serious. It was absolute peacetime. The soldiers most of the time were out painting rocks and I was out playing games with the commanding officer making out things were going on and writing up the land warfare manuals and doctrine stuff. I really loved it there. I really did. It was so much different from the infantry. It was a really loose

21:30 slap happy group of jokers. I actually wouldn't have minded to stay there. I spent a couple of years there and I think I was the secretary or the treasurer of the sergeants' mess. Had great fun there. Then I went to counter intelligence in Sydney for a while, a couple of years. They decided they wanted to promote me. I was a

22:00 staff sergeant of something then. I didn't particularly want, I knew that I wasn't going to stay in the system. The kids, Malcolm was just starting high school in Sydney and the other two were climbing up in primary school. I wanted them to do all their high school in the one place. So the army decided in its wisdom to promote me and send me to Melbourne to one of those super spy mobs down there doing something. I'm not quite sure

22:30 what it was. If I tell you I've got to kill you sort of stuff. I always thought it was a bit of a joke the whole bloody thing. But it was easy work. I spent a bit of time in the United States mucking around over there. Then I went to, I decided to pull the pin on the whole thing. 20 years was up. I didn't want to disrupt the kids, so I took my discharge and we came back to South Australia. I had no job. I didn't know what the hell I was going to do. I didn't

23:00 know what I could do.

How old were you at this stage?

I was 38 I think.

You packed in a lot for a 38 year old.

Yeah, 38. I thought I was old. Because 38 in the army is fairly old. Anybody over 28 was called Pop. So we built a house at Aldinga Beach and we stayed there for 8 or 9 years I thing, while the kids went to high school. Then finished

23:30 high school. Two of them went on to university. Chris, who I reckoned ended up with the best job of them all, he bombed out horribly at matric. Life during those periods, I was working for, initially I set up a youth project in Aldinga for, they used to call them the CYSS, Community Youth Support Scheme, funded by the department of, whoever runs the CES [Commonwealth Employment Service] in those days. The whole Idea was to engage street

24:00 kids and bring them back in and try and sort of try and put them on a different tangent and get them into the workforce. So you run all sorts of programs. Quite a successful. It went quite well because I found that the kids responded to a bit of firmness and being told what they had to do. I was surprised by these kids because I was surprised in the society that we lived in. By this time all the Vietnam stuff was receding into the background.

24:30 I was going to go back to Vietnam, but Gough got in and ended all that. I was only an hour away from putting my foot on the plane. It was all pulled. I'm jumping back. These kids didn't have licences. They had cars, but they didn't have any insurance. They were illiterate. I just couldn't believe that in our society that sort of stuff was existing. So I started to run night classes for literacy. Teaching kids to read and write.

25:00 That just got so heavy that in the end, I was trying go do 1 or 2 nights at the week, and then I could be doing it bloody 7 nights a week and I still wouldn't have got enough done. Quite successful actually. We got quite a few kids into the workforce. As far as I know they're still in there working. A lot of these kids were damaged very badly. Girls and boys. I don't think they will ever – I mean. I can

25:30 remember that nobody turned up one day. I said "Where is everybody?" They said "The mushrooms come out this week and they're all up in the hills gathering the magic mushrooms." They were using my facilities to produce booklet on how to cook magic mushrooms. Learned to be nonjudgemental. I had to get rid of my old military thinking. The local member down there at the time was Gordon Bilney. I found him to be an excellent member

26:00 and very hard working in his electorate. He was unfortunate guy that he sort of looked like a piss pot. Did you know of Gordon Bilney? He was fantastic. Labor. Nobody took him seriously. But he was an excellent guy and a great support to me. I'd done him a couple of favours, which were returned with years later by him. There wasn't much money in the social street worker scene.

26:30 I was only pulling about 20 grand a year or something like that. During some of the course I'd come across some people in Santos. Then I was invited to join Santos as the training and safety officer. I had no idea about oil and gas and all that, but I don't tell people that I don't know these things. You just get a book and read a bit and you pick up the terminologies. Never say you can't do anything, you just get into it. Most things most people can do if they're half smart.

27:00 So I ended up in Moomba. Two on and two off and all that. I didn't go much on the Santos ethic. It just grated on me a lot. Again, the money was good and it got the kids through school and all that sort of stuff. I spent about 4 years with them I guess. Then one of the big, foreign French companies, a mob called Schlumberger International, which is a big well servicing company, I

27:30 resigned from Santos. Again, a part of the stress thing got me there. Because this prick from the Adelaide office turned up to do assessments and evaluations. The guy didn't even know me. I knew of him and knew he was just a suit. There he is, sitting with all his efficiencies in front of me and he's this sort of absolute

28:00 example of the type of person I detest.

That's very restrained of you there.

So he's looking at me, and I'd had the job by then. The construction was all over and it was going into it's operating phase. This is just money now, I'm just going to be earning money here and nothing to do. That was a bit silly I suppose, but. This guy's going on about the parameters and all this evaluations and all that. I said "Look, I don't think you're qualified to bloody

28:30 assess me, mate." He got a bit stroppy because he was a bit full of himself. I said "Look, I'll put this on the bottom of your form. I resign I want to be out of here at the end of the next trip in two weeks." He continued to try and go on with this evaluation. I had to tell him to go and get you know. So he went back to Adelaide and I got a very bad report.

