

Australians at War Film Archive

John Humphries - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 5th December 2003

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1182>

Tape 1

00:31 **Okay, John, just a brief life history.**

Okay, let's see, my life started in the western suburbs of Sydney, I was born in Bankstown in 1947. My family moved to Cabramatta about 1954 and my whole family - I'm the eldest of five - good old fashioned Catholic family - and with a western suburbs background. I suppose it's a lot different now when

01:00 you look at 'Cabramatta Vietnam'; my mother still lives there. And we had a wonderful lifestyle, barefoot, and a whole world to run wild in. So I went to school at Bonnyrigg High and left there in 1962. And worked for a while in Sydney, did a chair maker's traineeship, so I can make a good wooden chair. That got boring after a while and

01:30 I joined the army in '65. And 30 years later I transferred to the reserve. So it's a - and in between there we toured the world, met a lovely lady, had three wonderful daughters and the world's changed forever. So basically that's it. I think there's a lot of in between stuff there but that's it. That in a nutshell.

If you could talk a little bit about your parents.

02:00 My Dad was born on the wrong side of the Burrinjuck Dam, in central New South Wales, before it was built. Country boy. He joined the army in 1942, during the war and served for 27 years in the army. Left to the startling rank of private, stayed a private all his life, met - my Mum served in the air force, during the war and left after the war. And they raised five kids.

02:30 My brother and three sisters. They were fairly close knit. And as I said, we had a wonderful time living in that - I mean, Cabramatta at that time, when we moved there was - in our street we had about three houses and the rest was just all wonderful bush, so I mean, nowadays I think of letting your kids roam wild, you know, barefoot and Mum used to come to the end of the street and yell her head off and we'd pop up out of bushes all around the paddocks and

03:00 I mean there was nothing to say, "Where you been today?" "Oh we walked to Thorny Island." That's about five kilometres away. Nowadays you'd be - you wouldn't do it, but it was a wonderful childhood, upbringing we had. No computers, no TVs, we did have a radio, but it was just a wonderful lifestyle. When you pass through Cabramatta now and you see the houses and the density, it's amazing to think that you had free roam on

03:30 acres and acres of paddock. My father used to take us mushroom collecting on the old golf course. You'd come back and there's wild mushrooms, this big. It was just marvellous. But it was a good life, back then, no complaints whatsoever. I think probably, that's what makes us so different, I mean, having served as I have, within the defence force I've actually, the people that I served with,

04:00 I've actually, in the ready reserve that I was in '95, I actually had soldiers coming back and I've said, "Your name sounds familiar." And it's their fathers that I served with that were coming back through. But their perspective of army life, life in general was quantum leap different than what we had. Ours was I suppose, not simpler, but we didn't have as much expectations apart from what we could get out of life. These people that are coming in now, they're

04:30 a lot smarter, and their expectations are a lot higher. And they probably don't tolerate as much as what we used to tolerate. We tolerate a lot more in our days, because life's a lot easier. I would not like to be growing up now. Because my kids have got a lot more expectations and there's a - it's a faster, more demanding world out there now. With or without a conflict of any sort.

05:00 We had a good life, yeah good life. And good grounding, if you could use that word, for what we went on through life and later on. And I think with my peer group and all my friends that we've grown up, they have had similar grounding, similar backgrounds, they've come from western suburbs, country stock, that sort of thing, we've all hoped to instil upon our

- 05:30 children, some might say, some outdated values, and but it's not, it's things that have worked for us in the weirdest of ways, you know, they've worked and I'm happy to say that my girls have sort of taken on board some of the stuff, discarded some of the stuff, obviously that's the nature of things, but they're, I think a lot better prepared to travel in this world, than most people are. And
- 06:00 I think I put that down to my upbringing, in that carefree era and a certain amount of disciplinary and coalface type activities within the defence force and the army and overseas. Sort of there's no rule book, there's no, "This is how you do it." There's things that you learn, school of hard knocks, shall we say. So, yeah, that works like that.
- 06:30 **Did your parents tell you much about their experiences in World War II?**
- No, not really. It was not on the agenda. I mean, it's yeah. It was then, we lived it at that period, it was never – it was just never spoken about. I mean, Dad never went overseas, but he served all around Australia in all the defensive positions and so forth, but he never spoke about it and even his army life, it was
- 07:00 I would put him down as a public servant in uniform. And he utilised that. See, I bring my kids up, I'm in the army but it's not going to get in the way of my family life. I'm a public servant in uniform. That's all he took it on. To a certain degree I suppose, I do the same thing. But it's a little bit harder now, because there's more separation than there was when Dad was in. It's still a good life.
- 07:30 There are a couple of things that I would – not everyone, you look at the recruitment brochures and so forth, I enlisted in '65, there was no Vietnam on we were just finishing out of Borneo and Malaya with the communist insurrection there. So there was not a war, but it was a boy's own adventure. We used to – I grew up and my grandparents and aunties, they used to
- 08:00 every year you'd get the, Boy's Own Annual, and it was just full of politically incorrect things. Now there was war stories, there was "Smiley gets his own gun." I mean, it's- I mean the other day, we were underneath a bloke's house and up on the rafters, there was this little bebe gun, all covered in rust and I'm a licensed collector so
- 08:30 I took it down to Stafford Police Station so he had it recognised, put it on my list of stuff and so forth. And then I'd done some research on it, and it's the recommended toy, gift, for eight to ten year olds. That's the difference in eras I mean, everyone had a bebe gun. I used to chase my brother around the yard, my parents were very good about that they – I had a bebe gun but they didn't give me the bebes. And
- 09:00 Which was very good because I used to shoot my brother with it. What we did was, we had a lovely hedge on the front which had that little purple beads with the seed in. That fitted just down the barrel, so I used to chase my younger brother around the garden shooting these dye bebes at him. You know, it was a carefree era. You wouldn't do it now of course, you'd have everyone up in arms. But it was a good life. And again, it's trying to explain it to a generation now that are
- 09:30 focussed on computers and not getting out and doing something, you know, using your own – and that's the difference between us as soldiers and our soldiers of today. They are smarter, obviously, they have higher expectations, but they also have a tendency to say, "Broken? Can't be fixed." Whereas when we were there, something would go wrong, we'd say,
- 10:00 "We've still got to go from point A to point B. So the logic was, let's work a way around it. Or over it or under it. Where the guys nowadays, it's you've tried three times, that's it. You finish. There is a tendency not to be as self sufficient or innovative or to use your initiative more than it was before. And I'm finding that now, with a lot of soldiers, they come out and they say, "Rightio, pick this up, take it over there." "Why?" "Just do what
- 10:30 you're told." The – they don't see the relevance in training and preparation. We have, in preparing soldiers for war, overseas service, you do, physical, to get them physically fit, you give them all the padre speeches about ethics, values, you give as much
- 11:00 as possible, medical and health briefings on what you're going to be confronted with and so forth. But nowhere in that preparation do you prepare them psychologically for something that they're going to see. I mean, there's – doctors have a very good way of doing it, when they're training. Sooner or later in their medical school, they'll be confronted with an autopsy. And if they can get past the autopsy part of it, they'll have no problems.
- 11:30 There's nothing more brutal than seeing someone carve a body up. So where are we able to prepare soldiers psychologically, to be confronted on a battle field, you can do everything under equity, workplace health and safety, you name it, the Commonwealth does it, yet there's nothing there that psychologically prepares a young soldier, he can be the best soldier in the world, and suddenly his best friend, is laying, dismantled
- 12:00 on the ground, in the most horrible fashion. How do you prepare the young soldier for that. I don't know how we did it, I can remember some of the things we did. We're not allowed to do those things now. There was a lot of yelling, bashing, jumping up and down and continually pushing you to the limit. Nowadays, we're not allowed to do that. We've gone full circle, we've got to be really aware of issues we

don't want to break the

12:30 body before we get it there. And that becomes a double edged knife. For all of us.

Do you think that's worse, for..?

I think it is. We've had soldiers - I mean I don't envy, I mean, we had a soldier in one of the companies in Rwanda at Kigali Stadium and young bloke, and they were protecting the medical teams there. When the people were moving all the refugees up the hill, they said,

13:00 "Don't worry about it." And they waved to the soldiers like this, and then calmly, this Rwandan, just pulled this woman aside, pushed the barrel of the gun in her face and pulled the trigger. Now if you're a young soldier, not - being directed, "Do not respond. Do not respond." This guy came home as an emotional basket case. Didn't fire a bullet, was told not to fire a bullet, stood there with his hands tied, for want of a better word. There's no way you could prepare him for that. And of course

13:30 he was not, and he's a - he's something that the Commonwealth is going to have to look after for the rest of his life. So you - I believe that you should prepare people more. They're not being prepared. That's an example to me, of - I mean, we went over there and you, we call it, "up-down training." Area 17 at Ingleburn, every soldier went through reinforcement wing would know it, Area 17, every day for

14:00 four weeks, you'd get out there, they have contact front, contact rear, contact front, contact rear, up, down, up down, up down. Till you had knees were red raw and you're worn out and you'd be sitting there going, "If I have one more contact, I'm going to scream. I've had this, I'm over this." Yet, soon as you went to Vietnam, and someone fired that first round, 20 minutes later, you're sitting there going, "Jeez, I'm alright." You did it responsively, you did it automatically. All that up-down training.

14:30 It was mind defeating, it was boring, it was hard, yet it worked, because you acted instinctively and we're not doing that. People are being allowed to, let me make a conscious decision, let me look at this from that point of view or your point of view. So I can look at it. And it's dangerous, you cannot do it. War is not a thing that you can push into a round hold or a square hold as

15:00 you think. I think someone said that once the first shot is fired, the textbook goes over the shoulder. And that's the way it is. So we try to fit all of these wonderful ideas together so that when the time comes we can go to the parents, the next of kins and say, "We have done everything humanly possible to prepare this person for service in a

15:30 hostile environment." And we've done it by the book, trouble is, I don't believe it's good enough. So I remember my own experiences, and I went to Timor and I saw the guys there, what they were doing and we were very lucky because, we didn't have it as probably as bad as what they're having now in Iraq and so we're learning, so the guys that are in Iraq now have got a lot of good experience

16:00 from Timor, so that we're not as novice, we've seen some hardships. That would have been condensed down into four weeks of Area 17 for me, but these guys have gone through a process over the last say, three years, and they've had a lot of practical experience, hard work, so there's no illusions as to where they're going and what's going to come at them. And we've been very lucky so far. Very lucky.

16:30 Going back to my time, it would have been probably a big adventure, every time someone said, "Oh, you're going somewhere." It was probably from a western suburbs point of view, I left and all my peer group, same age - 18, 17, 18, got girls pregnant

17:00 shotgun weddings, it was all the rage. And I left. When I come back, they'd say, "What are you doing?" I'd say, "Oh, I'm off to do this, off." You know it was just like a boy's own big adventure and so forth and, "What are you doing?" "Oh, got to go home, look after the kids." We didn't - we parted, I mean I've never been back - the friends that I've kept all these years are the army friends, the friends from school years and so forth, we all went our separate ways and never went

17:30 back. Went back to a reunion some years back and it was like we were two different people, or two - an alien world. They had their own conversations, talking about what they were doing and so forth and I might as well have spoken another language. It was very, very different. We - bunch of guys, I went - I probably had the - until the first patrol in Vietnam I was on my

18:00 favourite boy's own adventure, you couldn't have asked for a better time. We left in April of '67 and we were - 17 of us, and in those days, you flew from Sydney on a normal London Qantas flight, to Manila and then you went from Manila to Clarke Air Force Base. So that's about 60 kilometres north of Manila. And you joined the big

18:30 military assistance command, lift into Saigon. So we get to Manila and we had a great time, about 17 of us, all in greens, young and silly. And the bus broke down, on the way to - had a flat tyre. So the embassy guy who was looking after us said, "I'll go and find a spare bus, you guys stay here and behave yourselves." "Yeah, okay." So, off they went and they came back a little while later and he come back with a local Filipino bus.

19:00 And there were six bus drivers, and he had two Filipino constabulary guards. These guys are immaculately dressed. We thought, "Oh this is very interesting," so this - these six bus drivers all sat,

you know, family owned business, we all thought that, 'cause, naïve, just out of Australia, 17, impressionable. So we went to get in the bus and it took off down this road, so now we're roaring down this road and we see the ambulances coming the other way and as these ambulances went past, they were those

- 19:30 jeep ambulances with stretchers, here's all these bodies laying in them and hanging out and covered in blood. And I'm going, "Jeez, I just left Australia, this is." No concept of war. It was just boy's own adventure, sort of thing. Then we made a turn down this dark side street across a bridge and we said, "Oh, where are we going now?" And next thing you know, this constabulary officer's got this nice big shiny '45 and he's got it in the back of this bus driver's head with the hammer back, saying, "Stop." And the
- 20:00 young constabulary guy, he jumps out with his carbine and he's - they backed this bus up and we're going, "What the hell is going on here?" They drove us back onto the main drag to the constabulary's station and it turns out these guys were what they call, Hucks, communist guerrillas. And they were going to hijack us on the way to Clarke's. They say, "We're going to have to leave you here." So they found this place again, remember we're 17, 18 year old impressionable types, found this little
- 20:30 bar and it had one of those old Coca Cola machines, chest tops, and it had this whole walls were filled with pornographic wood carvings. And there was two bedrooms and four girls and they guy said, "Right, get in there, you lot." And had those big old concertina - you know like the old railways, the gates. He locked us in there, with the four girls put the constabulary guard and he said,
- 21:00 "You're not to leave the building. I will be back." We had the most memorable - embassy picked up the bill for it. We were all drunk, had a great time, first time out of Australia and it was - there was - and if you bump into any of these guys, they'll tell you the same story, it's - we had a marvellous time. We spent seven days in Clarke, waiting for a - to get a space on a plane, but that was the best part of it. And then
- 21:30 seven days later I said - we flew into Saigon and then joined the war. That was our first experience outside Australia. Young 17, 18 year old. Had a marvellous time. We thought, "Well this is what the army's all about. Hey, I'll sign on for longer." So we - impressionable, then we - I joined the 2nd Battalion. When I got there, everyone goes through on a reinforcement status, you go through the reinforcement unit, and you spend time there doing, you know
- 22:00 in country training and they show you how to do things and how not to do things. And they - one of the most silly things I've ever seen and I - to this day I don't know why they did it, they would take a detonator, and they said, "These things are dangerous. Please do not carry them in your backpacks, please do not connect them to - if you're - there's lightning around." They give the whole safety thing. And they'd stick one in a chicken, a dead, a frozen chicken. And blow
- 22:30 it up and it'd just open the chicken up like this. He said, "Now that's how dangerous it is." "Oh okay, that's - they're pretty dangerous." Soon as you get out in battalion on patrols, "Oh John, you're carrying the FI, fuse instantaneous." Here's all these det cords and you've got about three kilos of explosives on your back you know. There's lightning striking everywhere and I'm going, "Why do we do that lesson when they do this over the road here?" It made no sense. But we did that sort of thing. 2 Battalion had a,
- 23:00 they'd just come from Terendak in Malaya, they'd spent two years on counter terrorist operations, went back to Australia for a year in '66 and then early part of '67 they were in Vietnam So you had all us reinforcements who for want of a better - Johnnie come latelies and all the original hands. We had a very good bunch because most of the platoon commanders were
- 23:30 good hands, from Malaya, we had two platoon sergeants that dropped at Arnhem, during the Second World War, Korean veterans, Malaya, Borneo and us young blokes. So we had an absolute unbelievable wealth of experience to fall back on or be guided if you like. So when the platoon sergeant said, "Do this." It was, "Oh, can I discuss that with you?" Just didn't happen, it was,
- 24:00 and you had an unbelievable faith in the leadership of those days. I mean, they had their idiosyncrasies, we had Lieutenant Ed, he was a very nice guy and platoon commander, went on to be a full colonel. But he couldn't read a map if his life depended on it. And you'd always tell his platoon without seeing him. Cause every member of the platoon
- 24:30 had a map. Making sure they, if he was going to get lost, they knew where they were. He was just a walking cluster with a map. You know, he passed everything except map reading. He was just hopeless. And here's a guy, you know, full colonel and he's got the map there and the compass, you can just imagine the scene. Platoon commander with his map out and he's got his compass hanging around his neck and he's looking around like this and every person in his platoon
- 25:00 knows exactly where they are. Cause, they've all, know where they are. And he was just a - you see on the radios, you know, whatever his call sign was, you know, "Call sign, 4-2, where are you?" And he'd, talking to the CO, "Niner this is 4-2, I'm at coordinates," and he'd give the reference and niner said, "4-2 this is niner, throw smoke." And he'd throw smoke and he'd go
- 25:30 "4-2, this is niner, you are not there, you are here." And he'd give him the reference, lost again. It was just - they were the sort of people that you dealt with. I don't think in my time, and I was with Charlie

Company, we had two platoon commanders, one platoon sergeant and we had two company commanders and a - one CSM [Company Sergeant Major], CSM

- 26:00 actually just passed away. The salt of the earth. Montiff was a gentleman as a company commander any man would have done anything for him. The next one, Major Williams, Princess Williams, he took us into Coburg and - eaaghh. Fairly ordinary. But the CSM, James he was a brilliant man. He sort of interfaced if you like,
- 26:30 between the strengths and weaknesses of his company commander and the strengths and weaknesses of his company. So that any given time, day or night, you always got the maximum effort and the best out of every person there, so that on the day, when the job was done, it was not, Jonesy or Montiff or Humphries or anything like that, it was C Company does it again. The total package. And that's a lot of things that are missing nowadays.
- 27:00 We have a lot of individuals that do well, because they're picking up some of the older skills but it's not right across the board, which it should be. But that was 2RAR [Royal Australian Regiment], that was - they were a good bunch. And the sad part about that is I think that because that was '67, '68, I got medivaced [Medical Evacuation] in January when Coburg started with - which was really disheartening for me, the
- 27:30 tag on the thing said, you know, there's guys laying there and they've got bullet holes in them and bombs on their legs and they bring me on board and they look at it and it goes, "Chronic diarrhoea." And you know, it was really heartening and we get to - we left Vung Tau and overnighted in Butterworth in Malaya and when we were there, Gough Whitlam and - turned up on one of those visits that he was leader of the opposition. And of course I'm laying in the bed and it's,
- 28:00 "Oh, what's wrong with you?" "I got blown up." "I got shot at the battle of so and so." "What's wrong..?" "Chronic diarrhoea." And I'm going, "Thanks." You know. I got picked up a thing called strongylosis. And I was eleven stone, at that time. And in three weeks I went to six stone, four pound. They had me on intravenous, they raced me back home, didn't know what it was, until they found it. Only now, where I work, would you believe,
- 28:30 at the Malaria Institute, the Veterans Affairs has decided to do a study on all the Vietnam veterans who had strongylosis. All 562 of us. Because there's now - they reckon there's now some sort of a long term side effect. I said, "That's good, what is it?" I'm barely bloody ten stone now. I lost all that baby fat for good. So they're doing a study on it now, so you learn something new every time,
- 29:00 I recovered very quickly in - and I come out of hospital, went back to reinforcement wing, and silly thing I did over in the - in Vietnam. We were on a thing called the horseshoe. And it was dry. No beer. It was defensive position and one of the guys, our section commander, Skid Rowe, says, "Let's go back to Nui Dat
- 29:30 and have a night on the grog." And we said, "How do you do that?" He said, "You volunteer." "Volunteer for what?" He said, "They're doing SAS [Special Air Service] selection." And I says, "So how do you work that?" He said, "We go back today, tomorrow morning we have the selection day, to go for the interviews, that sort of stuff, that night on the booze, the following morning, back to the horseshoe. So we get two nights." And we all thought, gee that's a good idea. "But what if we - we don't want to go to S.."
- 30:00 "Don't worry, just say a lot of rubbish, you know and they'll just cross you out." So we all went in there, said, "We're going to volunteer." Put our hands up. Gets in for the interviews and they had the OC [Officer Commanding] of the squadron in Vietnam at the time, some other brigade officer and a psyche guy. And we all got interviewed and we - "Oh yeah, I want to get out there, I want to kill people, I want to do this, I want ra-ra tear things, leap over hills and jump out of planes." "Yeah, that should have fixed that, I won't get there."
- 30:30 Had two good nights, went back. Got back to Australia and went to the reinforcements wing and I said, "What's on?" "Oh you've got a cadre course to go to, over at the west. You've been selected for SAS." And they're going, "What?" And here we are, all six of us, so how'd this work? How do we get out of this? We got picked. It backfired on us. So we did the cadre course and I ended up being in base squadron over in the west for two years, where I met my wife for the first time.
- 31:00 And we got bored with that, as you do as a young soldier. Said, "Oh bugger this, I'll go back to reinforcement wing," and I hopped on a flight for Vietnam again in '70. And I joined 8RAR. And they were a pretty good bunch, we had a - at that time then there was a lot of, what's the word? There was a lot of
- 31:30 incidents. There was people being involved in fraggings, shootings, and so forth. Very untidy. And we had a company commander that was in Delta Company 8RAR that was Major Peck, was a absolute pig. No one liked him at all. And he had a very, he had a simple ethos
- 32:00 about - he said, "Delta Company will travel light, will travel fast, and will hit hard." And we thought, "Oh great." So with that in mind, he reduced our rations to one small can of fruit for breakfast, one small can of meat for lunch, one large can of meat for food, no

- 32:30 hexamine or triazine, as they called it for heating purposes and plenty of joopy joos. So – and of course, we – this is no good, we can't survive like this and he enforced it. So when you'd start a six weeks operation, you'd absolutely load everything down because you knew you weren't going to get a resupply. So you'd carry six weeks of stuff out there and it was killing you, you know, so. And we had a wonderful company 2IC [Second in Command], big tall guy, Keith Anderson
- 33:00 lovely guy, he's – I only just met him last Anzac Day, he's doing very well. He knew what was going and he would actually land – set up Land Rovers to help guys down to the helipads. And the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] used to say, "Why am I having lifting this off? I've only got nine guys in the back." But we were carrying ten guys bloody rations, you know. We were heavily loaded.
- 33:30 **Did you go to school in Bankstown?**
- Yeah, no- no sorry, no. Not Bankstown, in actual fact I was born as I said, in Bankstown, in my grandmother's house and that is now the bowling greens for the Bankstown RSL [Returned and Services League]. I often drive past there, it was a beautiful old house I remember it. But we moved, Dad finally bought a house in Cabramatta and we moved there and we went to Cabramatta West Primary, oh sorry St. Peters
- 34:00 Catholic School at Mount Pritchard. And then Cabramatta West Primary and then Bonnyrigg High. And we were the first students, in actual fact our first six months of high school, we spent at Cabramatta West – Cabramatta High and you had two high schools, two complete high schools wearing two totally different uniforms and you can imagine the animosity between the two types, just walking past each other going from class to class. And
- 34:30 it was like, I mean, the demographics of it. They were all from the local suburbs but as soon as you put the school uniform on, put them in the same environment, and then it was just asking for a fight, you know. And we did, we'd fight, you'd get in there and you'd have your shirt torn and your – and finally they moved us into our new school and – very colourful schools. I mean in those days, we lived
- 35:00 I'd say about three kilometres from primary school, five or six kilometres from the Catholic school and it was either pushbike or walk. And it was nothing to see as soon as the old bell'd ring and the kids'd all come charging out, you'd see all the kids walking down the street and it's not just walking down the street, it was walking home and the buses were only there for
- 35:30 people who really lived well out on and in those days we had a lot of market gardens and all the dairy farms out towards Badgerys Creek and Kemp's Creek and all those places. And it was all dairy farms out there so those people used the buses, but the rest of us, I mean, walked out and just walked home and you got home in time to – Mum to yell at you and run around the paddock a couple of times then have tea. Boiled
- 36:00 potatoes, two other vegetables, usually turnips and parsnips and some sort of meat. And you could always tell when it was Wednesday, because it was mince and Sundays was a roast dinner, whether it was hot or cold, it was a roast dinner and we were very set in a very Anglo style lifestyle in those days. When you go back to Cabramatta now and you look at it now and you think, "Wow! It's very different."
- 36:30 But must admit that my Mum does enjoy living down there, she wouldn't trade it for anywhere else.
- What did she do? She was in the air force, wasn't she?**
- Yeah, she was a catering assistant. And she served Bankstown there and she – her messing supervisor was the – a bloke by the name of Rollo Kingsford-Smith. Who was a – I think a second cousin or something to Kingsford-Smith. Then she moved
- 37:00 up to Parkes. And she saw the war's end at Parkes, at the big air force dump up there, where they were all aircraft and started demobilising them and pulling them apart and so forth. And then she was, she got out of the air force in '46, I think it was and got married and had me. And her life started all over again. But it was – school was probably
- 37:30 I think back on school years and New South Wales was always doing something different. And I mean, and they never thought about the kids. They would – you'd go in there and he'd say, "Rightio, try this." And you'd do something. "Hey, you're pretty good at that, you can do that." No that was, we – I started my first year in high school based on my academic, either good points or bad points or lack of
- 38:00 primary school. And I had science and algebra and maths and all – maths I was not very good at, still not very good at. But science I was a real whiz. I could blow things up like nobody's business. And my first year in high school, I thought, this is good stuff, this is, I can – I'm really enjoying this, I had my eyes totally focussed and then they brought some sort of organisation, I think it was called the Winding Plan or something and they came in and they
- 38:30 done a square peg, round peg type activity with all of us. And suddenly I was in a – I think a B class and after the little test, I went to a D class. And instead of getting science I ended up with biology and general maths and – it was very, very uninteresting. I failed biology badly.

What was the idea behind the..?

- 39:00 I don't know, I think that they were trying to, I mean, it was – the idea was to get better value for the teachers and put everyone – because in the old system obviously there was people that were struggling, and other people – they had no way of separating the way of the good people and the bad people in academic teaching. So they said, "Right we'll just do a test, okay, you're that and you're that." And they put us, separated us that way, but the trouble was,
- 39:30 quite a few of us really were doing well in subjects. That's why I liked when my daughters went to school over here at Wavel, they said, "Right, you know." The kids have got such a wide selection of subjects to go to. They can say, no, I don't like that, I'll have that. You know what I mean and of course Samantha, loved music and she just dove into it completely and I thought, "By jingo I'd like to have been able to have that sort of a attempt." And I mean, a lot of kids would have
- 40:00 I mean they'd have done famously with that sort of smorgasbord of things you can do, I mean there was huge a range of bloody stuff you could do, but in those days, it was just general maths, or maths one and two if you were smart, science if you were smart, biology if you weren't. They were – it limited a lot of guys and I think probably when I went out – I wanted to be a motor mechanic
- 40:30 when I left school, I thought, that's what I want to be. But straight away, the maths let me down. Cause, I – it was not one of those, I was never a stellar person in that area there, so panel beating next. No, couldn't get in cause every Tom, Dick and Harry wanted to be a panel beater. I said, "Okay, can't be a panel beater," ended up being a chair maker.

Tape 2

00:31 How did you get into chair making?

Well, we started looking around for jobs, and I mean, in those days, the – you didn't have a CES [Commonwealth Employment Service], you could apply for unemployment benefits, minimal. So I found a job as – and I thought it said, "cabinet making." And – but it's chair making. There is a relationship and it was working for, Hare and

01:00 Murray and Son. Botany Road, Botany. So you get off the train at Redfern and you walk down. And I went in for an interview and said, "Oh yeah, you can be a trainee apprentice. It's a three year course and you do cabinet making at TAFE [Tertiary and Further Education]." "So what do you do?" And he said, "You make chairs." So I gets in there and of course they have a master chair maker and a master polisher, probably was

01:30 only shop at that stage, that still had it. And he had a polisher's mound. And I can see the blank look on your face, "What is a polisher's mound?" It's – if – I'd love to have been able to dig it off the floor. You imagine in a French polisher's shop, he's got his spray gun, he hangs it, it drips, just a little drip, every now and then. Well this polisher's mound was this wide and about that deep

02:00 in shellac. Smooth. You could, I often did it, you could get down there and just wipe it and you can imagine the deep glaze into it. That's an old fashioned, it had been there about 20 years. Polisher's mound. And I thought to myself, years after, "My God," to dig that thing up and cut it in half, and then polish it. Because it was just – it was like glass. But he was a very good polisher and the master chair maker; we made chairs for example, the Lions

02:30 Club of Australia, the Rotarians and that sort of thing, they would have their chairman's chairs for the Lions Club, we made two big chairs, they would have been, the arm rests were about that wide, just silky oak, with polished lions – carved lion's claws on the end, and a polished lion's head up above. All in silky oak. And we done the rest of the chair with leather trimmings. That's the sort of – the chair you

03:00 would make. Course, there was no money in it. You could only, you know, sustain yourself so often. So they then, in a very short period of time, about my second year into it, we were doing mass production. Bevelling legs, you'd take a normal leg like that and you'd put a shamf on it on a drum roller. So you'd stand in front of a drum roller all day. You can imagine how quick this is, I'm starting to lose interest here, de-de-de. And that's what you did, you went to work

03:30 and you put bevel edges on legs. Because they had a contract to, rightio, Parker wood, would make the backs, Artwood would make the legs and Hare and Murray would do the centrepieces. And then another organisation will put the whole thing together. And you were no longer a tradesman, you were a process worker. So I applied for the army

04:00 Was that the main reason?

Yeah, that was – just killed it straight away and I – it was good work I suppose, I mean they were a good bunch to work for, Sergeant's Pie Shop was up the road, that was good fun. They used to make Sergeant's pies like you've never seen them and you've never seen them again. They had metal trays and you went in the morning, they'd send you up there, pretty scary really, my kids don't understand this. The master chair maker would start

- 04:30 work, he was a addict, Bex addict and he'd have in the morning he'd have a cup of coffee, and a Bex powder. Sorry, cup of tea and a Bex powder. Morning tea, he would have a cup of tea and a Bex powder. Lunch he would have a cup of tea, Bex powder and a Sergeant's pie. That's what he - and you know, undo the wrapper, pour it down, drink it. That was
- 05:00 unreal lifestyle and you're sort of growing up with this, going, you know, "You got a headache?" What a silly question to ask, you know. But when it went to mass production they started winding all the people off, getting rid of them, we had people like spindle operators, lave operators, all master tradesmen with years of experience in making quality stuff, and they were being paid top wages at that time, I was on
- 05:30 five pound, five pound a week. And it cost me 21 shillings to travel weekly, from Cabramatta to Redfern. So you get up in the morning, there was no sun up, and you'd come home and there was no sun. And you spent most of your time on the train. Five pound. And then someone said to me, "Why don't you join one of the services?" I said,
- 06:00 "Why?" "Well, you get 17 pound a fortnight." I thought, "17 pound! You sure?" Went and checked this out, hey it's 17 pound, ay? Gee that's alright. So I went down and applied and they said, "No you can't join, you've failed the medical." I said, "What's wrong?" And I still laugh about this, I had a growth, on the back of your spine, there's the - say that's the
- 06:30 coccyx there, and I had a little growth above it, which was actually widening itself, going in. Growing in. Forming another hole. So someone, some wag said, "You've got twin ports." So, I said, "Rightio." So I went to the doctor's and he said, "It's easily fixed, it's a good thing to do because sooner or later it would join up with the canals inside and it would destroy your vertebrae and you could be paralysed.
- 07:00 It's a good thing to get this fixed." Because no one has medicals in those days, you're fit, why do I go to a doctor's unless I'm crook? So we got that fixed and of course I came out of the surgery in a hospital in Fairfield and - hungry, god I was hungry. And they said, "Oh, you're on a special diet." I said, "What's the diet?" He said, "You can have tripe." And I said, "Okay, so
- 07:30 what about breakfast?" "Tripe." Okay let's try for tea. "What about tea?" "Tripe." "Nothing else?" "Nothing else. You can have it boiled, you can have it done in a white sauce, and you can have it boiled. How do you like it?" Well I'd never tried tripe and after seven days of tripe, I - you can trust me, I'll never eat it again. It'd be a bad day in hell before I'd eat -
- 08:00 So having survived seven days of tripe I reckon the army'd be a piece of cake. So I got in the army in - I joined the army 11th February, 1965. And a good bunch of guys we went in with. Most of them are retired now, or all of them are retired now. I'm probably - I'd be the only one still around out of that group, there was a good 40 of us.
- 08:30 That still sort of got a link to the service. But I think plus also there was, there was the mundane travelling, you'd - I mean you'd get on the - get up in the morning, Mum'd make me a bit of breakfast, you know, some ungodly hour of the morning, and I'm not saying you've got a good life in the defence force or the army, you know, you - it's not much better.
- 09:00 But you'd go off to the bus stop, and the same group of people'd be there every day. Five days a week. Year in, year out. And you'd get on the same, you'd go down the railway station where, we're like sheep. Go down there and you'd stand in your spot, cause at that time of the morning, that's your spot. And you'd get onto your spot on the train. And all around you would be the same people. And they'd all stand - no one would stand - oh sorry, I'll move over a bit, you know, they'd
- 09:30 they'd stand in the same spot, and then you'd go to work and no one'd say anything. And we spent the bulk of your travelling life, standing next to people, who only lived two or three houses down the road from you. And you could probably write on your hand what you've said in two years. And you go, "There's got to be something better." So I gotta take a twink at the world, so to speak, you know this is crazy. So I said,
- 10:00 when the army thing came up, and the money that was a big push, you're a young bloke going, you know, five pound doesn't go very far. And especially when your mother sits there and goes, "And I'll take that pound off you. Thankyou." And I says - I had big ideas of spending and so forth. Beer was only - a schooner, you could buy a schooner for two shillings, that's a big pint. Reschs in those days. So we used to drink at the Cabramatta Inn.
- 10:30 And in those days also, there was the - the worker's pubs were Reschs pubs, Tooths Pubs were the older pubs, and that Johnnie come lately, Millers, they had all the entertainment and girls in mini skirts and all that good stuff and you know and the, course all the other blokes used to drink Millers. Out of necessity. So. They had a pub over at
- 11:00 Bankstown, next to the hospital. And in hindsight I know why it was next to the hospital, it was the Millers Sundowner. And we all used to go over there and have a great old time, bloody, drinking and the pub used to put on shows. And you'd take all the girlfriends along and they'd egg you on - you'd egg the girls on, because they'd have competitions, you know, Miss Lovely Legs and all this sort of stuff. And we were there one night
- 11:30 and they had this stage set up. And a big blind, a roller blind. And they had the Lovely Legs, the most -

the – by applause, you know, acclamation. So all these girls got up there and they were asked to sort of hitch their skirts up a little bit and they sort of, they gradually rolled this thing up. Trouble was, there was one little short girl, on one end. And she didn't realise what she was doing, as the blind was coming up, she was lifting her skirt up, so here's the girls here at the knees, showing off their legs and she's got it up there showing off her knickers

12:00 and of course the entire audience was going crazy about number seven. And the blokes out there going, "So you're picking number seven are you?" And everyone's going, "Yes! Yes!" And then he'd turn round, "Oh no! Put that blind down!" So it was a naïve era then, we had a lot of fun. Fun and games. We had a – I used to go out each night, or a home, and I think I was in the army at the time, we were

12:30 at the Millers and we come walking out, and I got run over by a car. Coming out the car park. I was just walking along, we were all laughing and the mate of mine was in front, Povva Ralph was in front of me, and this bloke comes flying out of the car park, picked me up, threw me up into the air, Povva Ralph reckoned he put his hand out like that and my hand touched his hand as I went flying over one side. I landed on me face, all over the place, they picked me up, run me straight across the road and into the

13:00 hospital. And you know, put all the stuff on me face. I was – all abrasions most than anything else. And discharged me. So I went home and we had a little house out the back, me and me brother shared. So I just went to bed, didn't worry about it. And yeah, that was Saturday night, so Sunday morning, my dear old Mum, makes up a plate of scrambled eggs and bloody fried tomatoes and toast and coffee

13:30 comes up to her two sons to give them. And I'm laying down, face down and she comes in, kicks the bed and says, "Righto you two, here's your breakfast." And of course I rolled over and she took one look at me and went, screaming. So Dad comes running up and – "What the hell's going on? What have you been doing?" He said. "What? What's wrong?" And I – it didn't click, had all these bloody scabs all over the face from where I'd landed on me face, on me head and that there. And I'm going, "Ooh, yeah, a

14:00 bit of an accident last night." And we spent the next 20 minutes scraping all this rubbish off the bloody ceiling of the bedroom. But yeah, it was a good life, as I say. A good life.

What was your parents' reaction to you signing up?

As my father said, "Well we can't stop him. Just let him go." They were not happy about it. They felt I should have got a trade

14:30 in hindsight they probably – from a military point of view, they would have preferred to see me get a trade, do something on a basis where- and they come from a school where, "My son lives here, my daughter lives there, and so forth." So that they're all in a little area. You think about – I go back to my grandparents, my great grandparents, sorry, my parents, my grandparents, my great grandparents,

15:00 and my great great grandparents. Now all of them would have travelled, no more than twenty kilometres from where they were born and all their family, very few of the family, apart from my father, moved, never left New South Wales, to start with. Go out of Sydney? No. Never heard of it. Why? And so they were all, you know. And when Mum moved to – Mum and Dad moved to Cabramatta – "What the hell are you living out there for?"

15:30 Out in the sticks?" Because that was the mentality of the – of the time. So when I said, "Oh I might join the army and go roaming." And so forth. But they put up with it. Said, "Oh can't stop you." You know, "Go with our blessing." But it's – you look at people nowadays, I mean, my kids – Samantha was born in Perth, Rebecca was born in Brisbane,

16:00 and Kirsty was born in Canberra. And they think nothing of it and they've been backwards and forwards for education departments, nowadays of course, we're all becoming more conscious of it because you've got public servants, you've got big companies and so forth that are moving families all the time. So they've gotta structure the education system to suit those needs. I mean, most education systems use

16:30 the Mount Gravatt system. And you would think, well that's good. The drama with that is, they employ the Mount Gravatt system at different levels. An example is, when we moved to Sydney on one of the postings. Let's see, Samantha stood still, Rebecca went ahead a year, and Kirsty went back a year into the New South Wales, that's how they worked.

17:00 And where Rebecca went forward, they said, "Okay, we're doing XYZ." And she, "I don't know how to do that." Because what they did was, they did the year before, and she'd missed that year before. That's the applications that's a real issue with all the people that move their families all the time. Because the state education systems don't cater to that. And in the old days, of course it was, you know, reading and writing, the three As, it was not a great deal, but nowadays,

17:30 it is an issue. So we were lucky in a sense, so you go to school and there was no dramas about, "You've only got thongs?" "Yeah." I've got some wonderful photos somewhere of here in Queensland, I love Queensland, I'm born in Sydney as I said, but I love Queensland, I'm Queensland by choice. Rebecca, little Somerset Hill School uniform and about five of them standing there. Rebecca's got one thong on

18:00 she's only about six. And the rest of them have all got thongs so they're all standing there and it looks like, it's all sort of mugs line up. The kids all lined up there. And it's just that, you could only take this

photograph in Queensland. Because they're all there with one thong on, and, "Where's the other thong?" "I don't know Dad." Didn't know where the other thong was, but she wasn't going to lose that one. But - I mean, that was the beauty of, as I said before, you know that trying to capture what I had as a kid and

- 18:30 give it to my kids so they could understand what I'm saying. You dwell too much on the bad stuff. I said before, you know, the - all the guys that are writing books on Vietnam and that sort of thing. A mate of mine bought one for me. He said, "Oh here's a book I bought for you." "Oh thanks." I read about five pages I think. And become very depressed. Because this guy was obviously getting rid of his ghosts and devils and
- 19:00 so forth and it was just about the worst 12 months of his life. And I looked at him going; there was photographs in there, that just showed him with serious issues. And I - I'm not putting people down, I'm not saying that it doesn't happen, but I have a friend who spent three years in the armed forces,
- 19:30 12 months in Vietnam. The last 30 years, he's a fairly senior fire fighting officer with the Queensland Fire Service. Got a wealth of tales to talk about. Yet he's only focussed on one 12 month period. I said, "What about the fire service?" "That's where I work." I mean, you've got a wealth of
- 20:00 service there, but he's - all he can - he's focussed on this thing here, this - and it's a negative focus. Not a positive focus. It just amazes me that people can not move past that 12 months, you know it's a - it's something that really - they do a - what do they call it? Mind slipping, I must be getting old.
- 20:30 Vietnam veterans counselling, they do a born again, rebirthing process. Guys with post traumatic stress syndrome, lah-di-dah, so forth and they take them out there and they take the wives with them and they have a little bit of a weekend together where they come to terms with their ghosts and so forth and then the very next day, the Monday, they take them in to Enoggera, at the Royal Australia Regiment Memorial and they bury their ghosts symbolically.
- 21:00 Then they walk around the camp and so forth and get over issues and so forth. Trouble is, I've seen a couple of these guys but they're no more crazier than me. And they don't - what they've done is, they've gone to this thing and they've suddenly taken on board, what's been told to them. I'm lucky, in a sense that, I've had family interaction, contacts and
- 21:30 probably as I said before, the preparation, psychological preparation has made my irreverence I suppose to what went on and psychologically I really thank my family for whatever they've done. I mean, I don't have - what is it? Nightmares, I don't have issues, problems, so forth. And I
- 22:00 look at it and I say, I look at guys and I think, "You've got a wonderful family, you have everything going for you, job and so forth. Why do you need to go and do that?" And the way to do it, is - I'm an operations person, I work in operations. And from an administrative point of view, you put your life in a four drawer filing cabinet. Right. And you're in charge.
- 22:30 It's your four drawer filing cabinet, no one else's. Pull the top drawer open, you're in control, it's all the good things. Hence the top shelf. Opens and closes, things come in and go out. It's all the good stuff. Second shelf, comes out, you've got other stuff in there - there's memories, there's - it's all there. Right down the very bottom one, everything bad that happened in your life. When I got run over by a car, you seen mates get killed, see bad things. You
- 23:00 put them in there. They're not going to go away. They're there forever. The difference between a person I believe, in managing, staying in tune with life, is how he manages that bottom drawer. If it pops open every now and then, fine, just close it, get on with life. But most people let that bottom drawer open and then start digging around in it, pulling it all out. It's not going to go away, no matter how hard you try,
- 23:30 what has been done, is there forever. It's how you manage it is the secret, I believe. So, to me, life is a four drawer filing cabinet.

Did you have much counselling when you came back?

No. There was no counselling but I'll tell you a funny story. Because as soon as you leave Dili, or Timor, there is counselling now. So

- 24:00 it works this way. You have a group counselling group, where the warrant officer, Warrant Officer Heggarty, psychological - part of the psyche team. He gives you a general brief and talks to you about such things as, "Right now, remember, when you go back boys, your wife will be doing the lawns and so forth, so don't denigrate her and take.." And I said, I started laughing. And he said, "Shut up Humphries." I said, "Okay." And he started talking about things and every time
- 24:30 I'm about to laugh, he said, "Shut up Humphries." He does that brief, and then you go one on one with a psyche officer. In this case, a young female captain. So, "Come over here, Sergeant Humphries, how are you? You going home tomorrow?" "Yes, yes." "Alright, okay." "Seen much trauma here?" I said, "Oh yeah, a little bit, you know. We used to go down the Coomoorra Circuit there just before the airport and pick up the dead bodies in the morning.

- 25:00 You know cause, the locals would say, "Oh there's a body down there." And you'd go down there and there's an axe in the bloke's head and - payback killings and so forth after the killings and so forth. "Oh yeah. So have you seen any active service before?" And I said, "Oh yeah." She said, "Oh, you were in Rwanda?" "No." "Cambodia?" "No." "Where?" I said, "In Vietnam. Is this a psyche debriefing for that?" And she just looked at me. I'm going - and then she started
- 25:30 saying, "Oh okay, so how do you deal with all this?" I said, "I don't know, what can you say, have a drink." "Oh, so you drink?" And I'm going, "Yeah. Doesn't everyone?" "So you drink to get rid of the problem?" "No, no, no." That was in - she was trying to get something out of it. In the end I said, "Look, I've got no problems with this, but really, I've been through two active tours in Vietnam, this
- 26:00 was a cakewalk compared to that. So let's do the numbers, ticks in the box and go on with it." See? So I walked away and old Hages looked at me and he said, "How'd it go?" I said, "Oh it's bullshit mate, what's going on?" He said, "We've got to go down this road." And he said, "Watch this." So we're standing there and takes the young female corporal over there, see. And she run the same thing. Exactly the same thing. Within, I'd say five minutes of having this girl over there,
- 26:30 had her crying, totally broken down. And I'm looking at Haggerty and I said, "What the hell?" And he said, "They're good at it aren't they?" And I said, "Yeah, I'll say. Rubbish." But it was just, they know how to target your emotions. Doesn't take much to trigger an emotion. And their way of thinking is that it will release and it will be over and done with. I said, "People who are going to be emotional
- 27:00 and need that sort of release, really are in the wrong game."

But would people know that before they join up?

Well, I don't - I mean, I don't think so. I mean, I don't think there's a recruiting brochure anywhere in the defence force that tells you about what you're liable to be confronted with in the army. Tells you about me, because I can be very unpleasant, I mean, a young recruit comes in and stands there and he does something

- 27:30 wrong, I'm not going to be polite about it. Or, I had a case just recently, a very good storeman, he was a high flier, he's going to go places. Big solid West Australian, Cameron is a good man, a little bit of moulding here and there and he'll be okay. But he has an anger issue. He doesn't tolerate fools. So someone nicked his keys to his car and he couldn't find it for 20 minutes, so he lost the plot. Very badly.
- 28:00 And he's out there and he's punching the walls and you could see the anger welling up and I'm going, "Cameron, focus on me. Put a sock in it." And that's all it is, just gotta focus and this guy's twice the size as me. And - but it's - he backed off, calmed down. You've gotta be able to be, if
- 28:30 you expect someone so - sorry say that again. If you expect someone to do something unpleasant, you've got to be a little bit unpleasant yourself to start with, but you've got to be in there with him or her. Can't expect a person to you know, do something while you're sitting having a cup of tea. You've got to have that credibility to say, "Sarge wants me to do this, he's done it, he knows what he's talking about, I'm not going to challenge him on it." And that's what it's all about.
- 29:00 Recruiting posters do not tell you about people like me. I mean and the first time people are confronted with it, most times is in recruit training, at Kapooka. And we probably have about a 5% loss rate. Where they go, "Hm, I better rethink this career." And they make the exit, and there's nothing wrong with that, that's probably the best thing they're doing, for both the defence force and themselves. But a lot of people pursue it and keep going through it and a lot of people
- 29:30 don't understand there is a need for that. I - to me, we get away with murder, within the defence force now, because it's a user friendly environment according to OH and S - Workplace Health and Safety - Equity and I'm an equity officer which is a real laugh. The issues of people being confronted
- 30:00 in a environment that is, they're not being prepared for, as I said before, is always going to be the issue in the defence force. We lose from not psychologically preparing them, and I don't mean giving them a psyche brief, I went through prior to going the first time to Vietnam, we did that Area 17 training, then we do the - what they call Jungle Training Centre at Canungra, and that was
- 30:30 14 days of absolute hell. Where everything was thrown at you, there was no niceties, you were beaten with sticks, you were jumped up and down, it was total full-on and if you fall over, bad luck. And I'm thankful I did it. Because in that bit of psychological mental toughness, that I got from those things there, cause after a while you start, you know the steely narrow gaze,
- 31:00 "You're not going to beat me, you bastard." And that's where the mental toughness comes, nowadays, you're not allowed to confront a person, you're not allowed to push the person to that nth degree. Because if you do that you could have a psychological problem before he even gets out of training. So we'd rather have the psychological problem at the coalface. Which is sad.
- 31:30 None of the brochures will tell you that of course.

Do you think movies have kind of helped some people realise things about war that probably they're not going to see in the brochures.

Well I mean, I must admit, having been brought up on a diet of John Wayne, you know and Hopalong Cassidy where the guys in the white hats never lose their hats in the fights and the – and the guns shoot and the – and they fall

- 32:00 over. And then you see, "Saving Private Ryan," and I'm going, "ooh, oh, that's real." Yeah, I mean that's – yeah, the special effects now, have put a different perspective on a war movie. There's no two ways about it. I mean, I could seriously have – I could sit there and I watched "Saving Private Ryan," with a mate, the first time it came out, and I said to him, "This is not a movie I'd go to watch and enjoy.
- 32:30 It is not what I would call – this is work. It's too close to the truth." Not the storyline, I mean the way they did it. I mean the graphics on it, I'm going, "Whoo!" It was scary for me. I looked at it, I said, "Nah." I'll go back to John Wayne. You know, I know his hat's not going to fall off in a fight. I mean that sounds silly– but I go to movies for entertainment, a bit of historical data
- 33:00 but mainly for escapism, that's all a movie is about. But when you look at what they do. I give all credit where credit's due. "Saving Private Ryan," the historical data, what's the other one, my kids brought me "Band of Brothers." The work that was put into those, was absolutely unbelievable and it's probably good because people go out there now, and
- 33:30 in concert with what I'm saying to my daughters, they look at that and I say to them, "That's real." Knowing full well that it's a movie but the point is, that is as close as you're going to get to the real thing. And that's very scary. So probably it is a good thing that the way they've done war movies now there's, it's a good let-off valve, release valve, pressure valve. To show people that war is not nice.
- 34:00 It's a very untidy way of settling a disagreement. You can't settle an issue because if you look at this country, we fought a very bloody battle with the Turks, and it took us 50 years to sort of talk to each other, let alone become you know, I mean Australians can go to Turkey and have no real great issues and are welcomed as a
- 34:30 visiting country. That took a long time. You know you can get that same issue with the Japanese at the moment. Too many bad memories. You don't get that sort of issue with the Germans. There's a lot of bad memories, the older generation, that era of people. So when you have a war or you have an issue where it's done and in my case I – the Vietnamese at the present moment we have a
- 35:00 six and half million dollar exchange program with the Vietnamese defence force at the present moment over the next five years. And in that we are directly exchanging with the Democratic People's Republic of Vietnam's military hospital 108 in Hanoi, their ebola virus people, for our ebola virus people. And they're all young people, most of them are born mid- 70s, you know, so the war was just ending.
- 35:30 So the American war is not a high agenda on them. But just above these people, you've got the old guard. So when you go there and say, "Right we're going to help you with your malaria problems and so forth." You're suddenly confronted with this paranoia from the old guard saying – and we're one of the few countries in the world, that has a military exchange program with the Vietnamese. There's only two others. So you've got this old guard, so
- 36:00 Timor is the same thing. Human nature. One side wants to go with Indonesia, one side wants to be Timorese. They both had a stance, run an election, and then butchered each other. And you say, "Rightio, well we'll – let's bury the hatchet so to speak and get on with life." No. The scariest thing I ever saw. They'd bring the refugees in from
- 36:30 West Timor, to Dili, once every 14 – every fortnight. The UN [United Nations] refugee boat from WHO [World Health Organisation] would come in. And they'd load the people, process them through the building and then put them on buses that take them out to various camps where they'd assimilate them back into the population. But as soon as those buses went into the main street of Dili outside the port, all the locals would rush over there and be glaring through the windows and you could see these people, actually looking
- 37:00 for someone. Not, "Oh, yeah, welcome back." Uh- uh. Just making sure there was no one there, that had a stance on the other side. Because they would be dead. And it's – the place up at Manatutu where the Filipinos were, I used to look after the Filipinos. When the elections went and they had –as every town in Timor, has this beautiful big hill in the centre, and it's got the
- 37:30 bit statue of the Lady of the Rosary holding hands out like that. And one side of the town totally destroyed, that was pro-Indonesia, so the other side was totally destroyed, by you know, tit for tat. And then they turned on everything Indonesian and destroyed all the infrastructure and the only thing they didn't destroy was the church and the Lady. No on either side, touched that and every
- 38:00 town in Timor is the same. Destroyed everything. Except the church and the bloody statue. Everything else went. And those two sides of the camp, you'd go – drive up the road and all the rice paddies are out there being fertilised – cultivated and the rice is growing, raining and so forth and every now and then you'll come across a couple of patches where there's a tree growing out and the people that live there, are pro-Indonesian and they haven't come back.
- 38:30 And no one'll touch their ground. So it'll take a long time for the hatchet to be buried there. Human nature. And I – to me, we've – as I say, war doesn't resolve an issue because you won, at the last battle

or the last score taking, or whatever, because then you've got to wait for generations to get through the process of dying out for want of a better word and for young people to come and grow up and say,

- 39:00 "Hey, this is not too bad. Haven't had a shot fired." Think of how long it's going to take Iraq, for people to gradually die and it ain't going to happen over night. It didn't happen overnight in a lot of places. It's just a gradual process. So war is not the answer, obviously.