I bet that upset you.

Yeah, so I left Santos with still no great prospects of what I was going to do. With a young

29:00 family still at school.

Marilyn must have been a very supportive woman. A number of times you jumped into the great unknown.

I do. I don't know much about comfort zones. Within a very short space of time I got involved in the winery industry. So I coordinated the vintage of 1988. I didn't have a clue of one variety of grape from another. We had

29:30 70 odd varieties, no, 18 odd varieties of reds and whites and 180 odd growers or something. But somehow I managed to, it's crisis management at its best, but I picked up enough and we coordinated a very successful vintage. Then I went pruning for a while. Then this Schlumberger International heard that I was on a loose end. They were looking for a guy to start going around Southeast Asia to do audits on their operation. So I got hooked up

30:00 with them and another guys. I spent quite a bit of time based out of, I lived in Adelaide, but the office was in Jakarta. Then started travelling all around south east Asia and visiting all their bases and do audits for the vice president.

Was it strange going back to that part of the world?

It was. It was the first time I'd been back. But the hook was in. So I spent a couple of years

30:30 doing that. The travel in the end got me, because you were just on a plane all the time. I done 7 countries in 7 days once. Every place you went to you were on their budget. They wanted you to do your audit and sign you off and get you stamped and away your good little report and the vice president would piss you off. Particularly the French mangers, because it was a French company. They didn't believe that colonials had any right to judge a Frenchman.

31:00 So I done that for a while. During that period of time I started to see other aspects of Asia. The poverty and those sort of things. I left Schlumberger. Then I got into a bit of construction work in Malaysia. Just, I don't anything that I could in contract work. Then, by this stage I'd got a bit of a reputation in the construction and the exploration

31:30 industry as an operations manager. Coordinating, and I find that I still do a fair bit of that, even though I don't work any more. I've been able to put the resources together to look at that time the professional. Get the money to get the people and the machines together so they can get on with their job and then deal with all those things that the engineers think aren't necessary. There's a lot of things. Logistics and all that sort of stuff.

32:00 So I made a life of that. Then as part of that, quite often I was operations or project manager, as part of that in places like Kalimantan and Malaysia and the Middle East and wherever, one of your roles was to deal with the local assistance or assistance to the local communities. So I started getting into assisting small communities in spin off

32:30 ventures from the projects. Then making so they can get some benefit from the project.

That was instigated by the company?

Yes. Generally it's a requirement of the permit to do whatever country you was in. Some companies paid more attention than others. I was never, apart from a couple of times, I was never ever a permanent member of any particular company. I was a project hire. So I didn't have to worry about

33:00 the budget went over or whatever. I just done it. If they'd say, I often had to fight off controls engineers because the milestone weren't reached and the budgets were out and I said "Sack us". And they couldn't sack me. They hated us because we earned a lot more money than they did. Only for a shorter period, but. So I started to get into this aid things.

33:30 A couple of those things are still happening. One in Tari in New Guinea I got them organised into making, there was no transport between Hagen and this place we were working. So we got, the money they were getting of royalties, I got them and bought them and had modified a couple of small truck, like canteen trucks and put frames on the back to make them safe and all that sort of stuff so people couldn't

34:00 fall out of them and all that. Then got this little taxi truck thing going where the people could get a lift from Hagen to wherever they had to go. Because they'd walk. And the roads and all that. The roads were there from the war, but had degenerated into foot tracks. Things were still there. With some traffic on it, it would all come good. That's still going. I understand there's something like 16 or 20 vehicles run by that little community company. So somebody's benefited.

34:30 Setting up little medical centres and stuff. A lot of it, once the company left it falls over. Particularly in Papua New Guinea. Can't seem to sustain anything. They want you to keep it going for them. Same in Indonesia. Things just seemed to fall over. I don't know why. Got stuck into it.

The whole country's fallen over quite a lot.

Yeah, shooting yourself in the foot.

35:00 I have a lot of time for Indonesia and the Indonesian people, but they just frustrate the hell out of me. Then I got into, I'd been working in Thailand, Indonesia, Cambodia, Burma, a bit of fighting in Burma. I was with an oil company and we got between the Koreans and somebody else and bullets were pinging out of the rig. So we

35:30 went and seen both sides and said "We don't know who's going to win this, but either one of you's going to need the oil, so just leave us alone. Try and fight around us please." So they did. So that was helpful. Then again you learned to live with all sorts of things. Then I went to Cambodia at the very start of the UN [United Nations] thing. That's where I really got stuck into doing the aid stuff. Ostensibly I was a

36:00 contract field manager for a Singapore company on contract to the UN. It was supposed to have, we were responsible for doing civil works, preparing it for the UN major mobilisation. We had to go up into near to a place where I'm going next month, or in February, and prepare some areas. But there were mines there. We thought the mines had been cleared

36:30 and we had a mine incident. I knew the sound straight away. Went in there and cleaned up the mess. We lost a couple of guys. Not – they were Khmers -- I was working with Cambodians.