We had a good quote recently, the way to stop war is to send the politicians to the front line.

I think that's - anything would be better

- 39:30 than what we do now. I mean, I'm a professional soldier. And it's what I do. But having seen it up front in its worst form, yeah anything's got to be better. But on the same token, you don't turn a blind eye. You don't turn the other cheek. Because the world is - and I mean it's - it's just like road rage. I mean, you - "Excuse me don't do that." And you don't turn a cheek because as soon as you turn the cheek someone's going to knock you straight over
- 40:00 and the world is not much better, I mean we continually sit there and I mean I've been privy to a few things, I look at in the course of what I do in operations. And the amount of times this country has come close to a blow-up in the last ten years has been quite scary. And if only for the good judgement of
- 40:30 the people on the deck at that day, that these people were able to exercise sound and cautious judgement that nothing happened, I mean there was two submarines tracking one of the destroyers off Dili. And the submarines kept on running underneath it, and we were all sitting, you know we were all following the communication
- 41:00 and half expecting to see communication come back going, "Submarines sunk." Or "Ship sunk." But caution was showed on both sides and they separated. But I haven't seen something like that happen, not since the Cold War era of the '50s and '60s.

Tape 3

- 00:34 One of the things that really got me was the safety record that you're brought up with our own air force and the travelling public so when we did our first lift in 2RAR with American helicopters, you're flying along and we're all hovering along and you're sort of wound up in the activity of the moment so you're not
- 01:00 paying attention to your immediate surroundings, you're looking a bit further out because we used to travel on skids. You put your feet on a skid there, you'd have your weapon across your lap, pack on your back and you'd be travelling and you do silly things. You wave to the guys in the next helicopter and they'd wave back. You'd then you'd suddenly say "We're going in are we?" because normally when you start banking to go in to a LZ [Landing Zone] you'd get a tap on your shoulder, you know, thumbs up, get ready
- 01:30 but there was nothing. And I'm looking around. They're all still up there and we're by ourselves. As we got out of, we were in the centre flight as we dropped out like that there was no sound. The motor had stopped and we're just auto-ing down. The next you know the big negro bloody door gunner, load master reached across, huge big hand, grabbed you by the scruff of the neck
- 02:00 and you've got great big pack on and you've got your weapon and you've got all this paraphernalia hanging over you, you weigh twice your body weight and he just goes - and bundles it all up in the centre of the floor. We hit the middle of this road, bang, bounced. They don't have wheels; you've just got a pair of skids. I've seen photographs later on, the skids actually bent right out and they make it bounce a bit.
- 02:30 But your backside is sitting on a metal floor, it doesn't bounce that well. But we landed all right, it just auto-gyroed straight down. We're all going, "So what do we do now?" throw us all out. Working with the yanks was an issue. You get used to them. They become very efficient getting in and getting out of LZs. Anyone that's operated on their flights will tell you that. They'll come in
- 03:00 to a small LZ and they'll land four helicopters on the one area. Hit and by the time the momentum is banking up like that, you've gotta be out, go, goodbye. So we load into the chopper. I've got the gun on me lap and I'm sitting in the centre and when the plane lands, the first two guys, they get out and then you've gotta
- 03:30 drag yourself backwards because you can't crawl because you've got the pack dragging you and you're going like this. It hit, those two guys are gone and as the chopper's lifting along like that, it's getting up high, this big negro load master says, "Sorry boy, you're too slow". He just grabbed me by the scruff of my neck and the back of my pack and I went straight out the door like that. We're about thirty feet in the bloody air, couldn't flap my wings or anything.
- 04:00 Just went into the long grass, you know, crash. By the time I turned around they were history, gone. I learnt after that, be very, very quick otherwise he'll just pick you up and throw you out because he's not

takin' you back. They were a fascinating organisation to work with though. 2RAR had a lot of big lifts, operation Santa Fe

- 04:30 I think we lifted four rifle companies in one hit off a road. There's some memorable photographs - 7RAR was on one side and two was on the other side. We just lifted off. It would have taken every helicopter in Australia at the time to lift probably half a battalion let alone we lifted two battalions off a road in one hit. It's an awesome
- 05:00 insight into the sheer size of the air power in helicopters. We sit there goin, "Oh, look at this, helicopters all over the place". Actually one of the first tasks we got there was road guarding duty and we set up just outside Nui Dat right up to almost to Bien Hoa in the northern part of the province and
- 05:30 a unit from the eleventh armoured cavalry regiment was being moved from Germany to Vietnam and of course they turned up and there were all this huge amount of bloody armoured vehicles just being driven up the road. We were just standing, watching them drive past just mile after mile after mile, a whole cavalry regiment. It took a day and a bit to pass. As they went up we actually rotated right up to the very end. We watched them setting up their big camp, they had a
- 06:00 massive complex they had set up and they had big fires going. I said, "What are you burning all this stuff for?" and they had come out of Germany with all their cold weather stuff and they had woollen liners, pure wool liners for those olive green coats, thermal sleeping bags and they're setting fire to them and we're going, "What are you doing? Don't do that" so all of us are grabbing. We all realised our mistake because
- 06:30 within a matter of weeks the stuff would have turned mildewy and we had to burn it anyway. But it was just, we looked at this stuff, it was priceless. You couldn't get that stuff it was for the northern European winters. And these guys that had come with them had said, "That's it" and they were just burning it all and it was just, made you cry when you looked at it and you couldn't get it, they were burning it. It was an insight into their, the logistic system that they had was unbelievable.
- 07:00 2RAR had some interesting, we had two companies with us, whisky and victor. They were New Zealanders, they were the New Zealand government's contribution to the Vietnam effort. They had a very unusual way of doing things. When it come to drinking and you had a shout the Australian,
- 07:30 "Do you want a beer? So I'll buy you a beer and you'll buy me a beer". But with the Kiwis it was "I'll buy you a case of beer and you'll buy me a case of beer". The simple arithmetic, I used to go under very quickly. You know, buy them one case, you get halfway through your case and you're dead. They were a good bunch but. We had a Kiwi officer in charge of the reinforcement platoon,
- 08:00 the reinforcement unit. In actual fact it's little know, the largest Australian unit to serve in Vietnam, the largest Australian unit was also the smallest and that's the Australian Reinforcement Unit, 1ARU because all the reinforcements that passed through it were all posted to the ARU unit so over a period of time you probably had about ten thousand people in it
- 08:30 and when you look at the Vietnam Remembered book and you go through all the battalions and regiments and so forth when it comes to the ARU it's the largest one. So everyone that went through ARU as a reinforcement was posted to that unit first so it's the largest unit. Statistically it was. That was 2RAR '67. 2 Defensive. Lost a couple of good friends. They
- 09:00 really, you really think about the waste when, I seen we had Graham Norly was a section commander, the section next to us and he got shot on covert, killed. The company medic went out to tend to him and we at the time said, "No, you stay
- 09:30 down," but a medic just kept on going and when he up over him to check him, he got shot and died. So we lost two guys that were an integral part of the organisation. I often think there's a way, how do you remember him. You meet a guy, you know him for about six weeks
- 10:00 or you know him for six years or six months and then he's gone. He's a good bloke, a nice fella, a drinking mate, help you out, lend the shirt off your back sort of thing. How do you continually remember him? There's a lot of memorials around that attempt to do that. But they're always located in the wrong place and up until it would have been third year of,
- 10:30 from the Vietnam point of view before they started bringing the bodies home and they're buried in a lot of nondescript places, the guys are. Little country ceremonies and so forth, cemeteries. A guy in 3RAR came up with a concept for the Royal Australian Regiment Memorial and at the time I didn't understand it, I said "Why?" What he did was, we've got this pathway that weaves through all the conflicts from the British Commonwealth force occupation
- 11:00 of Japan up until the Gulf War. Wherever Royal Australian Regiment soldiers have been involved and every soldier who died overseas in conflict has got a little brass plaque, regiment, unit, day and where he died and as you walk through this thing it's like a history lesson. Anyway I didn't understand, I said "Yeah it's alright, it's very interesting." You've got a plaque in Canberra where the names are all on the bloody
- 11:30 list and so forth. The day we had the official unveiling by the Governor General, about three years ago,

ceremony was over and I was just walking around taking some photographs as you do and up in the carillon part of it, there's this little old grey haired lady and a gentleman about the same age absolutely bawling their eyes out. I thought, "Oh geez.

- 12:00 There's no one buried here. What's triggered this?" The bloke looked up and said "Oh, I'm sorry" and I said, "Oh no. I didn't mean to intrude" and I said, "Why?" He said, "Our brother is buried in Korea. We have never seen him since the day he left or his grave". He said, "At least
- 12:30 now we've got somewhere where we can connect with him." Then I understand what they're trying to do with that. It's a great idea. There's no body there and you're not part of a big wall. Individuals can walk over there to whoever it is, and I know that person, there he is. Very personal without having a body there. A guy from 3RAR thought it up.
- 13:00 There's twelve hundred Australian native trees with these individual plaques scattered and there's about fifteen hundred names all scattered amongst it. That's in Enoggera. Quite an interesting thing to have a look at it. It's just one of those, we have memorials, we have last post, we have Anzac Day and
- 13:30 sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. I think where a person is able to be personable with an individual. I feel sorry, we had, all of us went across on the second tour, there was a good thirty of us bunch of guys went together. We done the ARU as you do and then we went to 8RAR and then
- 14:00 8RAR was going home. We still had time to do so they transferred us across to 7RAR, all the reinforcements and we arrived at the bloody main gate and then we got divvied up into all the companies and so forth and off we went. About, we did, would have given us thirteen months in country. In the last four weeks two guys got killed. Ray Patten and Eric Halkiar. Eric was a big strapping Welshman, Welsh guardsmen
- 14:30 from the British Army. Done the boy's own thing, got out of the Welsh guards. He always had a photograph of him in his big red suit and bearskin cap. He was a good soldier he was, very good soldier. He came out, joined Australian Army to go to Vietnam. Ray Patten was from Coonabarabran in New South Wales, country boy. They were in, I think it was A company 7RAR.
- 15:00 A contact came up and when the firing was over Ray had wore a RPG [Rocket Propelled Grenade] round the side of his head. This side of the head was gone and we had to go down and recognise the body. If you're talking about distasteful things, trying to recognise based on his dog tags and you've got to actually do a physical recognition. I'm looking and I'm saying, "Yeah, that's Ray alright" but every time, something that sticks in your mind, every time you go there to the RAR memorial
- 15:30 on Remembrance Day and Anzac Day there's always a poppy on his and Eric's. I often think, you know, he was an only son and I've often wondered what his family thinks, all those miles away in Wales, he's buried here in this country in Sydney. We sent the flag home, the
- 16:00 Australian flag with a little name plaque on it after the welcome home parade. It seems insignificant, you know, for an only son. But that's what he chose to do. He was a soldier, a Welsh guardsman and then he joined us and was unlucky in the sense he was killed. It's to put Anzac Day probably the best way I can explain it, Anzac Day is all about remembering those people
- 16:30 who are not there now. But more importantly and my mate Perc is the best example of this. You can be up to your neck in mud, it's pouring rain, everything that can possibly go wrong has gone wrong and it's gonna go worse, it's gonna go pear shaped in about thirty seconds flat, it's all bad and Perc will pick something to make a laugh at. So when you go to Anzac Day, Perc,
- 17:00 even though the guys are gone, and they died in the most horrific circumstances, you'll always remember these guys the way Perc does, in the best of circumstances. There's always something positive. I know it's a very weird way of doing it but there is. You can dwell on Ray's exit where it's better to dwell on when Ray was alive because he was a wonderful guy and we had a lot of fun together.
- 17:30 Circumstances weren't ideal but that's what it was all about. You know, the guys there, Perc has a better grasp.

What other coping mechanisms did you use?

I don't know. I think about, we had great times. Perc has a bent sense of humour if that's the word for it. He gets up there

- 18:00 on my fiftieth birthday for God's sake and he's telling a story. He says, "I'll tell you a story about John". He gets up there and says, "When we were in Vietnam, pioneers, we didn't always get our bloody resupplies so to change the monotony we'd change gears with everyone. Rightio, give us your pants. I'll wear your pants, you can wear my pants and change underwear," and I'm going, "Don't tell that joke," "Trouble is Humphries didn't wear any underpants so you always
- 18:30 got short changed with him" And I'm going, "Where do you get that from Perc?" He's got this warped sense of humour, probably to with he's aboriginal. He's got this warped sense of humour that works. When he comes around he's full on and you know, whether you try or not, you can go, "No, I'm not gonna get involved. I will stand back

- 19:00 and be conservative". Uh-huh, not with Perc around. It's just like a big whirlpool. He starts and suddenly he just sucks everyone into it. He's one of these guys that can say, he'll tell a story, he'll set the scene for you "Let's see, it was three o'clock on a Wednesday afternoon. George was wearing a black shirt, Fred was there with his blue shoes on," he'll do the whole thing and
- 19:30 you're not gonna disagree because he might be bloody right. He's just got that wonderful, he can tell the tale like that without repeating himself. I envy guys like that because they're the sort of guys that should be able to drag all these photographs together and then add a monologue or a storyline to each of them. I mean we don't need to write War and Peace but there's something there we can put together that in later generations.
- 20:00 I mean, this is a great idea, years gone by people can sit down there. I think what I liked about this, what intrigued me with this one was not so much the gung-ho, the warry bits and so forth, that's fine but from a researchers point of view it's the, what the person came from. How many times
- 20:30 when people are doing research they say, "Let's see now, what set the fabric of life, what effected these people before they even got involved in this thing or these things". That's why I really like what you guys are doing. I thought, "This is a good idea" because if you get a good cross section it'll be like a microshot of the way of life. People growing up in the Western suburbs
- 21:00 of Sydney, in Perth prior to going to the Vietnam War, the Second World War. It would be amazing if you look at say, ten guys doing what I'm doing now and then ten guys from the Second World War. The difference would be black and white. Then do the same thing with the guys from the Gulf War and all that sort of thing. Because what effect us, me and my forefathers is affecting the guys
- 21:30 that are going to Baghdad now. The guy next door, he's, Suzie's son Ashleigh had a talk to me because he was sort of losing the plot a bit, unemployed, left school too early, didn't want to do anything so had a talk to me. So he joined the army and of all things he's in two battalion, my old battalion and he didn't do Timor but he did
- 22:00 the security detachment in Baghdad. He's come back, pocket full of money, girlfriend, all that sort of thing but he's a different person than he was six months ago. The difference is so dramatic. Not so much for joining the army, that's part of it but having gone to a place like Baghdad and then I think the word we use is, we sent young Natalie
- 22:30 Lehman, she's a laboratory technician. She's doing her degree part time to become a scientific officer but she's got all the qualifications as a laboratory technician of pathology and she's a corporal. So we've suitably dressed her up in a uniform and sent her off to the border on Timor. I said to her, "The only difference between here and there is that you've got a live bullet
- 23:00 in the magazine and in the breach." Now that doesn't seem like much but you just imagine, okay, pick up a rifle, there's nothing in it, it's inert, it will not harm you. As soon as you put a live round that will hurt you and you know it will hurt
- 23:30 you into the magazine then you put it on a weapon, then you cock the weapon and put the safety catch on and you live with that day in, day out and everyone around you does the same thing. It puts an edge on just day to day living. You mightn't ever use it and I would imagine in the current circumstances up in Timor Nat won't use it but she's, when she left here she was suitably nervous. I said,
- 24:00 "Nat, all you've got to remember, remember this for ever and a day and if it's the last thing you do, always check it again, as soon as you pick your weapon up check the safety and always before you're going to do something with that weapon, check the safety". So whenever she's going to carry out something function, because accidental shootings is the worst issue, there's nothing worse because once it leaves the end of the barrel it's in charge of itself.
- 24:30 We had an air force sergeant at the hospital in Dili when I was there in 2000. Got distracted, didn't think, fiddling around with the thing. We were over one side doing something else with the warrant officer and bang, accidental shooting. We flew around the corner expecting the worst because once it leaves the barrel, who knows.
- 25:00 Luckily he was here doing it and ten feet away was a big tree. We come running around behind expecting the worst and he's going "Oh, oh" Had no argument, it had gone. As we looked up the local Timorese worker for him was just sticking his head out from behind the tree. He was just walking up behind the tree when the thing went off and hit the tree.
- 25:30 They were lucky. You just see these big eyes just peering out from behind this tree. That's a scary thing. It's bad enough that you've got to go to war but then you add the unwanted pressure of having a loaded weapon. That's something you've got to get used to as soon as you walk in there. When we were in Vietnam, any infantry unit, the pressure. How do you load pressure?
- 26:00 First of all you've got an environment where there's, let's take the basic common unit, ten guys all of them with a rifle, each of them with sixty rounds per rifle. Give them two hand grenades, put them on there. A phosphorous grenade, very nasty. Put some claymores on your back. I carried a ninety mil recoilless rifle with two rounds, big things. We were walking bombs

- 26:30 and every man next to you is a walking bomb. That's the ad... can either be an adrenalin rush for the nutcase or it could be an anxiety thing or it can calm you down and make you concentrate and think about what you're doing. That's what it should do. To work in an environment that's not safe, an environment that's crazy, you've got to concentrate and think. That's what in most cases it does. It does make you
- 27:00 settle.
- If we can talk a little bit about when you signed up, can you tell us about that process?**
- The process. Scariest old sergeant I ever saw in the world. What's the name of the place now? Watsons Bay. Notable for two things. I left for
- 27:30 the army there and I came back from Vietnam to there. Everyone came through what they called the eastern command personnel depot. Idyllic setting, the nude beach was down the bottom down there somewhere in those days, "Ooh, nude beach". We all arrived there in our various civilian attire with our little bags with what we could carry and this very old sergeant in battle dress that was way too big for him, had all these Second World War ribbons on,
- 28:00 Second World War bloody veteran. He took us for a train ride from Central railway station to Wagga over night and my first introduction to NCOs [Non-Commissioned Officers] and he was quite good until someone crossed him and then he jumped on them. Holy smoke, it was just awesome to see this old guy that would have been a very nice, congenial
- 28:30 grandfather for someone had a uniform and then getting angry and his persona would change completely. Coming back to personnel depots and I come back from Vietnam, full of myself, two inches of glory on my chest. Slip on down to the Watsons Bay hotel, Rose Bay hotel, walked in to there,
- 29:00 "I'll have a beer thank you", uniform, two inches of glory and old guy sitting on a bar stool next to the bar, walking stick, the country cap on. "In the army, eh?" and I thought, "Here we go, some bloody old fool having a go at me" and I was about to say something like this and this hand came across the bar and pulled me over like that
- 29:30 and this bar maid said, "I'd watch your words" then put me back and I'm going "What's going on here?" So took the writing, "I'll just watch this very carefully". This guy started talking, "Oh, when I was in the army we got extra money for qualifying with the musket" and I thought, "Okay mate."
- 30:00 and I looked across at the bar maid and the bar maid's giving me this steely gaze telling me in no uncertain terms, "Button the lip". I said, "Rightio" and then he says, "Then we got an extra two and sixpence when we qualified with the lance," and I think this is getting really, pouring this on. "Then we got extra money with the cutlass" and I'm about to say something
- 30:30 and the barmaid stepped across and said, "You won't say it. Now I'm going to tell you something" 'cause the old guy then said, "I've got to go now, well done soldier, well done," and he walked off, see, with his walking stick. She then explained to me and showed me this photograph and here's this guy. He's got a vest on with a bandolier of rounds across him, he's got a pith helmet on his head and he's holding a lance and he's got a cutlass on the side.
- 31:00 It looked like something out of an Errol Flynn movie except he was a full life member of the British Legion, a full life member of the RSL of Australia and he was with the Bengal Lancers at Queen Victoria's funeral. So I learnt never ever judge a book by its character and never ever, if an old guy in a pub does that to you, just believe it.
- 31:30 It was my entry to the army through Watsons Bay and my exit from Vietnam through Watsons Bay. If anything, a cultural shock. You come out of a Mum makes breakfast for me, catered to my, "I don't like that Mum" to if you don't eat it, you go hungry. After a very short period of time within the defence force you find you'll eat anything
- 32:00 irrespective of what it looks like or tastes like because at the end of the day there's no hamburger shop down the corner in the barracks. It's all you've gotta beef up for tomorrow because you if you don't beef up you're gonna get left behind. That's what you do. You go in there and I'd say about the third day, it would have been the third day, we bore no resemblance to the children that our parents had brought up because you'd go in there and whatever they sloped
- 32:30 on your plate you ate and you ate with a vengeance because as soon as you left there they'd run the buggery out of you and you were just burning it up. So you had to. Someone said, "Oh, what was the cooking like?" I really don't remember whether it was bad or good because really I was just hungry and it's very scary because in years later we had
- 33:00 an exercise in Shoalwater Bay and I was in charge of a hundred and twenty guys to look after, we were acting the bad guys. The boss said to me, "John, I'll give you corporal so and so he's a chef to cook for you. You'll be on ration packs. Get up there in Shoalwater Bay and play havoc with the good guys." So I gets up there and this guy turns out to be, he won a gold medal at the culinary Olympics in Germany and
- 33:30 the divisional commander's wife used to borrow this guy all the time for her soirees, you know, cook all

these little gizmos, beautiful. Anyway about four or five days into this activity and I've got a rebellion on me hands. "Sarg." "What's up?" He said, "Do something about the cooking. If you don't do something they're gonna kill him." I go down there and he's got a little sign up on the thing there and he's called the kitchen

- 34:00 train smash junction. If you work with ration packs, the ten manners, they're just tins. So all he was doing was it was stew for breakfast, stew for tea, stew for lunch, stew, stew, stew and he didn't change anything. I rang the caterer up and I said, "Catering, you'd better get up here, this is important, this guy doesn't know how to cook" He said, "What rubbish, gold medal, culinary Olympics".
- 34:30 He doesn't know how to do a ration pack. The caterer said, "Oh shit", rushed up there. Any catering person you talk to will tell you you've got to know what to do with a ration pack otherwise it is train smash junction. This guy said, "Look, if you don't give a bit of variety. I mean a can of bully beef is a can of bully beef and if you've got ten cans of bully beef, you've got to disguise it
- 35:00 ten different ways otherwise these guys will say why are you giving me bully beef". So you make fricassees you make sliced stuff and barbecue it, there's a whole range of ways you can disguise bully beef but you've got to know how to do it and this guy didn't know how to do it. He could cook a beautiful meal in a restaurant but give him a couple of cans of bully beef and he didn't know what to do. So the caterer came up and taught him how to do it.
- 35:30 That's a secret to soldiers, you've got to be able to. There's no such thing as a good cook, it's a talented cook because you've got a lot of stuff there that because, I mean, if you're out in the field you're eating ration packs. What is it? It's full of salt to keep up your water dehydration and so forth. You watch the chefs on TV and they'll, a pinch of salt this and a bit of that. I'd love to take the bloody naked chef out on an activity and say "Rightio, here's a ten man pack,
- 36:00 see what you can do with that with a pinch of salt sunshine". That's what it's all about, you've got to be able to, and not have four ladies or four gentleman back from the polo court, we'll have ten diggers come in hungry and let them assess you. That's what it's all about. You get guys who will walk away from a meal and say "Thanks cookie" That's great.
- 36:30 They'll be back. They've got to eat. If they say thanks, that's good. This guy, we were up there five weeks and it wasn't 'til probably about the fifth week that it was "You're doing all right mate" but he was learning. His learning curve was like this.

What were they teaching you in your first days of training?

Training to, mainly how to dress,

- 37:00 militarily, how to bearing military, military ethics, basics. How to march, salute, carry a weapon and do all those things with a specific uniform. How to interact with your peers and your superiors in a correct military sense and that's three months,
- 37:30 ten weeks. So you put a group of ten people on the ground and say, "Right, fall in." You just grab the first person, put him there, "Fall in on this man". The very first day they're a gaggle of sheep. They're going, bumping into each other, "What do I do? What's going on?" What they do is they come out there and say "Rightio, watch my instruction. You, come here, stand on that white marker there.
- 38:00 When I say fall in on this person you always fall in on the right. On my command, fall in," and they fall in. "Okay that's not bad. As you were. Get out of there. You, fall in there, right, fall in." It's like monkey see, monkey do, so you do it, parrot fashion. You say, "You guys did alright. Okay in the morning when I get up I'll come down and I'll yell out "Fall in" the duty
- 38:30 private will be the right marker and by the time I turn the corner of that building I want to see the entire platoon fall three ranks on this point". Reveille blows, NCO comes walking round the corner and we're all rushing out there to fall in. At the end of the three months, you do it like that. At the end of three months you have a march out parade, marching in quick time and slow time, present arms, using the weapon, firing the weapon.
- 39:00 There's a whole process. Everyone does it whether you are a rifleman, in infantry, a cook in catering corps or a medic in medical corps, everyone does it, three months. Then when you get to the end of that three months, okay, where do you want to go. Then you get shot off to the various four corners of Australia to do what they call corps training and that corps training will put you in as a truck driver, an engineer, a medic, you name it.
- 39:30 You go off to the various in-house defence schooling systems where we teach people to do things our way. That's depending on what you're doing, trades and so forth, there's another two, three maybe four months training and then you are deemed to be a fully trained soldier at the base level. So in my case I went from three months at Kapooka and then we
- 40:00 marched style very old fashioned style and took a train ride to Wodonga. Big railway station Albury Wodonga and we then did vehicle training as a vehicle storeman.

Tape 4

00:33 **Did your parents come and see you march out at Kapooka?**

No. Dad never drove the entire time of his life. He's a push bike person and was quite amazing really, rode his push bike all over the place. If you know Sydney very well. His mother when she was alive lived at a place called Punchbowl and we lived at Cabramatta. He'd say to Mum, "Oh I'm gonna go and see Mum,"

01:00 and he'd put his three piece blue striped pin suit on and he'd put the bicycle clips around his legs so he wouldn't catch it in the bicycle chain. He'd have the handlebars turned up like this and he'd tie a little gift for his mother up there and stick it on the back there and he'd pedal from Cabramatta to Punchbowl, see his Mum in his three piece suit and then, "Oh well I've gotta go now," and he'd pedal on home. I tell my kids that and they say, "How far is that Dad?"

01:30 and the roads weren't that good then. Thank God the traffic wasn't that bad. He used to pedal all the way. Yeah, they didn't come. They didn't come to my wedding as a matter of fact because we got married in Perth but he was always threatening to ride the bike. March out parades in those days, we had probably about fifty of us in the platoon, probably only about four or five guys had family there.

02:00 **Was it just the one platoon that marched out?**

No there was two platoons that marched out because that was before, in actual fact, that was in its dying days as a single recruit battalion. Would have been about two years later we had 2nd Recruit Battalion in, Training Battalion in Pucka and three was in Singleton so they were churning out all the nashos [National Service soldiers] then for all their activities. We were probably lucky because

02:30 I often talk to guys and said, "We were in the old stuff". They talk about, "You mean the old A block or B block or whatever the case would be." No it was, that's all Kapooka was, it was old Nissan shaped huts.

Silver city?

No. Silver city, see that's it exactly, it was all silver city. When we were there the guys, when we were about to march out the guys had already laid the foundations for all the new multi storey brick buildings and so forth

03:00 and I remember we were trying to get weekend leave in Wagga and they said, "No, no you can't go in there. Occupy your mind, play sport here," and of course in those days it was very limited, it was just a training battalion, there was no sporting activity. So someone said, "Why don't we build ourselves a volleyball court," so we had amongst all the guys in the platoon there was road workers, there was abattoir workers, there was bank johnnies. You name it.

03:30 In those days the building site shut down on the weekend. So we had this weekend off so let's build a volleyball court and play volleyball. I come walking out of this hut and here's two of the engineers, Tex Whittaker, he's got this little skid mounted bloody bulldozer. I said, "Where'd you get that from?" "They're over there, they leave the keys in them," so we built ourselves a little volleyball court, graded it and rolled it. Spent about half a day doing it and then we played

04:00 for a day and a half until we marched out. We had our own private volleyball court and we borrowed all the equipment from the workmen. They didn't know we'd used it. It wasn't a problem in those days. They were the old buildings, the warpy floors. The floor had, it looked like, you've ever seen driftwood when it's been in the saltwater a long time? These wooden floors had been washed so much, had been scrubbed so much, I mean it's, I'd love to look at them now you know.

04:30 They were warped so you'd come in and you'd sweep them every morning and you had white sheets, the instructor would come in in the morning and he'd look at your things and say, "Nuh, wrong," and instead of saying, "It's wrong", I'll just put it over there, it'd end up all over the place, he'd just upend the bed. If your clothing and so forth, it's all over, he'd knock the whole locker over. So you learnt very quickly in the piece, no precious stuff in there and if I want anything not to tip over I'll put it in the bottom.

05:00 So if you had a camera or anything like that it was on the bottom. It didn't take long before you learnt little tricks like you'd stretch the bed. At one stage there we were all sleeping on the floor because you'd make the beds up that night, stretch them, put them, drop the penny on them, "Yep, that's no worries," and then you'd sleep on the floor. That way, as soon as reveille blew you were up and run and you were in front of everyone. We used to run a picket at the shower area

05:30 and it was the old coal burners. The picket fell asleep and didn't stoke the fire, cold showers and it was not nice in winter in Wagga, it was miserable. You'd get down there and you'd go cold shower and you'd see the picket come in, "Sorry guys," absolutely distraught and we were terrible. You learnt very quickly. Adversity is the mother of invention

06:00 is a very true saying when it comes to going through recruit course because if you didn't meld in, adapt, improvise, overcome then you really fell behind very quickly. It was cold. I often think about those days there, they were miserable days. Battle dress, good thing for that sort of weather.

Did they still have the challenge at the end of the basic training?

Yes.

What was that like?

I'll think of the name,

- 06:30 Pomingalarna, the hill. A lot of hard work. We went up and down Pomingalarna in the process of your exercises you did a two kilometre march, a five kilometre march, in amongst that you also had forced marches with packs on. It was all getting towards the end where at the end there was a challenge march. Usually if there was another platoon marching out it was to see who was gonna beat who so there was a lot of adrenalin involved.
- 07:00 That was hard work especially for us. There was no user friendly boots. You got one set of issue tropical studs and one set of issue AB's, boots AB which is a commando tread on them, gaiters, black gaiters, a set of dress black shoes and
- 07:30 someone said the other day, I don't know why they did it, Dunlop volleys was the sandshoe. So if you had a problem with your feet it was supposed to help you relax your feet by wearing these Dunlop volleys. They stunk, they did nothing for your feet and they were probably more of a problem than anything. But everyone had to in the, I'd say what,
- 08:00 about the first four weeks, you would have to get your feet tuned to those ABs [Army Boots] very quickly. The boots we've got nowadays, I've got to say this, the Australian boots we are now wearing, I can put them on now and there's no breaking in phase, it's just wear, beautiful, they are very good boots. It's taken thirty years to get there, but they are very good boots. In those day you had to, you wear wet socks, soak them in brine, do this,
- 08:30 so many wives tales or old soldiers tales about breaking boots in and if you got the wrong wives or old soldiers tale you suffered, extremely because your stock and trade is the bottom of your feet. If you bugger that up, the amount of guys I saw with really buggered feet was terrible. That last challenge at Kapooka was a beauty because it involved at least two circuits of Pomingalarna.
- 09:00 I often wonder about that, that's good old heartbreak hill that is.

Was there a bit of a piss up at the end?

No. There was a bit of a piss up. It wasn't much in those days. You go up to the club there and of course full of ourselves. You would be there in and whilst you were going through the training phase you wore a little red tag and the recruits that came in they got a little white tag, so they're the Johnny-come-latelies so to speak. You're up there

- 09:30 you're about to move out the next day to your and you're wearing a corps badge which is even worse because you've been presented with your badge on parade and these other guys are all standing there, they're only recruits, you're a private and so full of ourselves, when I think about it. Of course then you add alcohol to the occasion and mix the two together. They're up there being marched into their various groups to replace you, they're up there and
- 10:00 we had a thing called Blanko. Before I joined the army if you would have said, "Do you want to use some Blanko?" I would have said, "What the hell's Blanko?" The first thing you do is you march in, issued all your gear, take that over to your room then you form up again and you go up to your local canteen. At the canteen you got this lady that still gives me nightmares when I think about her at the end of the counter
- 10:30 and she's got a big cash register there and she'll say, "Right," and you had to give her three pounds ten shillings or something and for that you got boot polish, two tins of boot polish, there was polishing cloths, yellow for your brass, there was bottles of Brasso, cleaning cloths for Brasso, polish brushes and then you got these, ever seen those nail brushes,
- 11:00 the old wooden nail brushes, you got two of them and this tin of green powder called Blanko. I'm sitting there and said, "I've already got polish, I don't need the polish." "No, no, no, you're not looking at me, you're taking the whole." "But I've bought polish, I'm smart, I've got polish. I've got some polishing cloths too." "No, you're buying whether you like it or not." When it got to the Blanko I said, "What the bloody hell's Blanko?"
- 11:30 I don't know what Blanko is, what's that for?" I found out. What do you do on weekends in Kapooka in your first few weeks? You've got this wonderful set of thirty six pattern webbing. When it's on a person it looks very good but when it's all pulled apart it's just like snakes and ladders, there's a lot of brass that's got to be polished and the fabric, the webbing you've got to wet and like a salt and pepper shaker you sprinkle Blanko onto it and it turns
- 12:00 to like an olive green and you take this little brush and you spend about forty to fifty minutes scrubbing the Blanko into each one. It's all wet, then you hang it in the sun to dry. When it's bone dry you then take your other brush and you dust it off. When it's all dusted off you then wear it. As soon as you've worn it you take it off

- 12:30 and you start the process all over again. As soon as you make a mark on it it marks and you come along, "Did you Blanko that last night?" "Uh, yeah." "Don't lie to me. You didn't Blanko that last night. Okay, extra Blankoing for you." So when they finally stopped using Blanko I thought, only one company would make it, no other company would make it so some company must have went out of business when someone said we're not gonna Blanko webbing anymore. You'd Blanko all this rubbish and they had tables out there
- 13:00 that would have had about forty years worth of Blanko powder on it. It was probably an ecological disaster waiting to happen and right next to it when you covered all your beautiful brass up with Blanko you'd sit there with a very fine toothbrush and get around all the edges because you know the platoon sergeant's gonna come down and look at it and say, he'll pick something there or he'll make you undo your belt, take your brass slides off and he'll look inside them there or they'll make
- 13:30 you lift your boots up and check under there to see if you've polished in there. All these little things, after a little while by about the sixth or seventh week you're sitting there going, "Where're you gonna look now?" and without realising it that's exactly what he's done. The anal retentive type activities that he's doing to you, it's all process, is making you start being proactive with the program and you're starting to go
- 14:00 "Jeez, have I done that?" Teamwork, where does the teamwork start? Right there. You'll get dressed in the morning and somebody'll go, "John, a button." "Oh, thanks mate, I'll check you out," right, bang. You start merging, meshing as a team and you'd pick the ones that had problems where you had social outcasts who wouldn't merge and what they would try and do is go, "Okay, that group is working well, let's pull this guy, he's a bit of a problem, stick him there"
- 14:30 and they'd try and find a group that would do it. They wouldn't do it the whole idea was to get these people thinking and working as a team. They would never be a team unless they were lucky enough to be posted together but this is the first approach of being part of a team. If they can't be a team, there's no such thing as a loner so they've got to work as a team. That's the first attempt, anal retentive stuff obviously but it's where they can start, ok.
- 15:00 And you can imagine, down in a platoon commander's office in recruit training he'd be going over your little report cards. You know, he'd go, "Yes, this man's taking to Blanko polishing quite well. This guy is excelling in boot polish." It's all about "yes, they're merging as a team." The report cards are not that much better when they come out. We all laugh about it, you know. "Yes, top soldier, senior this.
- 15:30 Most improved." I hate most improved. Was I that bad? Most improved at Blankoing? It really, when you say I got a prize for being most improved I say, "Oh my God, did you?" bite your lip John, don't say that. "Oh that's wonderful, well done." "I was most improved" from what? It is, it's where it starts, where the process starts and it never
- 16:00 ever ceases. Fair enough you go from recruit training to corps training. Corps training is where you really start using skills that you never had before. You build on your team skills and you start building the team spirit, the esprit de corps if you like that's gonna take you into an activity where you're using stuff that you're now training with. In my case I went to as a vehicle storeman
- 16:30 and I enjoyed it, it was interesting. I got to drive a lot of trucks.

What did you put down for your choices?

I thought you were gonna ask that. Okay. Don't ask me to repeat this. What was I saying? The driving aspect.

Putting down your corps choices.

Corps choices, oh yeah.

- 17:00 I got in there and I had aspirations. I could see myself as a tank driver. One of those nice little black berets, a shining blue badge. I used to sleep at night, "Get in my way now and I've got it." I get in there and you go through a process, what they call selection process. They sucker you in every time. "So what do you want to do Private Humphries?" "Armoured Corps sir" "Would you accept"
- 17:30 "No sir, armoured corps sir, that's what I want, armoured corps." "I've got three choices for you". I thought, "Gee that's very nice of him, three choices, gee I could do this." "You've got ordnance", "Okay", "Ordnance" "Yeah" "And ordnance", "There's nothing else?" "I've already told you the three choices and they're the three choices you've got" "Oh". So I took ordnance with no issues. But I got to be a vehicle storeman, it only lasted eighteen months. It was the most, what's the word,
- 18:00 I still tell stories about that period of life in the army because the entire back compound at Moorebank was full of old World War II trucks, cars, planes. It was all there and I could play with it. I was like a big kid, driving staghound armoured cars, Bren gun carriers, bloody trucks, Studebakers, GMCs, old Macks.
- 18:30 "What do you do for a living?" "I play," it was wonderful. All you had to do was as a vehicle storeman, you had to go in to work each day, get an old vehicle, in our case we had an Austin Champ, you put

some petrol in drums in the back and you drive around. You had a series of vehicles you had to go down, put new fuel in the vehicles, start them up, run them for a while and take them for drives round the blocks. When you've done that, bring them back, park them, drain the fuel then find another vehicle and fill out log books.

19:00 That way you kept them turning over. I was in A vehicles having a great time. Of course ducks too, we had them. Anyway one of the vehicles I had there was a remote controlled willies jeep, radio controlled willies jeep from 1965. What they did was, it was done at the Royal Easter Show, they had four of them. They removed the back section out of the willies jeep and where

19:30 the diff is, just there, the axles, they put a bicycle tractor seat type thing and you sat in that with your legs out either side at a series of pedals they had welded onto the real pedals coming back. Then they put a bit of Hessian cover over the top so all you could see was just a little bit out by the sides and they gave you this tiny steering wheel which is just above the diff running through

20:00 to the real one. What they did was at the Royal Easter Show in '64 or '65, 'Army trials new radio controlled jeeps and they'd have the things driving around first of all with the bloke in it and then he'd fall over and he'd be trying to steer it comical like and then they'd have the guy with a big cardboard box with a big long wire on it and he'd be out there trying and these things would be doing all these circles around. We used to drive them around the camp in Moorebank and you'd see us just driving down the road with no one in them. We had so much fun.

20:30 People just didn't realise. They were a cow of a thing to drive because that steering wheel was not very user friendly on tar, you know, you get, you always had to have someone sitting, we'd put him in the passenger seat and he could tell us if someone was coming up behind us because you couldn't see anything except just a bit out along side. Radio controlled jeeps. After that I got, as you do in those days, I got bored.

Can I just ask you there what was ordnance corps training, what did that involve?

21:00 Depends what you do. Ordnance is, they're the blanket counters. You could do vehicle storeman, ammunition storeman, operator supply, basic storeman, POL [Petrol, Oil and Lubricants] storeman and then you'd go on to the administration field, clerical types, that sort of thing. Ammunition storeman is probably the, ammunition technicians

21:30 explosives, bomb disposals, that's all Ordnance. So all your bomb disposal people now, POD's that's all Ordnance Corps. Vehicle storeman was interesting because you got to play with all the big vehicles. You had the most qualified licences of all. Your licences would be about this bloody long with all of them. Basic storeman you could be counting blankets one day and potatoes the next day so it was diversity so it would depend on what field you were in depended on what and all the training was in one location at the

22:00 RAAOC [Royal Australian Army Ordnance Corps] school in Bandiana. So if you were a vehicle storeman you went down there and you did it down there, if you were ammunition you did it there. All your basic training for those fields was at RAAOC centre in Bandiana. It's diversified a lot more now of course but it was interesting. I only lasted eighteen months.

So how was it that you ended up with the vehicles?

Again it was one of those choices, you walked in and he said, "Who wants to drive a truck?" and I said, "I'll have a go at that," and straight away I'm doing a vehicle storeman's course.

22:30 If you weren't quick enough it was the first five guys in the door, right, you're over there. "What are we doing?" You know so the old system of, "How did you get that job?" You know, it was picked for you. But I tried to get into armoured corps from there. I kept putting in applications, applications, applications, kept on getting knock backs, knock backs, knock backs and then someone said, "I'm sick and tired of these applications, let's approve one."

23:00 so they did but instead of armoured corps I got infantry and I've been in infantry ever since for my sins.

What did you think when they first said, "Rightio, infantry"?

I was happy with it, I really was. In those days Ordnance was based around BOD's and COD's. COD was a Central Ordnance Depot and

23:30 BOD was Base Ordnance Depot or as some wag would say, "Burnt Out Diggers" and they were predominantly old people with a sprinkling of young people. It was funny because they were probably, they were the largest organisations in the army. Probably fourteen, fifteen hundred people in an organisation like a base Ordnance depot but you could drive round the entire camp during the day and not see one of them until that knock off whistle and they'd come from everywhere. You'd never see them unless there was a fire or knock off whistle.

24:00 I was glad to get out of it because it was a nine to five job. Base Ordnance Depot, nine to five, big organisation, I said, "Nuh," so I went to infantry, did a tour of Vietnam, came back, went to SAS, went back, did Swan in Vietnam again, came back. I was in 5RAR at the time in Holsworthy sort of a bit jaded

24:30 as you do get so I put my hand up for a trip to Vietnam again and they rung me up and said, "Oh, you're off," and I thought, "Beauty, I'm going to Vietnam again, okay, fine" and, "You're going to six," and I thought, "Hang on, six is not in Vietnam. Where are they?" "They're in Singapore." Okay, so I arrived in Singapore and I probably had, probably one of the best postings for a single man

25:00 I've ever had. If my eyes tend to glaze over on this one it's because it was good. Garrison life, exchange rate was for every Australian dollar you got four Singapore dollars. You get a pint of beer for fifty cents Singapore, cameras and watches were dirt cheap, so were Volvos. VAT was great and Singapore was just damn friendly and three years.

25:30 When I came home someone said, "Oh, we've gotta go home, that's a bummer." It was a great life. We did exercises and so forth but it was just, it was garrison life like you dream about. In actual fact I was only talking to the padre just recently, at a wedding down at Mount Tambourine. When we were on garrison, first of all we were at Changi

26:00 and then we moved from Changi to a place called Sembawang and the garrison, the camp we were in there was Kangol. Kangol had its own little Catholic chapel, had a nice big altar in the front there, the tabernacle and so forth but it had a hollow section behind. So if you got guard duty, picket duty, it gets pretty boring, it's hot and temperature so we would just

26:30 slip in under the church there and have a sleep. If you're not careful you'd oversleep. It used to be funny because the chaplain at the time was a bloke by the name of John Tinkler, he's retired to Broken Hill now. He was a real wag. He'd come in on a Sunday morning and he'd sort of, somebody would be playing the altar boy bit and he'd come out with all his robes on and he'd walk up to the thing and he'd go kick, kick, he'd give the thing a kick a couple of times before the service would start and then sort of

27:00 look the other way as if there was anyone silly enough to be still sleeping in there, they'd bolt. Some of the things we did. It was a very good posting. I've got some lovely photographs of those times. People did things.

Can I go back and ask you about, you would have had to do infantry corps training wouldn't you?

Yes. We did ours at Ingleburn at the old infantry centre. It was, you start out life in first of all in what they call battle wing.

27:30 You do all your basics there and that's again three months which culminates in a very vigorous bloody end of exercise. From there in those days you straight away go to reinforcement wing which is the other side of the main headquarters. When you leave there you all qualify as a basic rifleman, straight into reinforcement. Those guys that want to go on

28:00 to signal platoon or mortar platoon or pioneers they all go over to specialist wing where they will take further training. Most of us went straight to rifle wing. Rifle wing was riflemen. When we got there we had about four weeks, would have been four or five weeks and in that time we did JTC [Jungle Training Course] and as soon as you do JTC which is ten days, my introduction to Brisbane,

Was that at Canungra?

28:30 Yeah. Come up on the Brisbane Limited to South Brisbane. Step off in battle dress and it was sweltering hot up here. I still remember all those beautiful hanging plants and so forth. You walked across the road and there was a pub right across the road and there was no women in it, I remember that. All the men were drinking there and all the women were all in a little area round the back there because they weren't allowed in the bar

29:00 which was very funny. Very old fashioned pub style. We came back from that, took seven days pre-embarkation leave and then we were gone over to Vietnam.

At what stage did you know that Vietnam was your ultimate destination?

I think by the time, well, when I came up, when I was in vehicles we came up from Bandiana to load the HMAS Sydney

29:30 for 1RAR going to Vietnam. That was great because the old Sydney was a rust bucket then. We had a great big ramp built from Garden Island dockyard went up say the deck's there and then it came over a lip and then on to it. We drove all the trucks, the land rovers that sort of stuff got them up there and got them all tied all down. Most of them, there's some good photographs of them all strapped down but we also put

30:00 caterpillars on. They slung them from the truck carries on to the deck and then we started them up and then we manoeuvred them across the deck into their position but you'd turn the motor off and you could hear all this stuff like that and we're going, "What the hell's that?" and one of the navy guys says, "Oh, it's all the rust from underneath just dropping off, it'll settle in a bit." In the sponsons around there you'd have

30:30 the forty millimetre guns, you have round holes like this and they're for the water to wash out in high

seas and so forth but every now and again you'll see one that's got an add on hole. Grey paint over that, you know. I said, "You're gonna go to sea on this?" We had to eventually use wooden planks to manoeuvre the caterpillars into their right locations. So one guy'd be driving and there'd be two guys picking up planks and dragging them

- 31:00 around the front. It wasn't very user friendly for that sort of stuff. We loaded that and I thought to myself, "Well, this is the direction where the army's going to." From that point onwards everyone was going. It wasn't a matter of, you know, when, it was just you were going.

What did you know about what was going on over there?

We were not getting any more information than what the press were getting. The army was

- 31:30 not as modern. It had a concept about passing information on but it never came any further down the chain than probably Canberra. You only did things or found out things that were directly operationally related. So if you were involved in loading the thing then you got to see it first hand but for any other storeman you wouldn't have known something was happening or your organisation was part of a support process because there was
- 32:00 very limited in its exposure and telling people about what it was doing. When you think back now a lot of the activities that we've done in that era there's probably a wealth of information we still haven't gleaned from the personal perspective where, I remember we loaded the Jeparit why? Because they made it a navy ship.
- 32:30 The big potato strike was on. They woke us up out at Moorebank, said, "You're going into Garden Island. Into the back of the vehicle." Loaded up, we had about sixty of us, plus stevedores and army terminal people. Gets in there and we parked, trying to think of the name of the wharf now, down from Garden Island. We were parked in a side street and of course
- 33:00 the whole place was blockaded. No one was coming on to the ship or going off it. We were just standing there, car pulls up, out jumps this navy guy, walks straight through the picket line, "What's going on here?" Walks up there, at the wharf, rips open the piece of paper and goes, "I now declare this ship HMAS Jeparit. Sign here captain."
- 33:30 Merchant marine guy goes, "Hey?" "Yep," and parked behind us was a navy crew including a ships captain and we just drove straight in and a protester says, "Hey, hey, this is..." "Oh no it's not, it's now Royal Australian Navy," and it stayed for the Vietnam War. It just broke the back of the strike completely. All the merchant people came off, Australian navy personnel went on board took over the ship
- 34:00 and three days later it left. It was just an experience to see what the full weight of the war can do when it needs to. It was good to see it happen. You've all heard the stories, punch a postie and you know.

We've heard a lot of stories about the wharfies.

Yeah. I mean the wharfies, you're never gonna get a

- 34:30 straight story out of the wharfies, nor for that matter out of most of the people that it effected because they're too far apart, too distant. I really think that most of us will only take it from history books, "Is that what happened? I'll be buggered, I didn't know that," and let's face it, we're all union people, you're crazy not to be so when you're on one side of the issue and you're on the other side of the issue and as I said before there's no
- 35:00 cross pollination of good information or good intelligence then it tends to be emotional or emotive. I mean, punch a postie, bang a wharfie, it was all about mail, potatoes and meat pies for god's sake. That's all it was about; we're not talking about critical war stuff because we never shipped critical war stuff. If it had been about, we've got to send this secret bomb to Vietnam to end the war,
- 35:30 no, it was about potatoes, meat pies and mail, that's all it was about and it became emotional and the government on the day played on. I thought to myself, I'm trying to think as a penny pincher, let's see now, we're gonna justify this on bloody a couple of sacks of potatoes and some mail that really, it's not earth moving and that's what we did and it worked.
- 36:00 But to ask anyone now what was it all about and really, what was your involvement in it, most of us including myself really, apart from my bit at the wharf there, really it was only. I mean, for our side of it it was quite funny because some wag in Vietnam put together these t-shirts, some Vietnamese guy did it too, there was punch a postie, there was ones about the wharfies, there was all sorts of goodies
- 36:30 totally unrelated but it worked. I thought to myself, "Yeah okay," and there was badges about coming home and getting a postie and so forth. Again it was an emotional thing that was based on, as I say, potatoes. It had no war winning application whatsoever. That was the time.

So when you put in your application to change corps, did you sort of think,

- 37:00 **this will get me into Vietnam?**

Yeah, I think that was the end. All along from my point of view then, from that point onwards I was

going to be, as I said, if you're a plumber, you can't expect not to get down the muck hole and hands dirty. So that's gonna happen. So I thought if I'm gonna be a soldier, that's where the soldiering is, that's where I'll go.