I don't suppose you thought you were going to ever hear that sound again?

No, I didn't think I would. What was supposed to have happened was that the Irish army was supposed to have been in there and cleared those mines before we got there, but they didn't get there. In fact they hadn't even arrived in the country. The UN coordination. That UN organisation was just

37:00 mind-bogglingly inefficient and so bureaucratic and corrupt. Somehow they do get some things done, but it's mainly because of the sub contractors and stuff. They don't pay. Then we cleared those mines and got the jobs done. Then another incident. We had to

37:30 walk our machines there, bulldozers and stuff, and our big rubber tyre vehicles out to a place, work and then walk them back. You know what I mean by saying walking these machines? Slowly they just go slowly, slowly, so we walk along the side of them, or the boys do, and we're walking back and forth. Bulldozers don't move that fast, so we just walked them – it's just a term. On the road we were getting all these three corner big spikes in the tyres. Turned

38:00 out that the local, some elements of the locals were very unhappy with us because we weren't buying these little representatives, false Buddas from Angkor Wat, because we weren't too far away from Angkor Wat. We wouldn't buy them. I had Thai engineering company working for us. So they tried to punish us for that. So I got the Thai foreman, who was actually Cambodian, or Khmer, but come from

38:30 the Thai side of the border up near Surin. We thought we'd go and talk to the police there. The civil war had just stopped within a week. The shooting had sort of stopped and it was a bit funny up there. We had to make it safe for the UN army guys because we don't want them to get hurt, get their uniforms dirty or something. I went to the, the only transport I had was the dynapack.

39:00 You know those big things you see on the road with lots of tyres and they run back and forth and flatten the thing to make the thing. So pulled up in that and the Thai guy, who was ethnically Khmer, knocked on the door of the policeman. They're speaking in Cambodian and it was really getting heated exchange. I'm standing back a little bit and then this policeman reached in the door, pulled out this bloody AK47 and shot this guy.

39:30 Put the whole magazine into him right alongside me and put holes in the bloody tractor. I've still got the pictures actually. Jesus Christ, I just didn't know. I thought "He's going to turn it onto me now". But he didn't. He just put it back inside, closed the door and went inside, and I'm left with this poor bastard.

You can't keep out of trouble.

No. I had to take him back. I couldn't leave him there because he was a Thai national. So

40:00 I dragged him and got him back up on the thing, what was left of it. It was a bit of a mess after 30 bullets hit you in one spot. I radioed to the UN to help, they didn't want to know. I said, "This guy's a registered contractor to the UN as am I. You're obliged to help him." They didn't want to know. So I got him back to Siem Reap and the hotel had been bombed during the war and it was only two or three rooms and a bathroom that I was living in. It had no roof on it, but the bath was there. So I put the body in the bath

40:30 and bought every bit of ice I could find and just kept him there. Two days before I could finally get a body bag up from the UN, from Phnom Penh to put him in the body bag. Then I had to get him to the airport. I got this body at the airport, I've got to get him back to Phnom Penh. Nobody would help me. All these soldiers from Poland and Bulgaria and Christ knows what. There I am dragging this poor bastard in a body bag onto the back of a Hercules on the ramp

41:00 at the back and none of them would get up and help me. They were all moving away from it and all that sort of stuff. I got to Phnom Penh

41:07 End of tape

Tape 10

00:40 **You were telling the story about the body bag and the fact that these other soldiers were giving you a wide berth.**

I was a contractor. They had some idea they were a little bit more important than contractors. We done the work and got the thing going over there.

01:00 I guess a lot of them didn't know that I had, a few Aussies I came across were great help of course. There was an Aussie unit up there. Got the guy back to the German hospital that was being set up in Phnom Penh. Then made a report to the Thai government. Then I proceeded to get and get something done about it. It was pushing shit uphill quite frankly. I just wasn't getting anybody to listen to us

01:30 at all. I'm going on about "this guy was an idea carrying registered contractor of the UN, is this the way you are going to be? What happens if it was me, or when you start losing some of your soldiers? Are you going to have this?" The UN was juts oblivious to it. General Sanderson, an Australian guy, was in fact in charge of the thing. So I actually got it up before him. I just wouldn't let it go. I wanted something

done and it was pissing all sorts

02:00 of prick off all the way up the chain. But I didn't have to care about hose. Get me out of the country, fine. Didn't worry me. Finally they launched an investigation. So, I'm sitting in our office in Phnom Penh one day and five Polish policemen and a Bulgarian general turned up and interviewed me about it. I think they though I done it. I was pleased that something was being done. About 2 months later the handing

02:30 down of the report was haded down and it concluded that the Thai foreman had shot himself 30 times with an AK47. Just committed suicide. That was the end of that. It was wrapped up and packed away and the Thai government were happy and the UN were happy, but Cambodia didn't give a shit. I just said "Ah, well". And that's another lesson in my life, learning

03:00 about the organisations. I then went on from there and I went up to the area where I'm actually going in February this year to a place called Batambang. I was doing a road survey for US Aid. The roads there were horrendous. They were just pitted bog hole rotten things. Full of mines and Christ know what. I had a driver with me. Funny sort of a guy. Just about everybody in Cambodia has got post traumatic stress so I fitted in pretty well there.

It's your kind of place.

03:30 So I didn't know I had post traumatic stress at that stage of the game, but I was a bit funny too. A bit freaky sometimes. We got hold of a UN vehicle and we're driving up and I was measuring and taking photos and measuring the road from pothole to pothole. It was a big, long job. They had to, US Aid wanted to rebuild the road in Cambodia was their thing. So we contracted that contract in

04:00 between the other jobs I was doing up there. On the way to Pay Lin I come across, and I didn't know because I just jump in the car and go and do stuff, I didn't listen to anyone because I just didn't think they knew what they were talking about. I was most of the time pretty right. But they never told me about this. So I was going along. There was this bloody roadblock on the road. It was the start of what we now know as the Khmer Rouge Autonomous Region. Next thing I know there's these

04:30 little fellows somewhere between 13 and 18, sticking rocket launchers and machineguns in my snoot in the car. The driver looks a bit funny. I knew what the Khmer Rouge used to do to get rid of people. The killing fields thing was all over. They'd been pushed by the Vietnamese back up into this stronghold area and nobody could beat them in there. It was at the first week of the ceasefire and they had agreed to do the right thing, but nobody really knew

05:00 whether they would or wouldn't. So I'm pulled out of the car. What they used to do to people was put them in a ditch and then they'd whack a machete across their hamstring here on their and make you kneel and cut your hamstring so you couldn't run away and then bash you to death with their rifle butts. That's how they dispatched people. If you wanted to buy the bullet off them you could give them money, they'd sell you the bullet and then they'd shoot you. That was a quicker way of doing it. It was quite well known in the Khmer Rouge days. So I'm being

05:30 led across to this ditch and I thought "For Christ's sakes, is this where it all ends? I'm trying to do the right thing and I'm being led by these little freaky kids." Anyhow, as I got closer to this ditch on the side of the road I noticed a plank running across the thing. Then, as I'm stepping onto the plank I see my driver shaking hands and hugging people on the car in the bush on the other side. We got on quite well this driver and I. We'd been together for quite a while. I thought "I've either been set up by this

06:00 guy, I'm sold aplomb or" anyway. I'm across the plank, I'm on the other side of this, I'm going into this attap hut, and I waited there for 2 or 3 hours. Attap is just grass and stuff. It's a checkpoint thing. The next thing this guy comes and speaking almost perfect English and he was a Khmer Rouge colonel. He asked me what I'm doing here and who was I and all that sort of stuff. It turned out they had no intention to harm me. I had cups of tea. Sat there having cups of tea with the guy.

06:30 It turns out that my driver was an old Khmer Rouge guy anyway. Ex-Khmer Rouge, or still Khmer Rouge. He was doing the right thing. In fact, if they were going to do me any harm he might have been instrumental in seeing that it wasn't done. I don't know. So I had a chat with this guy and I said "What's going to happen?" He said "We'll just wait our turn. We'll never ever accept anybody but us running this country. We'll never do it. We will govern.

07:00 We will not allow the corrupt groups to come back in and govern this country." It's a pity the way they went about it the first time. Their ideals and the basis was quite good. It's just that they thought they had to get rid of everybody to start the thing. So I had a few cups of tea and then they said "OK, we don't want you to come past here. This is our area. You can build the road right up to here and we'll take it from there. Thanks for coming and on your way." So I got into the car and "Wow.

07:30 Let's get out of here before they change their mind". That was my introduction to the KR [Khmer Rouge]. I moseyed around Cambodia for a bit longer and then finally came out of there and came back here. Then just went back and forth to Indonesia on various projects. Every one of those incorporated some sort of aid work. Then a few of us formed up an aid group. Three diggers. We served in the same platoon together. Terry, Paul and myself. We formed

08:00 this little group. We went up and re, the first project we done on our own funds and what we could scrape up, we rebuilt a school. That was the very school that my cousin was killed in a minefield.

Strange the way things come around.

So we rebuilt the school. Then got a lot of support by the business community in Australia and others. That organisation now is going fully fledged

08:30 small NGO [non government organization]. Very effective. There's no administration funds, it's just every dollar goes into projects.

What is that organisation for?

They call it AVVRG, Australian Veterans Vietnam Reconstruction Group. Paul insisted on that name. It must have been an easy way to do it. The horse bolted and the Vietnamese absolutely loved us because of the school. Then we built an orphanage from woe to go.

09:00 80 or 100 kids in there.

How did you finance it?

By donations and membership and business community in Australia. I'm not a fundraiser, but Paul is excellent. He just doesn't mind. He'll say anything. He'll do anything. He was a journalist and was also a very good media man.

What's his name?