- 37:30 I have never had any problems with that. As soon as Timor happened I thought, "Okay," and I was working in the Malaria institute at the time and I was supposed to go on Croc [Crocodile] 2000 no Croc '99, as an operations for the brigade headquarters and they got me extra days and then suddenly out of nowhere Timor happened, 19th September. Get a phone call, "John."
- 38:00 "Yes." "They need an ops sergeant down at DJ." "What the hell's a DJ?" And he said, "DJFHQ", "I'm still asking, what's a DJFHQ?" He said, "Deployable Joint Force Headquarters." I said, "I'm a chocko, that's all full of regular army guys now." "No, no, they're gone." "Oh". So I gets down there and it's normally like a hundred and eighty people down there, Cosgrove's headquarters.
- 38:30 As soon as they got the word they went out of there four hundred miles an hour. There was cups of coffee laying on the side, there was desks all empty, laptops with docking stations. They took all the laptops and left all the docking stations, that's all gone. Got down there and there was a bunch of reservists. General Moylan came in and took over and he said to me, "If we've got to do this again, where normally there's a hundred and eighty people, I'm going to have to do it with forty."
- 39:00 So I took over, I was in charge, a sergeant doing a WO [Warrant Officer] one's job, all air assets for the division. Even though technically the divisional headquarters were deployed it still had a division back here to look after so I said, "Okay, so what am I gonna do?" Get in there and start. I had no idea; I was totally out of my league. Every morning we'd come in there and there was all this
- 39:30 secret stuff and anyway this spook comes up to me and he says, "What are you cleared to?" and I said, "Oh, I think I'm classified to confidential or something." "Oh, you're going to be working in secret, top secret, you'll have to fill this form out." So I fill this form out, go through this agonising bloody two hour interview and so forth but the thing hadn't come through. So I'm up there working on this top secret bloody computer thing and the general's standing there, "How's it going sarg?" "Not a problem sir. Everything's working fine". Spook comes in
- 40:00 and he says, "You can't work on that. You're not cleared. You'll see something you shouldn't see." Not a problem, zip, turn it off, feet up. Moylan looks at me and goes, "What are you doing?" "Not cleared sir." "Bullshit," special clearance, bang, back in to work, you know, straight away, that flexibility. We had to clean up after them and one of the things we had to clean up was in the process of going from, getting ready to go over
- 40:30 they'd gone through various plans and during those days the army had a corporate image and I was tempted, I was sorely tempted to save some things because it had Cosgrove's signature over everything. Thirty five bags of classified waste and there was the corporate business plan for East Timor, big red slashes through it, Cosgrove's signature and then there was the, by the time you got to about the thirty-fourth bag it was the operational deployment plan for East Timor
- 41:00 and you could tell the nights they worked late because there was pizza packs in there and it was all the way through it and we just sat there shredding all this stuff and I'm sitting there going, "I'm tempted, I'm tempted," could be worth a bit, the signature. We put it together and of course every morning we'd give a brief to the general based on the operational requirements of the night before and as part of the brief I'd get up and I'd say,
- 41:30 "Good morning sir. I'm the J 3 ops. This brief is now classified, all those people not cleared to top secret please leave the room." Okay, give the brief, "Questions sir? Sir, that concludes my brief. Any movement to Timor for me?" I'd just add that on the end. In the end he says, "Humphries do not say that at the end of the brief." I said,
- 42:00 "Oh, you've got a movement for me?" He said, "Alright you can have a movement"

Tape 5

- 00:35 **Can you just tell us again about the intel briefings, the briefings you gave in Canberra?**

Oh for General Moylan? That was here in Enoggera. One of the things that really fascinated me was, most of my level of

- 01:00 operations type activity as an operations person was at a battalion level so you've got a commanding officer, lieutenant colonel rank and then you've got a warrant officer and some other people and basically it's a battalion level operation. When Timor occurred and they vacated the building and we all went down there, there was myself, as I said before, and four captains, reserve captains and
- 01:30 two ARA majors and then there was a real long gap and the general. So to set the scene we worked on a mercury switch which is top secret. The stardeck as they call it is a closed room with no windows in the central part of deployable joint force headquarters. It has four computers, two restricted

- 02:00 up to secret and then to top secret and everything, every communication that the defence force puts out every twenty four hours, could be anything from a load list for cement going to Timbuktu to the war started today, comes across that desk. So you'll go home and the switch is always working, rolling over. In the course of a month about four thousand messages will come in so you get to work
- 02:30 about seven thirty and you'll sit down and you'll brainstorm. Four captains, the majors, yourself all sit around and we'll run through all this rubbish, "No, that's", you'll really drastically cull it as you go through it. And you'll come up with what's occurred over the night of military value, interest whatever and then you look at the operational point of view. Now at
- 03:00 the same time the general has also got a media watch which he gets in the morning with his breakfast. He also has about eight newspapers and he'll look through them. We had the misfortune of one major going there one day and he read verbatim out of the media watch, straight off the report and the general said to him and unashamedly said, "You get paid money to give me an assessment. I already know what I'm gonna do but
- 03:30 I want a different point of view. I don't want you to read verbatim out of a newspaper, tell me what you think. Now get out of here." So with that in mind, having seen that we have at nine o'clock you get your brief so between seven thirty and nine we have to go through four thousand messages, come up with a briefing plan on the operational and operational requirements for the next twenty four hours and it becomes quite a push to do it. So we do it. Gets in there and you do the brief.
- 04:00 You say, "Rightio, here's the brief." And at the same time on the deck you've got two speakeasies, and they're an Australian classified phone. Also have a thing called STU III, S, T, U and Roman numeral three, that's the American equivalent, so we have a direct link with other people on a safe voice thing. It's a pain to drive, you pick it up and say, "Do you want me to drive or you drive?" The first time I heard this I'm thinking, "What the hell are you talking about?"
- 04:30 You've got to put this thing into various modes to scramble the whole line to wherever you're talking to. It'll only talk from speakeasy phone to speakeasy phone, not to a normal phone. Anyway, I got in the habit very early in the piece to open up the brief. If I wasn't doing the brief I would be pushing the slides on, we'd have the PowerPoint presentations and so forth. At the completion of it if I didn't have,
- 05:00 if I wasn't giving it, I'd have on the bottom of the PowerPoint presentation "Powerpoint presentation put together by Sergeant J Humphries," and a little request on the bottom would be, "When can I go to Timor?" Or if I was doing the presentation I would then ask the general, "When can I go?" The worst part about it was being in that position you would see all the requests come in, someone wanted in Dili headquarters, someone wanted on the border and I'm going, "Hey that's me, that's me, I'm going," and of course he kyboshed the whole thing.
- 05:30 Working up there was, for all of us uninitiated was most amazing because I'd sit there and I had a young female private clerk, reservist, Kylie Eagan, she's now in the regular army and doing very well, she's a corporal now. She said, "What do you do? What's your part in this plot?"
- 06:00 And I said, "I don't know, I just sit here and look," and someone said, "Oh you look pretty and don't do anything." She explained it to someone and I was listening, "Sarge does sergeant things." That's exactly what I'd do, you'd be sitting there and the person would pick the phone up and be rattling away and you'd watch him and you'd catch the captain's eye, trying to trigger him and he'd look at you and he'd go, "Go away, go away." So you'd get up, and you'd walk across and try to catch his eye again and he'd brush you off, "What I'm doing is important."
- 06:30 So you'd reach across and push the phone down, hang up on him. And he'd look at you with this dirty look, "What the hell did you do that for?" "What are you talking about sir?" "I'm talking to Australian Theatre Command about, oh no..." because he's on an (UNCLEAR)ed phone talking classified information. That was the one big problem because they had two phones in there not speakeasies and of course everyone would be getting into the hype of everything and they'd pick up the phone, start rattling away
- 07:00 and you'd watch them, "Hello", hang up. It was a common occurrence. One other thing we liked about it, everyone thought we used to bludge up there, they had two big plasma screens on the wall tuned to CNN and ABC. We sit there watching TV all day when the wars weren't bothering us, everyone said, "Oh, you've got a good life up there in the stardeck." You could only get in there if you wanted,
- 07:30 on a lighter side, stardeck has a bad habit of locking people out. DJ's has got a pass system. A little pass and you're classified to go to certain areas. So you wave the pass in front of the little light and it goes click click, in you go, see. Of course during the night time they have a duty officer there. The duty officer's job is to man the phones, take care of calls. That person, he or she has a duty driver. The duty driver stays
- 08:00 downstairs but times it'll go and sleep in the barracks and come back in the morning. If you have a little pass hanging round your neck, you never leave that pass behind because every time you go through a door going out it locks you out. On this particular night, young female captain, there's a shower facility up the top there. It's about four o'clock in the morning she decides I'll have my ablutions now ready for the morning. She's the only one in the building, locked up tighter than Fort Knox.

- 08:30 So she gets her shower, soaps and so forth, puts a towel around her, because, you know, there's no one in the building, goes off the stardeck, click, into the shower, click and she's having a shower, she goes to come back out with her towel and little bag with soap in it and so forth and suddenly realises the pass is not around the neck, it's still in the stardeck and she's in the corridor just outside the shower. There's only one place for her to go.
- 09:00 She can't go back inside the inner rings, she's got to keep exiting. So she got down to the front desk and she's sitting there, she couldn't find the duty driver, she's got a towel wrapped around her, it's about four thirty, five o'clock now and she's there, "What am I going to do?" We had the most fun that morning. We come in and here she is hiding behind the little counter there with a glass partition and a little round where you can pass your pass through to get validated and that sort of stuff and here she is. The general had the most fun
- 09:30 because she'd gone right out and the only place she could go after that was right out of the building and she couldn't do that. So she had to wait for the first person to come in and that was General Moylan and here she is, here's his duty officer with just a towel and a bloody soap bag. Never lived it down. She got extras for it but. Never leave that bloody pass card. Every time she went out, just couldn't get back in. Very bad system.
- 10:00 **If we can back pedal a bit, you told us about going through Manila, what about when you arrived in Vietnam what were your first impressions?**
- Saigon airport, old, French provisional, French colonial, heavily Americanised and possibly the most air craft I've ever seen in one location. Tan Son Nhut Air Base was huge.
- 10:30 You were just one tiny small part of it. It was an amazing operation with both air craft. On one side of the tarmac you'd be lining up and you'd see a big 707 a Pan Am or a Qantas jet taxiing down the runway, right behind it would be a F4 phantom bombed up, going on a bombing mission, it was side by side.
- 11:00 And helicopters, all, it was a working war footing aerodrome with civilian aircraft. The Qantas aircraft was the best example, hostesses sitting there going, "Oh look, there goes a bomber and here comes another one empty and loading up." It was just amazing to see the comparisons, side by side, tail to toe so to speak. That happened all the time. Tan Son Nhut,
- 11:30 Camp Alpha was the transit camp so you'd land there if you were lucky enough on coming in you'd have a night in Camp Alpha which was just a big transit camp. You'd get on the turps and do silly things. I remember there one night we were coming through Camp Alpha and just drinking copious amounts of beer, copious amounts and then painstakingly, as drunk as we were, stacking them all in nice little piles about this high
- 12:00 and then getting right back the end of the hall and then running at it full neck and diving through it. I'm not quite sure you could claim it on vet affairs. It was just one of those things we did. I always remember that, stack these things and we were drunk. Good thing we were too drunk because we couldn't stack that well so we didn't do it that much. That was one of the things we did there.
- What about, a lot of blokes talk about the smell when they first get to Vietnam?**
- 12:30 Look, none. The thing that, Saigon wasn't that bad for me. I didn't find it that. Like any other big Asian city it's on a par but I think most guys will always remember, I remember is you go on R&C, rest and convalescence in country. So the company would be doing R&C so you all load on the trucks,
- 13:00 you've been in operations for six weeks, whatever, and you'd roar down the road to Vung Tau and you'd go through a small village called Kat Lo. It's a fishing village and the smell when you roar through in the back of open trucks, not a problem. Two and a bit days down Vungers, write yourself off, poured onto the back of a truck, you are hung over, extremely damaged,
- 13:30 coming back, you get to Kat Lo and then all your worst nightmares are revisited, it is "Oh no." I mean, you don't get used to it. Every time we used to do that bloody trip you'd come back through Kat Lo and you'd go, "Oh no." It was bloody woeful. That's the one thing that sticks in my mind. I've smelt some smelly things but Kat Lo will always remind me, "Boy that fish has been out there in the sun way too long."
- 14:00 All it was was a fishing village and they were right on the estuary for the delta and it had a small fishing fleet there. There was a fishing village either side of it that didn't smell nowhere near as bad as this place. This place will always stick in my mind, Kat Lo, bad, bad feeling. You'd come back through there and guys would actually go, "I'm going to
- 14:30 hold my breath and cover my nose for the next three kilometres," and the truck drivers would speed up, you know, it was crazy. Funny things you do in a truck but, not very good ambassadors for our country really, but the Vietnamese would go out and gather driftwood and mangrove sticks and then they would row them back to shore on the main road between
- 15:00 Phuoc Le and Vung Tau and Kat Lo and that and they would painstakingly cut them into lengths about that long and then stack them about yeah high. All wiggly sticks but all methodically packed. You know

a mark three truck, International, it's got a bent bar, you're up front in the cab. Truck driver's roaring down the road and he'll see the big pile of sticks and they'll have a pile there

15:30 with a little space in between and another pile there and of course on the other side of the pile there's a little bit of an embankment and the Vietnamese wood gatherer would be having a brew and his bowls of rice, having something to eat there. The truck driver would be slowly inching the truck over, slowly inching the truck driver, just when he got it right. All the idea was to get that front bar to just clip the first part of the wood pile

16:00 and because it's so nicely bound and you're doing sixty or seventy plus it's like a big explosion, boom. We were terrible ambassadors for our country.

Hearts and minds hey?

Hearts and mind. Roaring on through. We did some silly things.

What did you get up to in Vung Tau on your leave?

Everything that I shouldn't have got up to.

16:30 We used to go down there for, as someone said, to have a rest from the activities. Probably, you take the alcohol away, you don't have a great deal in Vung Tau. You had the Grand Hotel, the back beach area, Peter Badcoe Club on the second tour the Peter Badcoe Club was there which was quite nice but

17:00 apart from that there was, the town was divided into a couple of areas. There was the areas for the Vietnamese, there was the areas for the black Americans, the area for the South Koreans and the Viet Cong and us travelled pretty much all around. We just walked in and out of areas and most people said, "Oh, you're Australians, aren't you, okay we understand the problem here," almost like

17:30 we were, you know, can't help ourselves, we just walk anywhere. The flags area, you'd go in there, the first thing you do when you arrive in Vungers, clean up, hair cut, shower, sauna and then find a feed of chicken on the side path, you know the old mama would have a little carry stick. In one thing she'd have a charcoal grill with chicken wings and legs and in the other one she'd have little footstools. So you'd sit in the

18:00 gutter and you'd have a heppo roll, those French style bread rolls. We called them heppo rolls because you had a pretty good chance of catching hepatitis from it, hence the name heppo. So you'd grab one of them, a handful of this chicken, sitting in the gutter. We survived and it was part and parcel of the cultural thing. Once having enough sustenance in the body you would then stumble out of the gutter

18:30 into the bar and continue drinking. The old mama would gather up all her goods and chattels and she'd move to the next bar and feed the next group. It was a good package so to speak. Vung Tau was good in the sense. We were Christmas in 7RAR at the time and we were on base duty. Me and a mate of mine, we'd gone over to

19:00 fuel engineers area and we'd had, as you would, way too much to drink and we had this idea we would go to Vung Tau. I said, "How are we going to do that?" and he said, "Very simple," the MPs [Military Police] where we were drinking they had this little rigid frame motorbike they used for scooting around picking bits and pieces up. So we'll pinched the motor bike, drive through the pearly gates and drive to Vung Tau. Not a problem, we'll do it.

19:30 Both, way too much grog on board. So we got to the pearly gates, it's a big steel configuration happily named the pearly gates and there was no way in the world, two drunks on a toy trike are gonna bloody get through there. So we threw it in the gutter and we're walking back along kanga pad which is a big helipad area for major lift offs. Right over near one of the refuelling points is this American helicopter and he's doing the fuel checks and refuelling and we said, "Bugger this

20:00 see where he's going to." So we gets over there and we said, "Hey mate, where are you going?" He says, "Oh, we're going to Bien Hoa" and he said, "Where are you going?". We said, "We'd like to go to Vung Tau", "Not a problem, we'll take you" "Thank you very much". So we gets in this chopper and as I said, blind. Chopper takes off, away we go, we're heading out and of course, bloody bugalugs, he's got a bag of grapes from somewhere; you know the console in between the pilot, so he reaches across that and as he reaches across that

20:30 he's turning switches off, things are flashing, lights are blinking. Load master's over there grabbing both of us and strapping us in to the seat to stop us moving around. So they landed us at a place called VC [Viet Cong] Hill. It's above Vung Tau and it's a big radio repeating station and the reason I know is because I used to drink with the American MPs there who guarded it, part of the 18th MP brigade

21:00 out of Saigon and they knew me. So we gets there and, "John, what are you doing here?" and I said, "Oh, come down for a few drinks, get on the turps with you guys." "What a great idea." So the chopper flew off and the blokes said, "Well, you don't need your weapons, leave your weapons here and we'll give you a vehicle and away you go." I couldn't stand and these guys gave me a six wheeled vehicle to drive.

21:30 Did alright too. When you look at this hill, it's not unlike coming down the gap. A mate of mine had his

SLR [Self Loading Rifle], so they took the weapon off and cleared it, secured it and they said, "John, you've got a pistol." I didn't like carrying the rifle around all the time so in one of the contacts I'd actually picked up a Russian Torkov leather velvet lined pistol holder, lovely thing it was.

- 22:00 I ended up losing it years ago but I didn't have the pistol with it; that was given to the war memorial. So what I did was I had an old M60 pistol grip and it just fitted inside the holster and you stuffed the rest with newspaper. That way I looked like I was carrying arms and I could walk around without carrying a weapon. These guys opened this thing up and pulled it and said, "What's this?" "Well now you know what I'm not armed with."
- 22:30 We took the vehicle, went to town, visited the local houses of ill repute, drunk much again, too much. Somehow got to the top of the hill that night, I've got no idea, it must have been a hair raising ride and I thought, "Rightio, we'd better do something about getting back to Nui Dat." So I ring up. Every morning there was a flight going back by Caribou, it's called the wallaby flight.
- 23:00 So I rings up the RAAF movements area and I said, "G'day mate. Is the wallaby going back in the morning?" "Yes," and I thought "Rightio." "I'd like to get aboard the flight if I could". And he said, "What's the name?" "Oh, uh," he comes back "It's alright mate.
- 23:30 That's Smith and Smith is it?" "Oh yeah, okay." "That's nineteen Smiths and fourteen Browns." We weren't the only ones. That morning we got back there and here's this darn, at the airport, gets there and it was almost like a mirror image of us. Holding our weapons, or not, hung over. The guy's calling out list "Smith, E."
- 24:00 "Oh, yeah, me." I got back to the Dat and we snuck down the back to the barbed wire area, got into our camp area. I promptly through myself into a monny drain, got myself covered in mud, that was my alibi. My mate walked straight into his CSM and got caught. He said, "You're gone. You're on a charge, AWOL [AWL - Absent Without Leave]." So
- 24:30 Major O'Brien who was base commander; he was the operational base commander and Reg Bandy, an RSM I have a lot of admiration for, a serious RSM. He said, "Rightio, we'll hear the charges tomorrow." So, hearing the charges.
- 25:00 He said, "We'll need escorts for the prisoner." They got the prisoner and I got, "Private Humphries, you be an escort." So I'm standing there, "Rightio, march in," march in, "Halt" bang, bang, bang. "Escort to the prisoner, one pace, step back," boom. "Stand at ease." Right. Read the charges out and then promptly said "Guilty as sin." Right, bang. Then he said, "Private Humphries, attention."
- 25:30 "What's going on here?" "Step forward. Now I can't prove you were with him but I'm sure you're gonna assist your partner in crime," and I'm going, "Hang on, what, I'm sure this is not legal." So he got twenty eight days field punishment and I assisted. You couldn't get around him. We had a marvellous time and the things we did then, I'd hate to try and do them now.
- 26:00 They'd skin you alive.

So when you're on leave in Vung Tau, what's your main poison?

Beer. Any sort of beer. Every now and then you'd lash out and have whisky. Beer was fairly safe; you were drinking predominantly American beer in varying states of deterioration because they'd bring the beer on. If you know anything about the brewing

- 26:30 of beer, you can't leave it out in the full sun without it doing some damage. We got to one stage there we had, I think it's black label and the Americans said, "Do you want some beer?" and our PX [Post Exchange - American canteen unit] says, "Oh yeah, we'll have beer." "Look you can have this, no problems at all," and they thought they were getting a great steal. So truckload after truckload after truckload of this black label turned up and we thought, "Oh beauty." By the time we'd gone through the first carton
- 27:00 we suddenly realised why. It was all off. Every single can. In actual fact in those days they were steel cans and of course they'd started to rust inside even though they were supposedly gold lined and I'm going, "This is not good." As soon as we find there's black label in there, they didn't have ring pulls in those days so some enterprising guy made up this stamp. All it is is you put the can in the little
- 27:30 circular area and then there's a little arm there and a hinge and at the precise moment you hinge it down it's got two spikes just there and it spikes the can with two triangles, one for air, one for mouth, or vice versa. Spiked about four pallet loads of this stuff to get rid of it. It was yeurk. Basically it was American beer in all its infinite varieties.
- 28:00 I must admit it's probably the only place I've ever drunk mostly American beer, there's nothing else there. Vietnamese beer was alright, bami ba or thirty three as they call it. In actual fact they still make it in Vietnam. It's not a bad drop but it's a French style beer. It's not as hoppy as what we would have. It's more of Pilsen as opposed to a lager.

Did you get any Aussie beers?

In the bases yes. The first tour we didn't have that much beer,

28:30 it ran hot and cold, you know depending on when they could get stuff across to us. During the second tour ample supply in base of Australian beer. It became a morale issue.

After you'd been in Camp Alpha overnight when you first got there what was next?

Next was to get yourself together, pick up your goods and so forth.

29:00 Still didn't have a weapon, that came when you got to Nui Dat. You then got aboard the Wallaby flight into Luscombe field at Nui Dat and when you arrived there, depending, normally you would go to reinforcements, they would pick you up in trucks, take you over. The very first thing you did was hand the paper work in and was given a weapon. From that point onwards you were part of the activity shall we say, part of the war. You soon got into a routine.

29:30 I remember the second time in we drew picket that night. They have what we call brown outs so as soon as the sun goes down if you think about Nui Dat, a town the size of, it was fairly big town, about six, seven kilometres across, five, six deep, so

30:00 a fairly big town. Each small unit had a sector of the wire so at a precise time they do clearing patrol. Knew the precise moment, all coordinated by watch, you would go out and go along. As you went out the other group would go out and you would all come in at the same time. Where the guys had gone out, it was all interlocking, little pathways in the wire and they were guarded by interlocking

30:30 fire pits. Once the clearing patrol was done you had about a hundred yards to a hundred and fifty yards of total darkness, no lights. And you were right on the wire there, you had all the phones, flares, all the paraphernalia of war, it's all there. You sit there two hours on, four hours off, two hours on through the night until the morning clearing patrol when you repeat the thing. Then during the day

31:00 you'd only have fifty per cent reduction on the wire because then there was more activities to be done back in camp. In the battalions case most of the battalions had limited frontage because they were never there. When we would pick up and move out we would always have what they call lobs, LOBs, left out of battle. These guys would immediately take on the lion's share of pickets and guard duties, clearing patrols and you also had

31:30 if you look at the circle that Nui Dat was, you had your own frontage responsibility and then each sector had what they call a tactical area of responsibility which probably went out for about five or six kilometres out. You would then have to put what they call standing patrols or TAOR [Tactical Area of Responsibility] patrols into that area from the LOB. So even though they weren't out on operation they were actually patrolling and maintaining

32:00 a distance, if you like. Protection by denial. You were aggressively patrolling an area to make sure that no one could get in close enough to surprise you. So that was always occurring. You could be a clerk or a cook or anything like that and you'll end up on a TAOR patrol. You were not excused anything. So when a guy says, "Oh I was a cook there", didn't mean anything, he would have done TAOR patrols, he would have done pickets, he would have done wire duty,

32:30 it was all part and parcel. There was only one other thing I hated about the Dat. The Dat was made of two things, tents and sand bags. Sand bags, there were two types of sand bags, there was the Australian sand bag which was a Hessian, what you call it, acid treated, no the same stuff they treat the logs with, Hessian bags were treated with that, so they're poisonous

33:00 and the American ones were plastic, it's not treated with the same stuff. So if a fire catches up it just melts, melts away to nothing. Every six weeks, six to twelve weeks you were re-sandbagging. It was a continuing cycle. You just finished all the sand bags there and you're back up the other end and start again, re doing all the sand bags as you go along, like painting the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

33:30 You get to one end finished and back the other end and start again. Sand bags don't last. I learnt my lesson in Timor. On top of the hospital they had three defensive positions we had to keep there and they said, "Oh we're gonna have to keep sandbagging," and I said, "No we're not, this is purely cosmetic. We're gonna sandbag these once and we're never gonna touch them again." "What are you going to do?" Simple. I got a slurry of cement,

34:00 dumped them in the cement and then said, "Right, this is gonna be quick. When I pull it out I want you to fill it full of sand, wrap it up, dump it there". So we built these things, four hours later we had this picture perfect sandbagged redoubt that you could knock on because it had all dried hard. Rain, never rot, wouldn't work technically for a sand bag should but we wouldn't have to sandbag the thing again.

34:30 What about, did you join Charlie company when they were in the field?

Yes. 2RAR? Yeah. It's one of those things. I don't think I've ever marched in to a battalion on operations or a company where they've been sitting at home, back in camp, feet up having a beer or something, they've been somewhere. It's really, it's the worst thing in the world because you're on the hop

35:00 and no one really likes you and I stress that because what happens is they, you arrive, you're an unknown quantity. You might be the greatest person in the world as far you're concerned but you've got

to earn their respect because you'll turn up, helicopter choppers you in, bright eyes, bushy tailed, you've got your weapon, you've got your pack, you've got everything. Who the hell am I going to? You know the platoon.