Paul Murphy. He's still the president of the thing. Terry, who's his brother-in-law and myself were

09:30 the other two that got it going. Since then the organisation's been almost taken over. There's not too many vets involved in it now. Some girls from Queensland university got involved and some medical girls, nurses got involved and they are real dynamos in their own right. So the thing has rolled on and rolled on beyond what we ever imagined. It's gained a sort of momentum of its own. It is actually official that the official NGO to handle, you've almost got to go through the AVVRG

10:00 to do anything in Vietnam now. That's how much faith and trust they've got in us. After the first 3 projects. We've got a micro finance thing going where the poor, and we're aiming it at that time he poor. A lot of these micro finance things, they get going, but then they lift the bar a bit to make sure that the people who have the ability to pay back get those money not. And the whole idea of microfinance is of course to give it to the very, very bottom rungs. Dr Katherine Gower from Queensland

10:30 University come up with that and she's running that. It's doing a marvellous job. As I said, there's 100% payback of that money. Some of them are on their second loans, which is 40 dollars US. They've set up sewing businesses and all sort of stuff. It just doesn't take much to kick on a little in economy. In the village economies.

Can you tell me about the work you are doing clearing landmines?

Okay. I'm involved in an organisation called,

11:00 again one of the originals, called Mine Incident Victim And Clearance, MIVAC or the MIVAC Trust. What we do is we are linked in with AusCare Landmine Action Program. We raise funds. Again it's another thing for veterans to focus on. Again it's another organisation that the original veterans aren't really the main force anymore, but lots of guys who have been on, Vietnam veterans. A lot of us are getting on. See, we're hitting the 60

11:30 mark and certainly a lot older than that, up around the 70-75 some of the older guys. I think 55 is the youngest you can be if you were in Vietnam. So a lot of us are getting tired and don't really want to be up there digging mines and all that sort of stuff. So we're raising funds and channelling through operational units to our contractors that raise and lift mines and that's all they do. A lot of them are ex-army engineer guys. They're doing it for bugger all.

12:00 They're just doing it for bugger all. Mozambique, Cambodia and soon Sri Lanka this group will be helping people in there. Just got it linked in with AusCare and by that, AusCare is a much larger organisation with a very big operational infrastructure and funding from AusAid because it's a recognised NGO here in Australia, which

12:30 my MIVAC yet. It'll take a lot of operation and a lot of runs on the board to get that. We don't know whether we want it anyway. We can work through this other group. Don't have to set up the infrastructure. So the thing in Cambodia, I'll be going back to Cambodia in February next year and working with the CBCDO [Cambodian Border Community Development Organisation] on the Thai border based in Pailin as part of MIVAC to coordinate the international NGOs'

13:00 efforts into that autonomous region where nobody's gone into before. It's one of the heaviest land mined areas in the world because it was fortified by the Khmer Rouge to be protected. So it's a bit of a thing that I've been invited in there because nobody really gets in there. It's an unusual area. Cambodia is hardly any crime, there's no prostitution, there's none of this paedophilia sex slave crap that goes on

all over Cambodia

13:30 Cambodia. The place was awash with that sort of stuff because the punishment is rather severe. They only know one punishment. It's not Khmer Rouge anymore but it's made up of people who were Khmer Rouge and grew up in that Khmer Rouge culture. They're trying to integrate. One of the underlying objective of CBCDO is to reintegrate that area back into the main thing, but a lot of them don't really want to be integrated. They much prefer where they are. What's happened

14:00 is the Khmer Rouge funded their operations by stripping the forests and logging and selling gemstones and stuff, but all that's gone. So all the mid-ranking corrupt Khmer Rouge people that are living down in Sihanoukville or over in the south of France. All the money's gone. The booming little economy that was there is no longer there. The poverty levels are higher than pretty well anywhere in the world. Maybe not quite as high as Laos. So there's a lot of

14:30 help needed there. I'm not going to be doing the work, I'm just going to help identify projects and then write the submissions because the international NGOs are a bit bureaucratic and they like to see ticks in the boxes and all that sort of stuff. With landmine clearing, of course we'll continue to support that. It's been a long time since I've been out laying on my belly on the ground probing for landmines. I don't think I could do it any more. It's a very, very tough

15:00 job. There are better people now. Younger men who have been out on peacekeeping jobs and have come back from Bosnia and Kosovo, former Yugoslavia, Iraq, Iran, Rwanda, Mozambique, engineering, ex army engineer guys who are out there doing it. They're only in their 30s now. But MIVAC has been good in as much as that

15:30 we've collected those people. They're now the force behind it all. There's money to be made in land mining things. But the whole aim is just to get them out of the ground if we can. I don't know that we'll ever win, but if you don't keep trying it's a little, because there's always another fight and you've got jokers like Bush who don't realise what they're doing. So whilst

16:00 the world seems to be mad, there are some still plugging away. With very little money. I'm going up there with a bunch of about 3,000 dollars from MIVAC and a bunch of second hand bloody eyeglasses. You'll be surprised what that does. It doesn't take much to kick start a little community to get them going again because they're sitting down now. They're all in severe post traumatic stress, to put a label of what's going on up there. The poverty

16:30 levels are extreme. They don't even have toilets. I was just talking to Sathali the other day. She's just come back. A Cambodian girl. She's a nurse here, been here for 25 years. She went back to her village. She couldn't believe that she was born there and grew up into her teens there. Just walking out into the bush and using the toilet or round the back of the house. Absolutely no basic sanitation. Used to have it, but it's not there now.

Is

17:00 **this in any way an antidote to your post traumatic stress?**

I'm not sure whether it's, and Terry's the same, Terry Green. He's been working. He was in Timor and running in the aid projects in Afghanistan and Iraq. Paul has done it differently. He stuck with AVVRG and concentrated on that. Work's taken us off to other things. Paul

17:30 was able to find work in Vietnam as a journalist so he could support himself up there. We had to go wherever we could. We've all tended to do that. In fact, if you look at a lot of things that a lot of Vietnam veterans do, they all have that sort of humanity aspect about it. It might only be that they're a safety officer or a training man. Lots of them are in ambulances and paramedics, used to be – they're all finished with it now. For myself, I think that it's

18:00 a matter of the guilt thing I think. For some reason I feel guilty. Certainly over that incident with the white phosphorous. That just, it's caused me some serious problems because I have a very, very almost an affinity with young Asians, females, because that's what we killed.

18:30 Sometimes Marilyn has misinterpreted that for something else, and it's not been anything else. But I have a, I go out of my way sometimes, quite obviously, to help them when there doesn't seem to be any reason that I should. I often have to pull myself up to do that. I think there's something in that that makes me want to atone in some way to make some girl's life maybe a little bit easier.

19:00 I remember in Cambodia, a lot of Vietnamese girls come over in the sex game when the forces were there. I used to drink at a little kiosk at a hotel called the Royale. It was an old hotel. If you ever seen the movie The Killing Fields it's the hotel where they were all herded in and kept there until they were evacuated. I used to sit there and drink my bowl of soup and stuff after being in the field all day. I talked to the girls behind

19:30 the bar and they were Khmer. After a while I'd buy two bowls of soup, or three bowls – there was three of us guys. They'd all come and start taking it. After a while it almost became, they were all, they used to call me Papa or something like that. Papa Mike or some bloody thing. So they did. So I got talking to a lot of them, because they were all being used in the sex trade by these soldiers and all that that were there. There was these Pakistanis and Indians and African guys

20:00 from African places. They were just abusing these girls something fierce. The girls used to come and tell me and complain to me about it. I said “If you’re going to go with those guys, that’s what’s going to happen to you.” Anal sex and all that. They’d be torn and ripped, beaten up and all that sort of stuff. Jesus Christ it just made me want to strangle these mongrel bastards you know. But there was 5,000 hookers there.

Supply and demand.

Yup.

20:30 Just incredible. I used to try and, all I could do was give them a bowl of soup I guess. Only at times.

And you were listening to them.

I had to listen to them, yeah, because they’d come and talk to me. It was me and another guy. A guy called Chuck Probert, he was an American guy. We used to suit there. We found a bottle of, in the bottom of the Royale cellars we found a bottle of, it’s not Ballantyne a

21:00 cognac. One of the best cognacs you can get is French, but it sounds like it’s an Irish name. Ballantyne or, it’s French cognac, but it almost -- this was the top of the line stuff and they’d missed it and it was lying in a corner in the bottom of that hotel. They were still sweeping the crap out of the hotel when we got there to crank it up again. Chuck Probert and we used to have a glass of this cognac every night. Just a little sip. I think it was the most wonderful

21:30 drink I’ve ever tasted in my life. It’s probably been laying there for 20 odd years. How old it was before that I don’t know. It took us months to drink it, but by hell it was beautiful. So we’d sit there and have this little glass of cognac every time we all got together. Just a little sip. Then the girls would put it away for us and nobody’d touch it. But there was ways you could help people. Just little ways. I used to just be horrified at what was going on. Bloody terrible. These

22:00 people were just, had absolutely no concern for these human beings. There wasn’t too many Khmer girls doing this, but they were all Vietnamese coming because it was just so many women in Vietnam that were so poor. It wasn’t the new things aren’t working in Vietnam. The economy is not taking off like they thought it was. The Americans didn’t come in with all the money that they thought they would.

With all that you’ve seen,

22:30 **how do you make sense of the world?**

I think I’ve given up to a large extent. Like we were talking before, you and I, if you can just do that little bit that you can do, that’s going to have to be good enough. You’ve got to, there’s certain things you just can’t contest. You can’t contest those Pakistani soldiers that used to want to have anal sex and tear

23:00 little Vietnamese girls apart. Couldn’t do anything about them. There’s just some things you can’t contest. You can probably try and put the girls on a different tangent or something, but the madness of ethnic killings in Kalimantan, which I haven’t even got to, between the Materies and the Dayaks. I’ve seen people’s heads being chopped off over some stupid little thing because there was a hate that had been

23:30 building up for 30 years between the Materies and the Dayaks over land, over contesting of land and things like that. I just happened to be there.

It’s going on all over the place. Still in Ireland things are going on.