- 35:30 You get off the chopper. Platoon sergeant'll grab you, "Right, I'm sergeant so and so, you, come with me. Pick that stuff up there right," he'll take you over and say, "Right, this is corporal so and so, you're in his section." And he'll say, "Right you're number two on the gun or forward scout or whatever." He'll dump you in a position. "Welcome to the war." It'll be usually with a resupply it'll be just before last light or just after breakfast because that way there'll be movement.
- 36:00 Just before last light we'll move away from an LZ and then harbour. And you've done all the routines text book style but you don't know how these guys do it. They've got their own idiosyncrasies, "We do it this way and we cross the T's and dot the I's another way than what you do it," so your learning curve is like this. You're trying not to, you know and you're the absolute brunt
- 36:30 of all jokes. Two of us, two new guys into the team and we were the last two guys in the platoon, the last section, the last platoon, the last two guys. I was tail end charlie of the whole company. Moving along and word came back, Sally [Salvation Army] man up the front, get your canteens ready. "Gee that's good, I could do with a cold drink." Open up the
- 37:00 kidney shaped canteens. Patrolled for about four kilometres, two of us did and then we get the signal, harbouring up. So we thought, "Ah, the Sally man, finally." So we gets into this harbour and as we come past the platoon sergeant's standing there, "What the hell are you two doing?" "We were told the Sally man was up, get our canteens out," and we'd been patrolling for, it's just like the "Go down and pick up four left handed spikes for me",
- 37:30 we got the Sally man for four kilometres. We learn.

So how about, you mentioned about working up in the platoon, first being put on number two on the sub machine gun and things like that.

In order of precedence most guys will go into the rifle section. Everyone is due and qualified, trained. It's not a matter of speciality, it's a matter of where you go.

- 38:00 Most number twos on the gun are about a step away from being promoted to lance corporal. Riflemen and so forth will come and go, there'll be a senior rifleman but most cases they're just riflemen. Forward scouts tend to stay forward scouts because of their ability and skills and they learn that as they go along. Number one scout will always take the job on and he'll be the experienced person
- 38:30 and number two scout will come in as I did, I came in, became number two scout and within a very short period of time, especially when the forward guy goes on leave it falls on you to become that person. I find it probably the most satisfying job, doing there, probably the scariest. You might be in a company
- 39:00 the lead person on a company, there is an entire battalion, six hundred men all around you, all through this jungle but in your little space there you are right on the point. Clearings are scary. You come up to a clearing, you give the field signal for the clearing and you'll go, "What do you want to do?" to the boss and the boss will say, "You can't walk around it
- 39:30 because we've got flanking companies. You're gonna have to go across." Normally you would walk around, keeping under cover either side, that's the common sense thing to do but when you're advancing with companies either side of you, you don't have that leeway. So if you're lucky to have this and you're on the point, good, you go through the jungle but I've had some big clearings and you're walking across and everyone's watching you as you're walking across the clearing
- 40:00 and I'm going, "I didn't get paid enough for this."

Tape 6

- 00:34 **Rightio, so you're going across a field.**

Going across a field, it's like, there's a couple of tasks that are routine tasks. Crossing open ground, because the boss will not put the entire platoon in jeopardy. He'll say "rightio," for want of a better word you've got to go and find out. So in the ideal situation you'll flank,

- 01:00 an open ground is an obstacle, it's like a mountain, it's like a barrier. It is dangerous. And a determined enemy can sit on the other side with the right equipment and deny you because you've got to cross open ground. So it's treated as an obstacle. So you always try to treat it like it by going around it, under it, some how. So when you're advancing in large organisations you're stuck with walking across open ground. It becomes a very lonely piece of ground when you're walking across it.
- 01:30 The same goes for probably night ambushes. You'll move into a night ambush area on a track at night. And at each end of the ambush you've got cut off claymores. You put the claymores off down. So a

claymore cable is 100 metres long and you'll run it right out to the max and you'll have two guys in the claymore team and one of the scouts. Now the claymore team will find what they deem is the spot to set the

02:00 claymore up and then you've got to walk another 50, 60 yards further down the track to sort of sit there while they're farting around up here and pitch black, no lights all your sensations are alive. That tree just moved, what's that over there. And you start to see things, and it is... When someone goes, "psst." "What the hell's that!" Everything's, your imagination's running wild. It really does.

02:30 And you come back and you think to yourself no I don't like doing that. There were two things, I didn't like doing open ground and those long narrow, because what are you doing on that path ambushing it? Because you know the enemy use it and you would not like to say, "Jeez I hope our clocks are right. And I hope his clock's even better."

Did you notice things like heart rate, sweating, breathing... things like that changing in those situations?

Not in ourselves. After a while you didn't worry about it. We noticed it in the media but.

03:00 We had Jim Aurum in 2RAR. We were doing ambushes, no eight, it was eight, we were doing ambushes along near one of the villages and he'd come up as a reporter and he said, "I want to go out with you guys." So we took him out on night ambush, just outside the Dat, we sat up on a rice paddy and we laid there, as you do, laid down, hope

03:30 nothing happens, have a quiet night. Anyway, off to one paddy you could see all these fireflies flickering around. He said "What are they?" We said, "Fireflies look, you can catch them. See look at that." Anyway nothing happened, we had a pleasant night. Come back the next morning away he went. And of course my Mum gets this Jim Aurum column out of one of the...I think it was the Mirror or the Telegraph at the time.

04:00 Sends it over. 'Standing patrol, Charlie Company, that's right Delta Company 8RAR. The lights were vivid as the VC moved.' And I'm going, not our patrol what patrol's that? Because he'd just embellished a little bit. Didn't come out again. We did a lot of ambushes.

Can I just ask you there, what was your impression of the media at that stage?

Not a great deal of

04:30 what's the word, spontaneity. A lot of staged stuff. We did a village relocation and we had some people from Reuters there and they were, "Okay we've got to take some photographs for Reuters." "Okay." All the guys are doing things here. "No, no, no I want you to throw a smoke bomb down that hole there." "Why?" "Well that's what I want you to do." "Okay." "No, no you didn't do it right." So the boss...

05:00 More like this like, you know. "That's better." So we never saw the photograph, what the photographs were but, I mean we're doing a village relocation, why are we throwing a smoke generator down there? So we didn't have a great deal of tolerance of a lot of the media people.

What about, you'd be in a perfect place to make a comparison between that relationship between the Australian army and the media in Vietnam compared to Timor.

Timor, I've got to say, the difference between there and Timor

05:30 was Cosgrove. I mean, what's the equation, Joe fed the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s, so did Cosgrove. You could not, I mean the man did not tolerate fools. I learnt very early in the piece, if you make a mistake don't try and cuff it with him because he'll burn you. And one other thing I did notice, guys used to walk in with their PowerPoint presentations and their reams and reams of

06:00 paper and they'd shuffle the things on the lectern and with the pointers they'd point to this map and that map and he'd not, nothing. And I'd sit at the back and watch this and then Senior NCOs or officers with a bit of smart would produce a field green notebook and dot point. He'd open it up and he'd rattle off that. He'd look at his dot point, "la la la," dot point "la la la." And you'd watch

06:30 Cosgrove. Suddenly start paying attention. It was one "ah." So whenever I had to do something anywhere near him, I had nothing in the green notebook, I'd just have it there. Worked for me. I'm not going to get caught out. But he had a very good savvy if you like. One of the things that people don't realise is prior to Timor

07:00 turning pear shaped, he was told that that was it. Look for another job because he was not what's the word, politically savvy. He didn't have the political savvy to go up the rung. So he was told basically he'd probably move sideways and "really, you know you really should be looking at another career, out." He said, "Oh okay." I mean, he was not going, he

07:30 would never have made CDF [Chief of Defence Force] if Timor hadn't have happened. And as every person in the Defence Force, when Timor went down, you can't just pull out someone who's there and put the flavour of the month in. It went. Suddenly everyone realised we had a soldier at the helm and he worked the media, he worked his people. There was just, he could do it all. And when he came back we said, "There's our next Chief of Defence Force." And it wasn't supposed to be an army platoon. It was

going to be

- 08:00 air force was supposed to be the CDF, Chief of Defence Force. And of course, he was flavour of the year then and a good choice, very good choice. But it wouldn't have happened had not, a couple of things from Timor's point of view. If we'd have been 700kms further away, it would've gone pear shaped. We'd have never done it. The difference between a successful activity and a failure come and
- 08:30 went that many times it was not funny. And a lot of credit goes to Cosgrove and a lot of the senior staff because they continually repaired bridges. We did so many silly things. Silly things, we need a crane to lift things off the boat at Dili on to the wharf. Simple request. "Get a crane." I said "We've got one; we've got a 32 tonner."
- 09:00 "It's broken." "Well get it fixed. Better still, bring it to Dili, get it fixed operationally." "That's a good idea." "Okay, do it." They got it into Dili and they said "it's broken." "Yeah, can we get it fixed." He said, "It's four flying repair." "So just get it fixed." They said, "We can't." "Why?" "Four flying repair is Darwin."
- 09:30 "Oh I thought you would have had..." "No, we got rid of that, we didn't need it because we'd never left Australia." "Oh okay. Alright we'll take it back to Darwin and get it fixed." "Okay." Hand comes up, "Quarantine." He said "You can't take it back to Darwin." He said "Why not?" He said "It's got those dirty tyres on it. You can't take that stuff back to Darwin." "Well how do we?" "Put new tyres on it." He said, "We lifted it on to the wharf and it hasn't moved, it's broken." He said, "Okay."
- 10:00 So we put new tyres on it and they ummed and ahned, ummed and ahned, and then finally someone said, "Bugger it. Get rid of it." So with new tyres on it, it was then loaded onto a thing and sent all the way back to Victoria where it was sold with brand new tyres. There's a compound in Dili that's got every vehicle that we send in to Timor, leaves it's tyre and canvas behind. Now I don't know if we're learning very much here because I would say why don't we leave the vehicles there and
- 10:30 just change the people over. We don't, we've been stuck in this new system. Cosgrove tried to change it quite a few times but it's just something that's been way too long entrenched but eventually we'll get it right. But tyres full of that parasite weed. I mean you get to Darwin when we come home and your plane pulls up. Before that, this is the quarantine customs people, "We're going to search your stuff." So they pull your socks out and your jocks out
- 11:00 and you've got girls there, you've got females in the Defence Force and they're going through feeling the seams, looking for the seed, this particular seed that's a parasite. Feels all the, and pulls all the socks out and feels all the socks like this. It's very thorough. Get to Darwin, get out of the Herc right, and you walk from the Herc right across Darwin airfield right to the perimeter fence and they've got a little Atco hut there.
- 11:30 You go in there and you declare all your goodies and so forth and then you sign off at customs and blah blah blah and then you're about to leave. "Stop." "Sorry?" And here's a lady from quarantine. "Please lift your boot up." Lift your boot up and she's got a pair of tweezers and a torch and she's pulling seeds out. I said "What's that do?" She said, "We don't want them in the country." And I've said, "I've just walked across 350 feet of tarmac, why aren't you
- 12:00 at the aircraft doing this?" We do silly things.

What about, you were number two point man, that's a pretty stressful job, was it normal for the blokes, forward scouts to have stress related problems or was it just the stresses of that job in the team?

Not the

- 12:30 not there no. I mean you could have issues at any given time and anything could trigger it. That's not to say that it's not there, but the only time we ever seen an issue surface in, they surfaced elsewhere but from my experience, we'd come back with, in Delta Company 8 and we'd had an extremely long operation
- 13:00 and eight weeks and we were all sitting around and the platoon Sgt said something to young Brownie. Brownie was only 19 at the time and I don't know, stars and the suns hadn't lined up for Brownie for some reason or other and of course he lost it and he was angry, but he was angry with a loaded M16 thirty round magazine in his hand. And somewhere in the process he took the safety catch off and he was gesturing,
- 13:30 like this, and every time he did that he'd give it a two round burst. And they were going everywhere see and of course the tents have got all sand bags around them, we were all like a lot of peering around there looking, "someone go out there and talk to Brownie." No heroes here. Hide behind it. But one guy did, and I'll always remember him, "China Long". His parents owned a Chinese restaurant up at
- 14:00 Maroochydore or somewhere, Longie was a big fat Chinese guy. Easy going, nothing flustered him, he was just not a problem, and every time he opened that big Chinese dial of his, it was pure ocker. There was such a contrast and him and Brownie were good mates. Anyway it would've been a good 50 yards from where China was

- 14:30 to where Brownie was having his bit of a stress attack. And he calmly walked out there and there was rounds whistling everywhere at any given time, it could have all turned very pear shaped for China. It didn't. Soon as he got near him, he gently took the weapon away and as soon as he did that old Brownie went too, basket case. But he came back and he was alright, it was just, you learned to take that sort of thing on board and there's not a great deal you can do
- 15:00 with them. You don't castigate a man because he has a bad day in paradise. The only person I would've castigated there was the bloke who blew the shit house up. New bloke, one of the things you have, you have a big hole in the ground and then you build steel across the top and then concrete it. And then at one end of it, and you put a row of thunder boxes in there with a little chicken coop type activity over there which would vent it.
- 15:30 And at one area you put this big metal tube into it with a screw top, an old shell holder. And once a month, you take a smoke grenade, purple, red, whatever and you pop it in there. And of course it kills all the parasites in there, the bugs and so forth so you have a fairly clean environment. Anyway new bloke in the platoon, "Okay, duty." The platoon sergeant, "Right I want," blah blah blah blah, and he says to one, "Get your new bloke
- 16:00 take care of the bloody latrines." "No problem." So out he goes and I'm sitting there cleaning my weapon, I'm looking up and I'm going, and I just seen him drop the white smoke down. Now the difference between a white smoke and a normal smoke is white smoke is phosphorous grenade. Fragmentation. It went down, thank Christ there was no one in the toilet at the time, the thing exploded. Well it lifted
- 16:30 the concrete slab up, broke it in half and for about 30 bloody metres around there was shit everywhere. Nothing ever, it set fire to the toilet and I'm going, and it burnt for days. The butt of many jokes about "white phos, dangerous. Smoke grenade for toilet."
- 17:00 **Was that the lot of a lot of newbies?**
- It was but we were all guilty of doing things. We had a company commander who shall remain nameless who wasn't popular with the troops. And he pushed us and pushed us and so forth, so without realising it three separate groups of individuals, shall we say enterprising individuals
- 17:30 decided to have a go at him. So one group, he had his own little tent, private tent and it had a little footpath coming out going down next to this very deep monny drain and then it crossed over a little wooden bridge and then it went up to his own personal toilet area and then he had a little shower with a 44 gallon drum up there with water and he could... all a little bit personal. Anyway the first guys, they threw a rock on his tent,
- 18:00 and yelled out "grenade." And he flew out of the tent, and we all went chuckle chuckle. And of course he lined the entire company up on the parade ground and said, "Right until that person owns up you're all staying out there." "Oh." So eventually the guy owned up and he was marched away and he was going to get field punishment. Without realising, this was not co-ordinated, two other guys had sawed the bridge partially in half. So
- 18:30 he'd got across the bridge but in the meantime me and a mate had put Condies crystals in his shower, so he'd had a shower and didn't have any light there, when he fell through the bridge and covered in mud, he had us all up on parade, it was only then that the CSM said, "Sir, I suggest you go into the Company Order Room and have a look at yourself." He went back in and we all had to own up. We got 14 days field punishment.
- 19:00 **How did he take his?**
- He didn't take it too well.
- Didn't improve things?**
- No it didn't improve things. It just made, I mean we were so well known as being on starvation diet that we'd pull up next to a fire support base and there'd be all the barbed wire and the claymores and all the nasties parked there. And somebody'd say, "Who's that out there?" "Oh, that's Delta Company, 8RAR." And next thing you'd see all these guys throwing all this extra food
- 19:30 and stuff over the wire at us and we'd be all climbing through the wire to get at it. We were starving to death, eating bark off trees.
- What were the one man ration packs like?**
- We for some reason or another the Australian Government decided to experiment with things then. And they had one of the worst things we could ever think of, you can imagine in the humidity, we were having Safcol tuna in canola oil.
- 20:00 If they'd make a mistake you'd say "What's on today." They'd say "Safcol tuna in canola oil." You just couldn't do anything with it, it was too oily, it was yuk. We preferred, with 2RAR we had a lot more American ration packs and we had what they call them, PX packs. PX packs would be, you'd have your

ration packs there with everything and each ration pack would be a

20:30 breakfast, lunch and dinner and then there'd be a little cellophane which would have in it, a little miniature packet of cigarettes, four cigarettes, there was coffee made by Coca Cola which was really, and sundry items, toilet paper that sort of thing. The PX pack, it came out once every four weeks or something along those lines, and it would have cartons of cigarettes, chewing tobacco, pipe

21:00 tobacco, toiletries, writing gear, reading gear, a box about yeah big for 30 men. I mean after a while we decided no we don't want our PX packs out there. "Why?" "Because we can't carry all the cigarettes that we're going to take back home with us." Because it was just free. Cartons and cartons of cigarettes so, although I must admit a lot of it was that Pall Mall and I was a smoker then too.

When did you start smoking?

I started

21:30 smoking when I was, left school and give it up, I stopped smoking about 20 years ago.

What about coffee drinking?

Always been a coffee drinker and a tea drinker, I've always, yeah. And I do something that in the army you'll have no friends, it doesn't matter where you are, no one will talk to you as soon as you put a brew on, you've got people all around you saying

22:00 "Oh you've got a brew have you? I'll have a taste mate." And it's like a keep it as quiet as possible, don't make a noise. As soon as that brew is ready, it's like someone rung an alarm bell. The race is on to get a drink. So I thought, I know what I'll do, have you ever seen those bottles of chicory? So I thought, I'll fix these bastards. So I've made the brew up, poured half a bottle of chicory in there. "Yuk, what the hell are you drinking?"

22:30 "It's my chosen choice of a brew." No one ever bothered me after that. Only draw back with it is, I rather like it and I drink it now.

Speaking of brews, was there an incidence where you were having a brew in a bit of a hot area.

Oh yeah. You don't realise your, the safety aspect. We'd just pulled into a harbour position

23:00 and cleared a little spot, set your hoochie up ready to raise during the nightfall because you lay it out ready and you have a, got the brew on and stirring it up like that and we have a contact. They call them counter artillery battery fire. And there's shells landing and you can hear the shrapnel whipping through the trees above you and landing all over. And I mean subconsciously, or common sense would say quickly get down.

23:30 And you're, you're worried about it and you're looking and you reach down and pick up your bush hat. Now the bush hat has no ballistic qualities what so ever, I can assure you of that, but it has one other, it has a, as soon as you put it, "ahhh," feel better all ready. It's going to stop everything. Not. But it did, you'd put that thing on your head and you'd brew up and you'd look around you and we're all sitting there with shrapnel whistling across the top of our heads having a brew, passing the cup around

24:00 with bush hats on our heads. It's some sort of psych thing that you do. It's a security thing, it's like a security blanket. Once I got the hat on, the cone of silence, the cone of safety, I'm safe. But we, you'd do it all the time. I mean we were in a contact up in the Long Hais we'd pulled up for a midday lunch, boss had put us on our

24:30 arcs and we were doing checking out, "Do you have bully beef?" "We have bully beef or Safcol tuna." "Safcol tuna?" "Great choice." And suddenly the clearing patrol went out, got half way around and we'd just pulled up short of an enemy camp. And of course the clearing patrol walked straight into it. So a fire fight started. So fire fighting and the boss is trying to get one section up

25:00 to move through and as they're moving through we could see them moving forward of us and we couldn't see a thing. And we figured we were out of it. And both our heavy packs were on this side and we jumped around and we were sitting there and we could see the guys over there and they're pointing at us. Like this. And I'm going "What the hell's going on?" "What? what?" "Nothing. Nothing." Anyway the guys swept through, contact was over and came back and I said, "What's going on?"

25:30 He said, "They were shooting at you, we weren't shooting." I said, "Who was shooting at us?" When we picked our packs up they were all full of holes. But we couldn't see. The guys could see them but we couldn't see them around there. And they could see us every now and then. And they were just peppering the packs full of holes. It was just, you don't know.

Did anybody get hit on that contact?

No. It was like a lot of the contacts, there's a lot, I mean, how do you explain Vietnam? 12 months of

26:00 absolutely unbelievable tension punctuated by mere seconds of sheer terror and hell. And just a long time between sheer terror and hell which is, which is probably mostly the stress is built there. There

was a program called the CMF [Citizens' Military Force] officers and what they did was they took Captains, Majors from CMF units all around Australia

26:30 and gave them 14 days in Vietnam on operations so that basically gives a balanced way of thinking to all infantry personnel. Well we had this school teacher from Launceston from the 12th Royal Tasmanian Regiment. He was old enough to be my grandfather. Anyway we were doing half patrols and that's, you take a platoon and split it in half so

27:00 we're sitting in this bamboo thicket and he's asking all the questions and we're going, "Yes, yes. Oh yes." Anyway 2 VC walk into the bamboo thicket and they stood there and looked at us, and we sat down and looked at them there was a couple of seconds of recognition and then all hell broke loose. And this poor Royal Tasmanian Regiment guy

27:30 he said, "Oh, VC, enemy." He's got the thumb down, he went to stand up and every time he stood up, one of us would stand on him and open up and of course we were firing M16s. As soon as the M16, especially the tracer, hit the bamboo, it's like hitting metal, it just exploded in a big ricochets and there's this poor guy, when we stopped his adrenalin was way up there. I'm going, "This guy might die on us, from heart attack."

28:00 But that was one of the ways of getting experience through. But sometimes it didn't work that well because we tended to walk over them to get them out of the way to do things. They didn't merge into the team so to speak, because they hadn't been there with us for that long. But it, you'd do things that were unusual then.

So which of the guys in the platoon would've had M16s?

Platoon Commander,

28:30 Section Commander, Forward Scout.

The rest were SLRs?

SLRs and an M60. There was one guy, one guy would've had, well it worked two ways. When we were in 2RAR we had a bombardier or a grenade guy, he carried a 79 and a pistol. The 79 was a real good bit of kit as long as you forced the guy to use it. Bluey Lane was

29:00 a hair dresser from Kings Cross. Very well groomed and I won't go into his sexuality, but he was, when it comes to using a 79, you couldn't touch him. I remember when we come out on to a big rice paddy area, it went for kilometres it did and way out there in the middle of this thing was an old ox and cart with about six oxen pulling it along this

29:30 area and it's stacked high with rice bags which they shouldn't have had. And parked on top was four VC with AK47s. Well we seen them, they saw us and you could see this guy laying into this bloody oxen, really sticking them. And of course we all took off and we're trying to wade through this paddy bun and the platoon commander, he's yelling out to Blue, "Blue, blow him down, hit the oxen, hit

30:00 the oxen." So here's Blue and he's got two big pouches either side of him. He would've had about 60 rounds of 40mm HE [High Explosives], running along this narrow paddy bun and as he's running he's plunk, load as he's still running, plunk, and of course they're shooting back and then somewhere along the line he missed the oxen but it landed right on top of the rice paddy - the rice bags and cleared it. Three wounded one dead. So good shooting.

30:30 **Did he have any other weapon other than the wombat gun?**

Oh yeah, pistol yeah, 9mm. But you had 40mm HE which will arm itself, what it does is inside the head it's got a little gyroscope. As soon as you fire it, it travels 14 metres. And in that 14 metres it winds back. When it winds back it's inarmed, so when it hits next, it explodes.

31:00 Which puts, you can imagine being inside a helicopter, near Sui and a NZ SAS guy accidentally fires a 79 and it went around inside the helicopter bouncing off the walls and then dropped on the ground. Now no one knew how far it had travelled, he picked it up

31:30 and everyone looked at him. I don't know what happened when he got back but I'm sure his section commander would've torn strips off him. He was lucky that didn't, because I mean if it had gone the full distance, the 14 metres, the next time it would've hit that door.

What about the 'wait awhile' vines?

Wait awhile is, this country's got it, Vietnam seems to be

32:00 infested with it, so is Malaysia for that matter. We were out near Long Tan, it'd all been land cleared at that time and the wait awhile, you can kill anything but you can't kill wait awhile. And it's all out there so first of all we tried, me and the number two scout, we were just hacking through this stuff to move a path through, one of those times when we couldn't walk around it. Anyway, hacking at it and hacking at it and hacking at it and in the end

32:30 the only two people who were working were us. Everyone was just standing still waiting for us to travel a few feet. Then we found, what a better way to do it was, I would just back up and then push me and then I'd just roll over into it. Get up, "Jesus, 12 feet, 10 feet. Hey that's not bad, do it again." So we were doing this, rolling through this wait awhile and then I took my pack off, someone was carrying my pack and me and the forward scout we were just rolling it down. So we'd gone about an hour and a half into this and the boss said

33:00 "You guys okay doing this?" I said, "Yeah, we're fine. I mean the area's been given the okay, there's nothing out here, so we've just got to get out of this thicket and then get on to that bloody road and get out of here." "Okay." So rolling along and then suddenly, remember you're being backed up to it and then pushed and you roll through. So I've got my weapon in my hand, backed up and rolled through it and this time I must've come right through the edge and I rolled over. I come up and I'm sitting there and I'm looking no further away than, and here's this VC sitting there and he's got a

33:30 bowl of rice. Just sitting there looking at me and I'm looking at him. And the Number 2's... and I'm between the me, the Number 2 and the VC. So nobody was going to fire it was just, "So what's next?" It was a huge pregnant pause. Then suddenly there was a mad scramble for everything. He bolted back, I've never seen a guy move so quick in all my life, he just went straight back into the thicket. Put a quick burst after him, missed him.

34:00 And then the boss said, "What the hell's going on?" I said "I thought this place was cleared?" "Yeah so did I." But it was just one of those things, that you...

Going through the way you were going through, you must've been making a racket.