You know, Rwanda and those places, we’ve put people over there. We talk about

24:00 even landmines and the munitions lying all around and stuff. I think the common old machetes killed more bloody people than any of those things and I’ve seen it in Indonesia in 1997. It was horrendous. The government of Indonesia acknowledged maybe that 300 people were killed. I know that it was probably more than 2,000 people that were killed. Just chopped to pieces.

24:30 **You said there was a time you looked to religion to clarify things and that didn’t work. What works? How do you hold onto sanity?**

I guess it’s maybe that detachment that you develop. You just know that this is what the world is and you look for those elevating moments of, I don’t know, sometimes

25:00 they come and you just feel so good. And sometimes in the worst places you find our best aspects too and that’s a fairly common thing. The better aspects of humanity are shown when things are as worst.

You saw brutality in Vietnam, but you were also next to men that you have great admiration for, who acted for the most

25:30 **part honourably.**

Yup, well they do. Anybody that, I mean that guy that threw that phosphorous stuff he was not one of us.

And never would be. He didn't need to do that. And there were a couple of other examples of that sort of thing, but not with the horrendous things of that. There's always people that will go beyond the pale wherever the pale is.

26:00 Where is the line? I don't know. But I think if you're a reasonable person, if you're not in that mad frenzy where, the frenzy bit only happens when you're fighting others who are trying to knock you off, if you're not in that situation the reasonableness of most of us prevails. We've got examples of people who, in Europe during the Second World War, the German guys,

26:30 the SS just chomping people into bits and killing them. Now we find out that the suicide rate of those SS soldiers was higher than anywhere else. They were ordinary men put in extraordinary situations. I don't know that I could do that. I say that we never took prisoners. We probably shot people that we may not have shot, but it was also at the tail end of that frenzy thing. So that we weren't confronted with prisoners where

27:00 you had to make the decision that "There's that guy, we've all calmed down a little bit, we've won the day, what are we going to do with this guy?" Somebody walks up and has to shoot him. We couldn't countenance that. But I don't know where the line is, where you've crossed from one to the other.

When you're in the frontline only you can judge that.

That's right. But there are attempts now by society to judge that. To judge soldiers. Soldiers are being hauled before courts now. We've got a situation where two SAS guys

27:30 are in strife out of Timor because they kicked a bloke to see if he was still alive. They were ambushed and wounded by these people, they fired back, surprised as the Indonesians were coming out of the forest, fired back at them and got them. Then hobbled over and kicked one, was spotted by somebody and now they're trying to court martial that guy because he kicked a body. Jesus Christ,

28:00 all of us would have to be hauled up before court martials. That's how you found out whether the guy was still alive. You had to, as you go passed you give it a bit of a good kick. Gee whiz, I mean. What's going on? Why are we judging? If you don't want people to do that shit, don't have a friggin' war. Get the pollies to put the gloves on or something. Don't do it. It's not being, since the end of the Second World War there's not been a reason that the Western nations has to get involved in anything in the

28:30 first place is there? Really? They're contrived political reasons or they con out of the insecurity of our governments later on. The things we're learning now, how they short-changed us in Vietnam and all sort of stuff and decision were made as cabinet papers become available. Those bastards should really be hauled before international courts. And judged now. Now they're

29:00 pulling diggers, that's why America won't sign that international court thing I don't think. Because they don't want their soldiers to be hauled before international courts for something they done while they were in the service. Our mob signed it. But they've had some thing put in it. Who's judging? Why don't they, if they can go to the problem to do that why can't they? Oh, they're only after the sort of Pol Pots and the,

29:30 so be it. And that's fine. The principles are good. But the people that come up with the things are bloody hairy fairy academics and bloody left wing flakes that have got absolutely no idea of what it's like to have this shit in your face. They really don't. And the extremes of emotions and what the physiology that works when you're in these extremes. You can sit back in Geneva and ponder and judge all your life, but it makes absolutely no difference to what's going on out there on the frontline. Wherever the

30:00 frontline is, or if indeed there is a frontline. Who's going to stop a bunch or marauding Rwandans who've got some particular hatred against the Tutus or whatever it is, chopping them up? Who's going to stop that? All the international courts in the world aren't going to do that. I don't know what you do. At some point in your time you accept that that is humanity, that is what we are and you've just got to, and hopefully go behind and perhaps clean up a little bit of the mess. I think we've got a big chance in

30:30 Cambodia. I don't think, the Indochina War went for 30 or 40 years. They've just had enough. They just want to get on with life now. They don't want their men to be thrown into the sausage machine anymore. 13 apron strings, get off your apron strings, here's an AK47, get out there and plant that mine, do it sort of stuff.

How do you hold onto the good in the world?

Sometimes you have a bit of a problem.

31:00 I don't know. I just know what I want to do and just want to go and do it. Sometimes I don't think there's much good in the world. I thought we had a chance there for a while, but I can see it all slipping away again. This crap in Iraq. We've got Afghani refugees across the road. They're wonderful people and all that, but the United States has got a hell of a lot to answer for. It really has. It screwed up Iran,

31:30 it screwed up Afghanistan and just left them. Now they're screwing up bloody.

Are they better that Pol Pot?

I don't know, well they bombed the living shitter out of Cambodia. See, the difference between them

and Pol Pot is that they've got an organisation they can put between them and their actions and they can come up with concepts of weapons of mass destruction and

32:00 righteousness and the Christian way and all that sort of stuff. Little Johnny's running around behind them and, you know, Jesus Christ. I think it's just going backwards. It really is. It's going back. I start to think that maybe that's a cyclic way of this society anyway. It just goes through that, it does this awful thing and then say, "That's awful". Then that generation, but

32:30 then the new generations come and life's not exciting enough, so here we go again. There's all sorts of little cycles going on in little places going on all around, but there's a big cycle going on too.

People often look for adventure.

You're dead right. What took me away from driving a tractor around there? Absolute sheer shitless boredom of the place and "Let's get into war on the tails of derring do of the guys

33:00 from the Middle East". We didn't hear too much about New Guinea and the rotten jungle and the malaria and all that was cutting across the vast open spaces of the desert.

But if you had been told?

It probably wouldn't have made any difference. Just wanted to get out of there. Of course it won't happen to you. 6 weeks in Vietnam and it does happen to you. Or 6 weeks somewhere else. Wars nowadays are a little cleaner. They seem to have a much more righteous reasons for

33:30 doing it. I think Vietnam was a very, very different thing. It was an awful, blood thirsty no-holds barred, knock them down reserve fight. There was no limits.

No moral limits?

No moral or ethical limits. It was just murder. On both sides. The people oddly enough caught up with the civilians who probably had a choice of who they wanted to support, but very often not.

34:00 They supported both sides. Whoever was pointing a gun at them at the time. The soldiers themselves, the foot soldiers. The foot soldiers up there have got the same problems we've got. The system's not looking after them. They don't want to know. Soon as the war was won, the carpetbaggers, the people from the south, they took off to the north and stayed up there, safe and sound become political. They all swanned down south and took over the place. The people that spent 30 years in the jungle fighting the French, the Americans and us, they were sidelined when it

34:30 all came back. They're still pissed off about it. They say "Why don't you go back in the jungle and get rid of this lot?" They even call them carpetbaggers.

What do you think are the most important things that you've learned from what you've experienced?

Hard question isn't it?

You've had a hard life.

No, not really. I don't think that I have. I guess really that you've got to, your

35:00 family, you've got to stick. It's been close where I've nearly lost it, because I have this burning desire to go and do stupid things elsewhere. I've taken Marilyn on a number of occasions and so forth. I think you've got to stay with, the bosom of your family thing is absolutely critical. I don't have a great Christian belief. If I

35:30 think I was going to be any religion I'd probably be a Buddhist. They seem to have a better way of doing it. It's not one of those like Christianity or Muslim or Judaism where "If you don't do this you're going to be punished" crap. You're going to go to some awful place. I've already been to the awful place. How much worse does it get? Whereas Buddhists have a "Live your life good and you'll come back as a better dog

36:00 or a higher being or be a bank account or something like that. You have this, the threat is that you won't go the next level up. You just stay at what you are, or go down if you're really bad. So I guess it has that thing, but it hasn't got that hellfire and brimstone. I can remember being as a, listening to the nuns. "You can't read the Melbourne Truth" or "do this and you'll go to hell".

36:30 It got there one day "what about a bloke that was blind, deaf, dumb and was totally spastic? How could he commit a sin?" "Even if he thinks about having sex out of marriage, he's damnation." There was just no way out. You couldn't get out of it. So using a bit of logic I thought, "Well, as long as, you know, we can think about it, but we can't

37:00 do it, so we're right. But that poor bastard that even thinks about it, they've taken everything else away from him."

Is there anything that you would like to say?

No, I’m not given to great statements, I don’t think. I think maybe if people

37:30 see this and bother to see it some time down the future, if you could just look at the humanity of our societies and concentrate on that, and think about the things that upset you, and are they really, really relevant? Are they really worth picking a fight over or inconvenience anybody or screwing anybody about? You don’t have to be

38:00 into the Christian thing, just have a heart and empathy and a sympathy for the other person. Not everybody’s trying to exploit you, I don’t think. There are those that will, but you should, most people -- I think more than anything, probably the thing that I’ve learned is take control of your bloody life. You do what you want to bloody do. It might inconvenience you, and you mightn’t be rich and you mightn’t be all those things, but they’re not that important. Materialistic things aren’t important. Take control of your life

38:30 and do what you want to do. I seen people that are just trapped in their companies and stuff like that. They’re just being jerked around by dickheads. It’s frightening sometimes and it’s daunting. You know guys like the people that set up Westfield. They come out of the concentration camps and are successful. Why are they successful? Because they’ve been through the worst and what the hell can happen to them? Lose a bit of money? But some people think it’s the end of the world to lose money. For Christ’s sakes.

They’ve seen the end of the world.

39:00 Yeah. Or what it would be like. It’s a white phosphorous grenade.

I’d like to thank you for having told us as much as you have. I think you’re a great man.

You’re just being nice.

INTERVIEW ENDS