Not in the wait awhile, it's green. Green wait awhile. It's strong as anything but it's not dry. When the stuff is dry in the dry season, it's, it doesn't take much to set fire to the whole place and you've really got a blaze going. But that was, I've got some colour

34:30 slides somewhere, absolute that real bright green, brilliant green, no doesn't make much noise at all.

And on a normal sort of patrol through the scrub, would it be "quiet as you can be?"

Yes, it goes without saying because one of the things that we work on is the fact that you've got to be able to, if you're going to have contact and you will have contact, it's not a matter of not, you will have a contact, it's best to be

35:00 on your terms and not their terms. So the only way you're going to do that is to get the edge on them. The people that get the edge are the people that win. If he fires first, nine times out of ten you're at a disadvantage and you will sustain casualties. But if you fire first then he will pull back, he will extract himself because it's not on his terms. He'll only stand and fight if it's on his terms on ground of his dictation. We do the same thing.

35:30 **So when you reach a point where you have to actually use your machines, you must give way to them straight away do you?**

Yes you do. So we really, I mean we carried them but very rarely used them. It was just, I mean I looked at what the SAS did they would do that sort of thing, I mean that's extreme but that's why they don't hear them. And we, there's a path there, will we still walk it? No. We'll walk through this stuff here. So there is, sound tactical

36:00 reasons for doing things. There are times when the rule goes out the door and you've got to do something else.

And with all the contacts that you had, what was the ratio of the Australians getting away with the first shot?

I think in most cases we always got the first shot in, except in mines. Mines were always where you, mines, I've been in two mine incidents and you just have no way,

36:30 we were travelling through the rubber, in APCs [Armoured Personnel Carriers] and you were jinking, in other words you had three APCs with the platoons and you'd drive them down the rubber lanes and you'd jink, go down the rubber and you'd jink. You're not setting a pattern doing that, jinking down. Anyway we were out on the right hand flank I think it was and we ran across a bamboo pressle switch, that's two pieces of bamboo that they,

37:00 they take a sorry a section of the bamboo and cut it out, put a piece of wire there, piece of wire there and attach it to a D-cell battery and then in the next lane across, attach it to a forty block, a block of, a 40 pound block tri-com explosive which is the Vietnamese or Chinese version of plastic. Jink across the track, the only saving grace was if it had been the centre one that hit the pressle switch, one of ours would've been over the 40 pound block. But it was the flank one

37:30 that hit it. As it was it exploded and when you're travelling in APCs so you don't get killed in them you draw straws. Everyone sits on the top and there's not enough room for a full section if you've got a full section, so you've got one guy ended up sitting on top of all the bags. So I had drawn the straw for the bags, so I'm sitting in there. The explosion went off and then all the guys got swept off the top like a big broom and the driver got sucked out, the crew commander got sucked out

- 38:00 no one was killed. Perforated ear drums, burns and the rotting twigs of the rubber actually done more fragmentation damage than anything else. 14 days later I was okay, because it was temporary because I was down inside listening, just kept on lurching along until it stopped because there was no one driving, I was going, "Hello. Guys what's happening?" Looked up around, "Oh, not good is it?"
- 38:30 But we were, the guys went back to Australia. I went back to Hollywood Repat in Perth to see one of the guys and he was probably the worst affected. What they'd done was they had to peel his bloody ear back, peel it back like that and they were taking grafts from inside his, the little soft skin there, and doing grafts across his ear drum. And they'd done it about four times. One ear was fixed, but one ear it just wouldn't take and it looked like, almost like a zipper behind his ear with the amount of, they had to do it every six months, let it all
- 39:00 heal up then do it again and so forth. Most of them came good but they'd always have ear problems.
- So how many guys would that take out initially, like out of that?**
- Out of that group then, nine.
- 39:30 End of tape

Tape 7

- 00:31 **Can you tell us about any other contacts?**
- Well the only one probably I think of most, I mean you think of the fire fights you get into. I mean we were in the 2RAR Charlie Company, we'd gone into a fire fight and we'd swept into a small defensive position,
- 01:00 had the fire fight there and for some reason boss pulled us back. So and he called out "cease fire." So we're pulling back and the adrenalin's pumping and I'm, eyes are like this, everything's working overtime, and I stumbled. And as I stumbled, pull the trigger. And the boss yelled, "Who was that firing?" "I missed him." It was all I could think at the time because I didn't want to say
- 01:30 I'd had an accidental discharge, I go, "I missed him." "Okay, is he gone?" "Yes. Gone." I've gone "phew." But I mean most of the fire fights, apart from some of the big activities that the other battalions had, I think ours was mainly relating to mines where we got into issues where mines became a real problem.
- 02:00 A lot of the problems with 8RAR was they walked into one area, set off a mine and then when they brought the choppers in to try and pick the guys up they set off more mines. So you think about their tactics, they're very good with mines, mine warfare. So most, a lot of our experiences with mines, the enemy, was fleeing. We probably did more contacts in 2RAR
- 02:30 in '67 but I must admit the billiard ball contact would have to be the best. And that was with Eight. We were ambushing outside Wah Long, on the road between Hoa Long and can't think of the name, Long Hai, a little town there. And each night we'd go out and set up our ambushes, the whole
- 03:00 company, all around. Well these guys bumped into our platoon, fired at them and they immediately withdrew. But they withdrew into our platoon, who hit them and they withdrew that side and hit the third platoon. They promptly withdrew back, straight back into us and it was a classic billiard ball contact. And I think we killed about four that night. But there was a lighter side to that
- 03:30 because we'd been doing that for days, every night. During the day you'd clean weapons, sleep, that night you'd go out. And every morning, coming out of the village you'd see all the local traders and one guy was the baker and he had his little cart piled high with heppo rolls and he'd come out and the first time he come down the road, we were, "There's some fresh heppo rolls." He got right down there and we just jumped out of the bushes and grabbed him and
- 04:00 took all his heppo rolls. Very cruel of us. Anyway next night, did the ambush, next morning, see this guy, he snuck outside the bloody gate outside of curfew, he's breaking curfew and he's coming down and he gets to where we were the night before, looks around, not there. Moves about 30, 40 feet down the road and we jump out of the bushes and we grab him again. So this went on for about four, four days.
- 04:30 Every time we moved he'd be looking and about the sixth day, before the Viet Cong contact happened, he wouldn't come out. We were all sitting there hanging out for our heppo roll, he wouldn't come out of the village. You could see him up there waiting for the sun to come up because he knew once the sun come up, we were gone. So he learnt a lesson. Billiard ball contact.
- Probably getting a bit worried what he was doing to the payroll after constantly getting knocked off.**
- 05:00 **What about cameras. Like did you mention on camera or off camera before about getting in**

country and buying Seikos and watches?

I think everyone, I mean one of the things I would like to see, is everyone, two things, I've still got my camera there. But we all had a passion for expensive cameras, but who could afford them? As soon as you got to Vietnam, "My god the PX is so dirt cheap," so you bought a camera. You bought the best camera in the world.

- 05:30 And of course you bought Seiko watches or Rolexes or Bulova and it was all there. And the money, you weren't making a great deal of money, you were getting a bit of combat pay but not much but you were able to afford all this wonderful stuff so you did it. And I mean, but you never took many photographs that are world beaters I think, I think a lot of photographs were here I am standing next to the helicopter, here's a helicopter flying. Everyone brought back, copious amounts of slides, and that's
- 06:00 I think as I said before, there's got to be the makings of one hell of a coffee table book with a half decent monologue of what happened there. But the trick will be, whoever does it, will be to identify those photographs that have some significance. I think we've all done it, you've gone past and said, "Oh that was so and so." "Oh was it? I didn't know that." And you miss the significant
- 06:30 person if you don't know what you're looking for. And that's, I mean I look at a lot of photographs now, misinformed, misrepresented, wrongly labelled photographs. There's a publication put out by the Ordnance centre, on the history of the Ordnance Corps and it's got blanket counters and god knows what in there, but there's a photograph in there of a Land Rover. A Land Rover smack dab
- 07:00 in the middle and it's got its TAC sign, identifying the unit, it's full of bullet holes and the caption underneath 'Warrant Officer D. Henderson, mobile army training team advisory died in this vehicle at such and such a ... blah blah blah.' I looked at it, so I rung this major up in Bandiana and said, "Sir, I don't know who told you that." He said, "No that's who it was." I said, "No it wasn't, the first thing you've got to look at, that TAC sign is C Company,
- 07:30 Charlie Company 2RAR." I said, "People died in there, Westie was the driver, there was Brett Jones who was the salt pioneer, there was two engineers in the back and a interpreter. And they died in a small village just off the horseshoe. And I was there. And I've got photographs of it there, black and white." I said, so misrepresentation of a
- 08:00 photograph, and then when it goes into a decent publication, very hard to change what you've done. You know, something happens; it's always of concern to me that when someone says something and you're sitting there going, "No, no, that's not right." But once it's been said, it's very hard to repudiate or to turn back because too many people have heard it. So it becomes law and you can't do anything about it. And to me that's I would imagine for you guys
- 08:30 that will always be an issue, especially when you're doing a documentary and someone says something and you've got no way of qualifying or validating or quality assurance on the subject. Probably, the best example is war movies. People do to a war movie and they'll, "This is based on fact." "This is loosely based on the vague truth," but then they use equipment to do it
- 09:00 the only time I've ever seen something that really worked well was that movie with Denzel Washington in, where they took all our old centurions we had.

Courage Under Fire.

Yeah, now that, they said we've got to make these look like American tanks. Well the amazing thing they did with that polystyrene and some lights and so forth, until I was told, I wouldn't have picked it. And that's where someone obviously sat down and said, "We can do this,

- 09:30 and it will pass inspection." And that's what you've got to do, not only the visual effects but the rhetoric and the history. I mean John Wayne can do all the stories he likes, but if you're going to play with history, then you really got to be careful because sometimes when you do that it becomes very hard to say, "Well that's not quite right, the real truth was this." "No, no you didn't see the movie did you?" "You haven't read the book
- 10:00 as abridged by such and such." I give up, I'm out of here.

So did blokes ever take their camera out on patrol?

I used to have a small camera. The good cameras, no. You were too busy. By the time, if you and I'll make an assumption, most of the photographs you will see if someone sits down and gives you a look at these photographs, will be after photographs.

- 10:30 Unless you're a combat photographer. They are after photographs because your primary task is doing something. It's only when someone says, "Okay guys, do something." Then you'll take a chance, quick the camera, click click, put the camera back. So these fleeting glimpses will be from I'd say 60-70% crap to 10-15% maybe worthwhile looking at.
- 11:00 But then again you're going to, as I said before, depending on the circumstances, but most of us had the old Kodak instamatic or the Olympus half frame. Because you could have a basic pouch which normally would have three magazines, SLR in, would take an instamatic or an Olympus half. Fits in there nicely, wrapped up in a plastic bag and you could put it around one side where you could get at it and you

could use it, but it wouldn't get in your way, and they were fairly

11:30 robust cameras. You could carry rolls of film anywhere in your pocket, they wouldn't get damaged, and that was a safe way of doing it. You were already loaded up heavy enough so you always took the smallest, but to have a big SLR dangling around your neck, no that's why if you look at most of the SLR shots they're, "Oh here I am standing against the bar or here I am standing against the other side of the bar. Oh by the way, did you see the one of my helicopter?" I mean

12:00 I must have drove my mother and father crazy, "Oh look there's another helicopter." "Oh that's good John, that's nice son."

How many slide photographs do you reckon you have?

I've probably got about 4000. And there's, I'm not going to say how many helicopters there are. But having gone through this exercise now, I'm going to have to find out the hard way.

Did any of the blokes dabble with movie cameras at all?

There was a few but they were fairly

12:30 16mm, that sort of thing, it wasn't user friendly because there was no developing process for it. We actually had a 16mm movie camera at my wedding in 1975, I haven't seen that movie yet. Got the two little reels down there and I've been threatening to put it on VCR but I might go DVD now, that's if it hasn't all

13:00 moulded together. Before my wife divorces me.

So what would you do with any rolls of photographs that you'd taken?

There was a good in house service, especially for slides. In 2RAR it would all be shipped off to Saigon, done in Saigon at the Kodak place. Most of the stuff we used was Ektachrome. And then it would come back on the wallaby flights and be delivered through the canteen service. You'd get

13:30 your slides and come back and you'd get full of piss and bad manners and you'd have a slide night showing us doing things in the bar and looking at helicopters and I've no idea why we did that but your sense of adventure. Living in base, you'd come back, depending on six weeks out in the scrub, six to eight weeks on a patrol, not a patrol an operation, we'd do two things. First of all, all the clothing on your back would be destroyed, your boots would be stuffed.

14:00 Your weapon would be the only thing that would be clean, well oiled, functioning. Your ammunition would be looked after but it's limited because if it sustained bad weather conditions and so forth, you could not guarantee the propellant. So we'd average about every two operations and then we'd just go down the range, pull all the new stuff out and you'd have just a big yippee shoot straight down the range. Get rid of it all, issued new stuff for the next two operations if you didn't use it.

14:30 That way you weren't using old stuff that may let you down at a critical moment. But the rest of time in camp would be, you know you'd wear walk shorts and you'd get drunk, visit mates and do silly things. They had a horrible thing called a pissaphone. What is a pissaphone you may ask? What you do is you dig a big hole in the ground. Then you take two 44 gallon drums and you weld them together.

15:00 Then you insert this down so it's just that far above the ground. Then you concrete it in and you put a bit of hessian over the top. Then you put a thin layer of oil across the top so you don't get the smell. And of course being in a male only environment as it was then, when you felt the need to relieve yourself you just went across to the nearest pissaphone and relieved yourself. Now these weren't very user friendly at night because you couldn't see. They didn't have

15:30 flashing red lights and that sort of thing. We were coming back, there was Bluey Lane, myself, I can't think of the other guy's name now. Anyway we were all walking back in single file being good soldiers and I'm watching Bluey in front of me because he's a lot clearer headed than me and he jumps. Oh. So okay, I walk up to where he was and I jump. And I jumped straight over the pissaphone, oh that's okay. But the guy behind me,

16:00 not looking, didn't walk up and just jumped, followed the leader and just went straight in. And I turned around and I'm going "what was that? Blue we've lost someone. Blue, who'd we lose?" "I don't know. What's that smell? Oh god." And we look down and he's got both arms up trying to pull himself up out of this darned thing and I'm going, "Oh boy, you don't smell good." He said, and he's drunk,

16:30 he said, "Someone help me." And we got a pole, "Stay away. Get out of here." Scary.

What else could you do for rest when you were in base?

Play cards, watch very unusual dirty movies, play cards, drink beer, play cards,

17:00 play mind games with the American Red Cross girls. That was interesting. I'm not quite sure where they thought they were, they must've thought they were still with the American bible belt because they turned up, we'd just come off operations, and they've got these little blue like beach hats. Red Cross on there, ARC and like a nurse's outfit, blue shorts, mini shorts type skirts and little sandals and they'd

- 17:30 turn up and of course, six weeks in the field seeing nothing but water buffalo and bloody bad guys, there's these two American Red Cross girls. So we're looking at them and they're trying to play mind games with you, "Guess what colour I'm thinking of?" No one asked her to guess what we were thinking of, it was just so, I mean they were just so naïve about and
- 18:00 they spent a day in the horseshoe with us playing these games and we've got some lovely photographs of them, and when they left they said, "Well we'd like to come back" and so forth. And one of the comments from them was, "You have a different sense of humour." You'd better believe it. It didn't go, I've seen them work with their own people and they get them all pumped up and they're playing mind games and word associations and so forth, they're all into it.
- 18:30 Our guys go, "What? Oh you're talking to me, okay." He's another mile away doing something else totally different. The American Red Cross, but apart from that there wasn't a great deal. You'd have movies, a good selection of movies but every now and then they'd make a mistake and the same movie would turn up. And there's only so many times they can watch Love Story. I think it was not the top of my list and there's other movies there that
- 19:00 they kept on playing over and over. After a while you know there was about five movies in Nui Dat, say "Where are they? I can't get to that one because that's... I can get to that, oh seen that one. Ah read a book." Sally Man [Salvation Army], the Everyman's, a lot of philanthropic organisations did a very good job. They were always there and I think they done a sterling job, a really sterling I mean,
- 19:30 not one of the organisations tried to convert you in any which way or what, but if you wanted a drink, you wanted a book, you wanted help, they were always there. I think they did a marvellous job.
- Every Australian serviceman from all conflicts speak so highly of them, the Salvation Army guys.**
- They were great. "Sally Man's up front." "Yeah great." I got it that time I tell you. But they did, I mean
- 20:00 you'd turn up, and I mean, they'd fly in. We were doing a big resupply and the Sally Man will turn up and he'll come in with the CQ of the company. And the two things that we never got over there were fruit in great quantities and fresh milk. And the CQ of our company, C company, was a real good hand, if he could get it for the guys, he would get it. They were sitting down on a beach near
- 20:30 north of Bien Long I think it was and we were waiting for the resupply to come in. And in come the resupply and there's the usual ration packs and all of this unloading and the CQ steps off this last helicopter and he's dragging all these boxes and he said, "One carton per two men." "What is it?" And he had these big pint containers, foremost reconstituted milk chilled from Saigon. I don't know where he got it from but everyone could've bottled
- 21:00 his blood that day. It was magnificent just sitting there, "Ahh," drinking this milk down. If you didn't like milk you would've drunk it, it was just great. Little pleasures.
- What about mail, correspondence from home?**
- Mail was good. Having seen the difference between the way we do it now and the way we did it then, I suppose I get a little bit blasé about emails and so forth because you tend to go a bit over the top with
- 21:30 video cameras and so forth. But the mail as much as possible crank all your letters over in camp and send them, so they went in spurts. So when you come back from operations you quickly catch up on all your writing because they delivered the mail in the field and it, if you kept your letters they were all covered in mud and so forth as they travelled around in your pockets in plastic bags.
- 22:00 But it was a ray of sunshine, and reading old newspapers. We had all the newspapers there but the local rags would come in. Quest newspapers and all that sort of stuff where Johnny Bloggs wins the local bloody football comp. It was all just old home week. They were appreciative, very appreciative of that sort of stuff. And of course photographs. One thing that we don't do now, the last time we did it was Cambodia, we don't send
- 22:30 people to war for 12 months and that's what, tour of duty is 12 months. And if you were a single guy you didn't come home, you were away for a year. And single guys stayed away for a year. Whereas the married guys, I think it was about the second tour, married guys they included R&R to Australia for the married guys. Now, a guy does six months and he gets what they call RofTA, relief out of theatre. And single guys can come back home
- 23:00 to do five days back here. So, it seems we've addressed a few issues there. The single guys bore the brunt of it, they were away for a year and that was it so the little mail connections were very important.
- Because right at the start we were talking about the dockers on strike, not letting the mail go through, that sort of stuff. To the guy in the field, those letters from home are very important aren't they?**
- They were and when you think about

23:30 they didn't want to get involved in the politics, and as I said before they probably didn't know all the nitty gritty about what the union was trying to do. To the unions it was just another union activity and to us it was mail and home. So as I said, neither side needed to talk about it, whatever, but to each side it was a different ball game and to each I suppose, just as important.

Like I said before, having been in both Vietnam

24:00 **and Timor, how do you see that daily contact with home. Does that benefit the soldier?**

Yeah I think it does. It's very unusual to be able, I've got some photographs downstairs, I said to Vic when I was doing my emails, we were stationed in the old radio station at Dili. Bloody, it was a series of

24:30 control rooms and sound rooms and there was a theatre and when the Indonesians left, they just ripped all the equipment out, including the lights, and of course there's no windows. They're dark day and night. So we run lights into them and we slept in them. One guy per control booth, six guys to a room, 20 guys to a theatre. You were in it and, in one of the theatres there, one of the dopey guys said, "I've got to have some fresh air." So he got a sledge hammer and he punched a hole at ground level straight through

25:00 and what he didn't realise is it went straight out to a swamp. You got fresh air alright son, and all the mossies that come with it. So we had to put it back together again. But you could pick the phone up and I'm talking to my wife and I'm sitting in the front office and directly across the road on the other side was the Filipino compound and they were driving AMC trucks. The same truck they drove in the Vietnam War.

25:30 So if you look at, here's all the barbed wire fences, monny drains, tropical environment, I've got colour slides of Vung Tau and a couple of CD shots, digital shots of Dili. I know the time difference but you'd be hard pressed to pick it. It is just so similar.

So was that a surreal experience for you?

Yeah.

To be on the mobile phone.

Mobile phone saying, it's almost like "darling I'm having a flash back here," and

26:00 I mean it's real. Wow. It was just, the trucks, the uniforms, it was "whoa!" It was like that it was a surreal experience. But that was probably, you'd only get it there because of the way that place has been left. A time capsule.

What about the Grand Hotel?

The Grand Hotel I think,

26:30 55,000 Australians, if someone says he doesn't know the Grand Hotel then I've got to say he wasn't in Vietnam. He must've been in some other place because it was, every time you went on leave to Vungers, I mean, "Where we going to meet?" "I'll meet you at the Grand." "Okay I'll meet you at the Grand." The Grand Hotel was an old French style hotel. It's still there, they actually did a write up in one of the Courier Mail travel brochures. You know doing the "Want to go back to Vietnam" bloody things they do.

27:00 And they did a write up on the Grand Hotel and they had a photograph of it there and it showed the garden outside and then it showed the little ponies with the little buggies outside. A guy by the name of Sonny Singalas, I wonder if he's still alive the big Polack, him and I were mates and we went on leave together and we went down to there and he said, "I'll race you." "Okay."

27:30 So he gets into this bloody buggy, and it's got a tiny Vietnamese pony. I've seen bigger dogs. And we're tearing down the road and Singalas is beating me and I'm saying to the bloke, "Whip that horse, whip that horse boy, come on whip that horse John, whip that horse." And Singalas the clot, stood up in his and was about to give me the big finger like this

28:00 and he must've crossed that centre of balance, that centre of gravity because when I went past him he was laying back in the little hood section and he had the horse up here with its legs going like this. Grand Hotel. It was a lot of fun there. If was staffed by Vietnamese but with a lot of French Eurasian backgrounds, and it was great fun there.

28:30 **What about the Vietnamese girls, I mean every guy that went there must have a story?**

Yeah I think everyone. You learned to shut your mouth. God I've been doing these lessons and I've been failing badly. We were out on check point duty, just outside of Hoa Long, and you have a check point duty there and it's like a choke point, all the busses come through and everyone does it sooner or later.

29:00 And we were sitting down, all the provincial busses would pull in and the women would get off and they've got all beetle nut stains around there and no one obviously speaks English, all Vietnamese and you're checking, "Yeah okay, yeah okay, right get back in the bus." Chooks and pigs all over the top. Anyway this bus pulls in and this absolutely beautiful creature steps off the bus with a tradition ao dai on, hat and striking, beautiful. And we're all

- 29:30 everyone's eyes just immediate glaze over, we're all looking at her. And of course like a fool I go, "Wouldn't you like to bang this. Ha ha." Big laugh and then pristine, you know "She's gorgeous." "I don't really think I'm that beautiful." In perfect English. And didn't bat an eyelid. Took the pass back off me. And we're going "oops." Got back on the bus and I thought "Okay."
- 30:00 Every book you read, the covers aren't just exactly the same are they? It was, their dress, their a o dais are, one of the mates, Barry Laws, he married a Vietnamese girl over there and went through a lot of strife to bring her back here and she's a lovely person. You wouldn't, she's gone bad now, she's become very much Australian now so ruined that.
- 30:30 She's become too ocker. Yeah lovely people. I have a lot of time now with the Vietnamese which is quite funny because when I wear my uniform there and I'm giving brief to the Vietnamese contingent when they come over here for the malaria exchange program, the Defence International Centre for Learning, they run the English conversion classes for them before they filter into, they do two weeks down in Melbourne at Sale. Anyway they come up to give
- 31:00 us the brief on the cultural awareness program and I'm sitting in the background and they know who's been to Vietnam and who's not been to Vietnam and when, and who was part of the American war. And I could see this guy, he was looking at me. And I'm going, we got to talking afterward. He said his father was Battery Commander on a surface to air missile battery around Hanoi during the war. He's now replaced his father's part in that battery.
- 31:30 But he was born after the war. And it's a little bit of history. I've got no problems with it but I know some people who would not even talk to the Vietnamese. Which I think is sad. We've got to learn to move on because the world is a moving, changing fast and will always be moving and changing and you can't dwell on past subjects.

What about ambushes?

- 32:00 Ambushes are always an issue. Australia teaches its troops the best ambush drill in the world. It is, you are drilled and drilled and drilled so it is instinctive. There is no other way. You cannot stop and think about an ambush drill. It must be instinctive because for the first part they've ambushed you so they're on their declared ground.
- 32:30 They're doing it because they're going to beat you. So you have mere seconds, fractions of seconds between success and failure for you. So ambushes will always be, we laid an ambush out down on the beach. We set all the claymores up and set all the bombs up and had all the stuff lined up. And we laid there all night. Just before dawn, that
- 33:00 sort of half light a guy come pedalling down the beach on his bike. We went "Shh. Right." And I had the 90mm set up. He said, "Nothing else John, just fire the 90mm." "Okay." Pedalling down. Woompah. Boom. Smoke clears. We're all looking. Bike's laying there. AK47 three. Bloke's there and we're going
- 33:30 "Got him. Yeah we got him." Suddenly the bloke jumped up, grabbed his bike, jumped back on it and belted down the road at 400 mile an hour. And we're like... It was like "What the hell's gong on there? How'd he survive that?" He didn't. He was running on pure adrenalin. He pedalled for about 4kms.
- 34:00 We followed him, he had a blood trail about this wide. Died. The reality of war. But he, again, even for us when we hit. The adrenalin. I mean I've never been hit, I've been dropped on, dumped on and so forth but never hit. But the guys that have been hit, I mean you're talking 400 miles an hour, they're working on pure adrenalin. Even when they're calm,
- 34:30 it's the most amazing thing to see when it happens. It's, to me I just, whooh, I've been very lucky. Very lucky.

What are the, a lot of the stories, like a lot of the blokes telling stories it's always the funny ones and things like that. There must be some shockers?

I don't know. Obviously there

- 35:00 is a dark side of the moon. It's always there it'll never go away as I said before but I think. I've seen guys who in incidences, the one with the mines, you're sitting there and you say "Right, the whole section's gone." And you realise no one moved because
- 35:30 it's just gone off on a bomb so you presume that there's more around. Commonsense would say not that's a big one, no they might not, they might not have some small ones around. But then you've got to say no, have they got this ground covered. Because common sense would say you would cover it, lay it with fire. So you sit there saying, "Rightio, what's next?" Waiting for someone to make a decision. An ambush, and you're sitting there waiting for it to happen.
- 36:00 You know it's going to happen and when it doesn't happen it's like this, it's a big relief. And then you see guys do things like this APC driver, we need a helipad, we just drove over a big bomb. He just got one of the APCs turned on its side and the whole thing had peeled up inside and killed everyone inside. We've got to get these bodies out, got to get these guys cleared. So that his mate in the APC jumps into it, both

crewmen

- 36:30 they stayed in the vehicle and they just doughnuts, like this, so if there's any big bombs there they were going to churn them up, set them off, they don't care. They're just driving around in an ever increasing circle until they've got a big enough area for a dust off to come in and pick the bodies up. And I mean you're sitting there with your heart in your mouth, will he hit one now? And this guy's just full stick, roaring around this ever increasing circle
- 37:00 to clear the area. Hit nothing. But he wasn't to know that. It's, when that thing happened, as I said before, that's adrenalin. And it leaves a funny feeling after the adrenalin goes away. You come down off a high and you are up there, whoa, and then you come down you go "Oh, okay." And then smoke about ten cigarettes and you don't feel any better for it.
- 37:30 That's why I had to give it up, I was smoking too much.
- Did you feel like you ever got that adrenalin from being forward scout?**
- Oh yeah, shit yeah. You would do things out there, you think about it, you're the forward scout, the first shot is fired. If you were ambushing a forward scout, you wouldn't be pulling the trigger like that. You'd be aimed shot at the person with the intention of killing them.
- 38:00 So when the shot is fired and you're down there going bloody hell he missed me. That, hey, this is good. So you're on a rush already because you're in front. And then you've got your section commander behind you yelling out, "What are you doing? Talk to me. Talk to me." Yelling and screaming at you. So you didn't see anything so you've got to stick your head up looking around to find out where it's coming from.
- 38:30 And when a person fires at you, there is no discernable line and with the modern cartridges there's no puffs of smoke. So you're looking for a bit of movement on leaves because that's the only thing. You'll hear a noise of the actual bolt moving backwards and forwards. If the shot's from a long way away you'll hear the crack as the shot passes over you. And you might see when the round leaves the chamber,
- 39:00 movement of leaves if he's in hiding. They're all flimsy aren't they? And you're straining, looking.
- 40:23 End of tape

Tape 8

- 00:30 **What about bump, bolt, bump?**
- I suppose you're relating to just to the action of the weapon itself, going backwards and forwards. I think, it's, when you go out on patrol you've got to, as soon as you leave the wire
- 01:00 cock lock, you know, cock lock. So you cock the weapon, feeds forward, you're loaded. From that point on, you have a round up the breach, safety catch on. The only person that doesn't have a safety catch on is forward scout, point man. He's got the safety catch off so that at any given time, wherever he's looking, when he's covering his arse, he can just pull the trigger. So if we bump anything, you know you're moving through, and that's basically
- 01:30 without putting the Australian army down, or any army for that matter, we train on being in charge of our own patch of turf. We really, you think of two armies probing around in the dark. And all we do is every now and then we bump. And when you bump into each other, for that few seconds that you bump into each other, if you really don't want, we, when we bump, we like to hang on. Because
- 02:00 that's what we went for, search and destroy. We want to hang on to him. Whereas they, unless they're in charge of that particular turf, if they bump us, they'll try and untangle. They'll try and disengage and pull back straight away because it's not of their making. They don't want to do anything so we probably take more risks in a situation like that, trying to stay in contact with them.
- 02:30 Pardon me. That would've looked good.
- What about the Vung Tau barber?**
- That was funny that was. Second tour and the Peter Badcoe Club was up and running. And everyone would go in there for two days R&C in country and you could go in there, get a fresh, you'd put civilian clothing on, do into town with the bars and so forth or stay around
- 03:00 the Badcoe Club and swim in the pool and generally be comfortable. And of course one of the things, as soon as you got off the truck you'd go up to the barber and he'd, there was two of them there and he'd have two chairs and you'd sit in the chair and he'd give you a haircut and he'd shave you with a razor and so forth and it was just all of this lovely prim and proper set up. Well 7RAR was up in the Long Hais

[mountain region] and they had a contact. And in the process of doing the sweep they picked

03:30 up all the bodies and so forth. And one of the bodies was the barber in the Peter Badcoe Club. And I'm going, and everyone straight away was, "Ooh, that guy used to shave me with that open cut, that cut throat razor."

Did you ever get similar feelings when you were in sort of rear areas that you were probably mixing in the territory as the bad guys?

Yeah that was always the case. I mean Vung Tau

04:00 amongst all of us, it was an unwritten thing that the VC had to have a rest too. So Vung Tau, what did they call it, they called it a special zone. Vung Tau town itself had everyone there resting, drinking, womanising and so forth on both sides of the equation. And it really, I'm amazed that we didn't have more bumps

04:30 between organisations that may have wanted to disagree. Yeah they were there, dead serious but they were resting just like we were. And they didn't need to gather intelligence because every bar girl in Vung Tau was an intelligence gatherer. They knew everything.

What about hearts and minds?

I think every battalion went there with a padre

05:00 and a civic affairs program before we left Australia, they did a lot of good. We had, we looked after a lot of the provincial troops, their little garrisons and so forth. I mean there was issues in those areas that we could take care of the schools, we used to look after the orphanages. While the battalion was out patrolling, looking after the security

05:30 area, you had the padre heading up his civil affairs projects and so forth. He did a lot of good. One of the things that ended up going around our province in those days and I often wonder if it's still there now, is the windmills. The icon of Australia, whenever someone in a village was not getting enough water, because they had the old style French drawing wells, and someone said,

06:00 "We've got a better idea than that." So someone brought over a second hand one to start with and set this thing up in the breeze and suddenly it's pumping water all over the place. So then it became, every battalion said, "Right we can put two in," and we'll pick two villages, boom, boom. And they started doing that. So it became around the province to get one of those Australian windmill things. And it worked wonders. It was a good civic affairs program.

What about, did you guys got involved in

06:30 **Recon patrols and things like that?**

Not really, we had our, well that's not quite true. 7RAR had an assault pioneer platoon. No platoon commander, it had a platoon sergeant, Stoney Bourke. And Sgt Bourke has aspirations. And because we had no pioneer responsibilities they made us the CO's response platoon. So Stoney decided a

07:00 reconnaissance platoon should have some sort of integral support. So he went down to the Cambodians' camp and he bartered some cigarettes, some beer and so forth for a little 60mm mortar about yeah big, two inch mortar and a handful of rounds and the biggest set of Zeiss binoculars you've ever seen. This, he looked like Rommel, this huge big thing hung on his chest, so and he had a base plate, a little square base plate. So

07:30 off we went, pioneers out on deep reconnaissance, you know, just on patrol. We get to this thing and he's got his big binoculars up there looking around and he spots these two Vietnamese scurrying across in a free fire zone. He said, "Right, not going to chase them, we'll bring them home with our 60mm mortar. Let's do it." So, puts us all around defence and he's up there with his binoculars calling the distance and so forth. So

08:00 drops the first round down. "Phoomp." Off it went. Well by the time we'd fired three rounds, now we're going to have to choose, becomes very self evident because the two guys that had scurried away, they had stopped and were looking at us. And where we were spread in all around defence, we were now all bunched around Stoney, waiting the see where the next round was going to drop. We had no idea what we were doing; we were more dangerous to ourselves. That was the last time we took it

08:30 out on patrol with us.

What about R&R in Bangkok?

I got drunk and wore purple pants. That was very scary. R&R in Bangkok, it was fun. We had five days, first time in another place other than what I've already told you about. And went to the tailors, got all this tailor made stuff. Went to a hotel

09:00 that sold vitamin C soap, first time I'd seen vitamin C soap. Also had hot and cold running water, bath water. I was very impressed with that. Rented some girls, as you did in those days, put them in a room and fed them for five days, can't remember much else. And came home with some tales that I can't tell

my mother about. Had a great time. And I think everyone did the same thing in those days.

09:30 But Bangkok was a big camp. There were about seven or eight hotels there that were controlled by the yanks, purely for R&R because they were running a lot of people in there. A big operation. But the Thais were great, they were wonderful people and we had, there was a western bar. It sticks in my mind this western bar and it had a fridge in the centre of the bar, and you all sat around the bar but this fridge was in the centre.

10:00 And I, "beer please." So I grabbed this big thing and a tap was on the top and it was just cold sinker beer and it went empty. And I thought this is funny and I opened up the thing and they had the whole keg inside this fridge. Pulled it out. And they'd speared it through the top of the fridge. It was the most fascinating operation. I thought this is marvellous so they must have had a fridge out the back somewhere chilling them all ready, they'd go in there and it was always

10:30 there this. I went back to the western bar quite often and full of Johnny Cash songs and god knows what else in there. The things you do on R&R.

Can you, without dropping yourself in it, can you explain to me the soldier mindset and prostitutes and women and all that sort of stuff because it's a pretty important part of it.

I'm not a priest and I've felt like I've been a priest and I've got to get my dirty water off. And I mean it was, there was no think

11:00 nothing good about it. There was no think, it was a spur of the moment activity. We went, I think the best one was Randy Ransom. He went to Taipei and we said to Randy, "You're going to Taipei right, listen I didn't get this on my R&R, I want you to get it for me. Now I want 16 bloody LP records. Guys and I want this watch and I want..." and that. There was a whole list of shopping to get see.

11:30 We should have known better. So Randy stepped off the plane in Saigon apparently and the bloke said, "Do you have anything to declare sir?" "You can have this," a few coins from Taipei. Gets back there, "So Randy, how'd you go mate?" "Good." "So where's all the stuff?" "I didn't get anything." "What did you do?" "I got married." "You got what?" "I got married." "Oh okay, that's good. Who'd you marry?"

12:00 "I don't know." Got a marriage certificate here and it said on the top Marriage Certificate, but the rest except for his name was in Chinese. And, "So what are you going to do?" "Nothing." "Got any pictures?" "No." "Have you got anything?" "No." "Did you buy anything?" "Yes." He doesn't remember anything at all except he's got this marriage certificate. And we knew Randy for many years, he's still got that thing, he's never been back to

12:30 Taipei and I've often wondered, I've said "I wonder if there's some lady there waiting for him to come back." But the mindset was, you had five days, you've got to think about this, you had five days, you might go back and get killed and some did. So five days, bloody hell, we'll have fun. So you did, you had fun. And I think the mindset of the girls was just the same. They were out for two things, make money

13:00 and if you had fun on the side that was good. So it somehow merged together and I suppose someone could say it's a war thing. And that's the only thing I can put it down to, because if you went there and said, "I won't do this because I'm going to get married when I go home," you might not go home. So you didn't think of that. You went there to have fun and play up and because it's not a pleasant thing you're going back to and

13:30 not a pleasant thing you've come from, so you enjoyed yourself. And no one batted an eyelid.

And was it hard to go back after having R&R, R&C?

No, you really had to, I mean you had to remember who came back first and so - George came back, I can out spin his yarns. "I had more girls than you." And it was just tall tales true and legendary and it was. Randy Ransom always fascinated me because he

14:00 you'd send him on leave or, he did the same thing in Vung Tau. Went down there and he came back and you went, "What'd you do Randy?" "Don't know." He disappeared into this void of his and when he surfaced he just didn't remember. It was a dreary, a drudge going back but it was part and parcel. You had to, you were already psyched in to doing it.

Can you explain for me

14:30 **from your shoes to your giggle hat, what you're wearing and including webbing description?**

Basic footwear was the general purpose boot. Woollen socks, would've thought that they would've been too hot but they were perfect for the occasion. You had over the years, the jungle greens changed from the normal jungle greens that we had in Malaya to those tight around the arse pixy suits which were

15:00 real funny looking things and most guys will tell you that, felt a bit queer wearing them. Your bush hats. As the war went on you went in to ballistic jackets, steel helmets which became a real issue carrying but after a while when you saw what the mines would do, they become very much of a life saver. Patrol webbing consisted of a combination of American equipment and British 36 patent stuff because they had a bigger capacity to

15:30 carry more stuff, so whereas we would only carry, had the capacity of American stuff, carry 60 rounds front line, with the 36 patent stuff on you could carry twice that amount quite comfortably. And they were easy to use. So you really did load up. Most people would wear, as soon as you walked in country you gave your size of your shoes, socks, shirt, pants to the C

16:00 **He wrote it on the board so that as soon as the resupplies, "How long have you been out there?" "Five weeks." "Rightio." And he'd just take out the whole company, by platoons, by sections clothing, tie them up in sand bags and there's many photographs around where you see the guys stripping down out on the beaches or on air, throwing a canteen of water over them or not even that and just putting fresh clothes on and then taking the other stuff and throwing it on the fire.**

16:30 **Because the stuff was just rotting on your body.**

Sleeves down always?

First tour no, second tour yes.

What was the reasons behind both changes?

Second tour they suddenly realised that bamboo would infect the arms very badly and malaria. By the time 2RAR come home, malaria had become a problem and they were trialing things like dapsone, and that sort of thing so it became an issue

17:00 so that protective measures with down sleeves. But also you were patrolling and you'd brush the small ends of the bamboo spikes. That little tip there infects and it doesn't take long for you to get ulcerated sores all over your arm. So sleeves down was the common sense thing to do.

So were the guys taking anything for malaria?

Yes. Paladrin. It's a brand name of a prophylactic that was commonly used by the defence force then.

17:30 Had no side effects, it was a daily regime, didn't give a great deal of protection but there was no side effects.

And you mentioned the helmets. You very rarely see a photo of Australian soldiers wearing helmets in Vietnam.

8RAR started the trend to some degree because whenever you knew you were going into a mine area or into a major assault area, that flack jacket would come on and that steel helmet would come on and you'd only have to walk a couple of paces down the road,

18:00 and your whole body would just be drenched. There was no way around it, it was the most and then you load your pack on back and so forth, it's just like wearing a sweater in a sauna. And I did the same thing in Dili and it was just really woeful.

Did you experience it yourself or see guys collapse from exhaustion?

One guy died from heat exhaustion. And it's if,

18:30 my observations of him, awfully bloody quiet and it happened so quick it would make your head spin. From one minute he was walking along talking and then he suddenly looked a bit pale, then he was gone. It just overtakes you, dehydration overtakes you and heat exhaustion that quick. And we're all going whoa. So when that happened the company then went into overdrive with, you know monitored the people's water intake and so forth.

19:00 We are a lot more professional about it now with our troops because we've got these bloody camel bags and so forth and you've got a thing stuck in your mouth. We used to carry four water bottles; if you were a big guy you could carry four water bottles. I'm a little guy so I don't have a big waist band. So I'm limited, remember I've got basic pouches and hand grenades and all this sort of crud on me and then someone says, "You've got to carry four water bottles and four more in your pack."

19:30 You run out of space for want of a better word.

What about medivacs, how good were they?

The best in the world. Dust offs, yes. You can't say enough, these guys will come in, I saw one guy being picked up, he wasn't wounded, it was heat exhaustion, he'd collapsed and a guy came in the side of a hill and there was trees up on the hill, so he couldn't land on the hillock. So he stuck the skid against the side of the hill and we were able

20:00 to go down, the guys on the back were like this and there was two guys in front pushing right up to get it over to the loading, and they dragged the bloke on board. And he just hovered there because he couldn't get it. That was the closest he could get to it.

Was that RAAF or American?

Yeah, RAAF. Americans were just as good. The dust off, there was no differentiation between the two of them, they were very good.

20:30 **Coming home, did you do the famous countdown to coming home?**

Oh yeah. Had a little chart there with the end days and the appropriate map of Tasmania. Not that it meant anything to me because my girlfriend left me when I was over there. I think we all did that. Yeah I, to some degree but it wasn't a big thing.

Did you get a Dear John letter?

Yeah I did. Yeah we got a

21:00 Dear John and one of the guys in the platoon helped me with that and I felt much better for it. I'm not a good Australian for it of course but. What we did was he said, "Do you know..." And I said, "The mother dropped me." "Okay, what are you going to do?" "I don't know." "You don't know." So he went around and collected all these photographs of girls and there was bar girls amongst it and we composed a letter back to Mum and it said, "I'm sorry to hear that you feel that way about our relationship but

21:30 I'll abide by it. Thank you for your time. Listen I just can't quite remember what your daughter looks like. Could you just pick her photograph out of these photographs and return the rest to the above address please." We never got the photographs back.

So what about the day you came home. Can you remember all that?

We snuck in at night on both occasions. Whether that was

22:00 I don't, that was the way the planes landed, was late at night and you wandered around Sydney waiting for a plane somewhere else with your mates. I lived in Sydney, my parents lived in Sydney so we landed in the middle of the night at the airport and there was no one around in those days so we wandered into town and the other guys were waiting for the next flight, the next morning to go to their Melbourne and Brisbane and so forth, so we wandered around the late,

22:30 the Auto Club in the Cross and the Texas Tavern and ordered the blokes a drink there and they, see them on to the planes and I went home to Cabramatta and sort of walk in the back door and everyone's asleep. "Oh you're home." "Yeah." 'Cause Mum would have you know. But whether it was planned that way I wouldn't know. People say it was planned that way to keep us out of the picture, out of the limelight so to speak but I don't know, different.

Did it bother you?

No.

23:00 I don't think so no. I went to the welcome home march and I came home from Dili when we arrived in a Herc and we went through the side door and I think it's just a military thing really. I think a lot of guys really were expecting the big march home with the streamers and the parades and so forth. And I have marched with, when 7RAR come home, we left early,

23:30 when the Seven came home, we flew to Saigon while they were loading to Sydney and we came home, we were home ten days before they arrived and we all formed up in the Domain and marched through the streets of Sydney and had the whole town that night. It seemed a bit of an after, anti-climax really. I don't know, it's nice but it hasn't been high on the agenda for marching, I mean, home. I mean probably the Second World War guys probably had more

24:00 welcome home marches coming home from the Second World War than we did. It was a standard thing then so maybe there's a some sort of psyche that says we should have something like that. I'm not so sure it's that important given we end up, we've marched more miles being welcomed home than the amount of activities we're going to now. Yeah I don't know. It would be good if it can be done but sometimes it's, I mean we were coming home in dribs and drabs, not unlike they did in the 1stWW

24:30 so, you going to turn on a parade for 20 blokes? I don't think so.

What about the peace movement and those sort of things, did you know about what was going on back home?

Save Our Sons and yeah I don't know. I've been pretty lucky; I've never been confronted with some of the issues. I've had a couple of, was confronted in Perth once with Save Our Sons and I was going to my

25:00 girlfriend's place, she's now my wife. I got off the bus from Swanbourne and I walked down King George Terrace because she worked for the RACWA then. And I was just coming up there and of all things the Senior Military General Abrahams, he was the Vietnam Commander, he was in the bloody Park

25:30 Hyatt or whatever it was at that time, Hotel. So I come strolling down from the old barracks area there and I looked down there and I was in my uniform and here's all these Save Our Sons and the bloody anti-war and the whole thing. And I'm going ohh, keep moving. And about halfway down there a bunch of people started yelling and screaming and carrying on. But that's as close as I got to being confronted with it. So I really had no.

Can you recall what sort of things they were yelling out?

26:00 No just "war mongerers, child killers," that sort of stuff.

So they want to Save Our Sons and presumably you're one of those sons that they want to save, yet they want to harangue you.

One of the things that came out was we'd probably have more confrontation at private parties and barbecues where "What do you do?" "Oh I'm in the army." And most people would say, "Oh fine, that's good, that's wonderful." But every now and again you'll come across someone with strict

26:30 opposing views. Normal etiquette I would have thought said, "Okay, I've got a different view," and I'm not on my soapbox, but these people would get on their soapboxes. I found that sometimes very offensive. Not from the point of view that this person is, Save Our Sons, child killer and all that sort of stuff, that didn't bother me. What did bother me was the fact that he's taken it into a personal home. And I'd probably rationalise by saying he's rude, crude and unrefined. If I'm not going to do it in your home,

27:00 I'm not going to come into your house and jump up and down on my soapbox in the middle of your lounge room, I would please ask you to do the same in this house. If you want to have an argument go outside. And that's the way I look at it.

Can you tell us a bit about the cadre course for the SAS?

That was a funny thing that was. Yeah, get over three, boy was I in for a rude shock.

27:30 We had a lieutenant Mick Deak, Military Cross man, 5RAR guy. I didn't realise until many years later that he was, his real name is Michael Von Deak MC. Germanic background right to the forefront. But we, you did it in two phases, the first phase was

28:00 you went out to Rottnest Island where we had all the physical running up and down hill and dale and so forth and team building and breaking down. Then you went down to a place called Colley where you froze your keister off in the second reconno phase of it. But I suppose the most memorable phase was, we had, there's an old railway line on Rottnest that was done there for the war for the big guns and these things were falling apart but there was five carriages.

28:30 Little wooden coal carriages. A section of track and it went right down for about I'd say about two and a half kilometres and then they'd tarred over it. So you couldn't go anywhere. Anyway this Ray Heathcote was the PDI [Physical Drill Instructor] and he said, "Rightio, PT [Physical Training]." So we get down and he said, "Rightio here's what we'll do," ties this big lump of horse rope on the back of this thing and he says, "I will blow my whistle once, when I blow that whistle once you will all push these carriages down this hill. When I blow my

29:00 whistle next, you will all jump on this carriage and roll with me. When I blow my whistle the third time you will jump off this carriage and stop it. It is not allowed to cross that track, that road. Damage that road and you've got to pay the Rottnest Island Board repairs." And we thought how hard can that be, there's 16 of us. We've all got two inches of glory, we're full of ourselves, this is a breeze. So tied the rope off, blew the whistle. This thing's really getting

29:30 some mileage up. Blew the whistle and we all jumped up and we're up there, skating down the hill you know in this thing, rattle rattle rattle, going like beauty. And he blows the whistle a third time. So we all bales out of this thing, the first guy that picked this rope up went thump. Got dragged down the railway tracks. We just stopped it and as it stopped, the old sleepers gave way and the entire thing split apart. "You've broken my railway line."

30:00 And we were looking, "Well what are you going to do?" He said, "Right, I'm going up. It's now eight o'clock. You've got until morning tea, I want those carriages back up the hill. Fix it." And he walked off. And we're going "Jesus Christ there's 16 of us, what are we going to do with this bloody railway carriage." But it was part of the psyche to get us going. So we had to get steel crowbars that were laying around the tracks and

30:30 old bits of wood and pinch these rails together that had separated for about half a kilometre, pinch them together and one carriage at a time push it back up the hill very gingerly. Four guys pushing, pinching, pushing, pinching, pushing, pinching and all five carriages had to be back up because he had another section of track going the other way. So yeah, it was different, the cadre course on Rottnest, yeah very different.

Before you did the cadre course, did you know, did you have any expectations of how hard it was?

31:00 No, none whatsoever. I did my knee in. I did, I had tropical boils from bad blood in Vietnam and when we were doing the long forced marches and runs, it just tore the back open and the boil burst. And we were doing the march from Fremantle to Swanbourne on the road and then I woke up in hospital. And they said, "What happened?"

31:30 I said, "The boil had burst but I just ignored it. But then the pain got so much that I just passed out." So I had to redo the test.

And the 16 blokes that were doing it in your section, were they all Vietnam Veterans?

No, not all of them. A good bunch of them were, there was Les Angel, he was a Vietnam Veteran, there was Mounty, there was Rasmussen. We actually had a guy

32:00 doing the course with us who had jumped into Dien Bien Phu with the French Foreign Legion. I mean you don't get that now, it's almost righting something out of boy's own adventure, it was amazing stuff. But yeah, they all, with the exception of a couple of them, there was a couple of big guys that were actually absolute Rambos, failed. They had no heart and yet they had an old guy by the name of Hartley, and he had grey hair,

32:30 portly paunch his tummy, but he'd never say no. You could see him, on his face, the strain on his face, not once, not once in the entire period of the course did he say no. His body would give out but it would collapse on the road before he would say no, and he wouldn't say no. Point blank he wouldn't say no. He passed because his heart was in the right place.

What percentage physical, what percentage mental?

33:00 Their attitude to the cadre is, we can build you up later on, we just want to make sure you've got the heart for it. A lot of guys, "I failed map reading, I failed this, I failed that." "Your heart wasn't in the right place. We can teach you to be the best map reader in the world, we can make you the strongest man in the world, we can make you the most resilient man in the world, but if you haven't got the heart for it, we're not going to waste time on you."

33:30 And that's what it's all about, you've got to have heart.

So you passed the cadre course?

Yeah, the second time yeah. I spent time there but it's if you're going to get married or have a family life, SAS is not the way to go. It's probably got the highest divorce rate of any sort, and really the family life there is not, I mean Vietnam the guys were doing and I didn't do a tour with SAS over there, I just

34:00 watched these guys, they'd do one active tour in Vietnam, 12 months. They'd come back and they'd spend 12 months training in the eastern states on training courses and so forth, so they're away nine months of that year. Then they'd go on to their training phase to go back to Vietnam which includes six months in New Guinea. Then they go back for another year. So there's two years they're supposed to be back here but they're not. So on average they were spending three months at home over two years.

34:30 **So at this stage were you still single?**

Yes, I held out for a long time. But

It sounds like obviously you were thinking.

Oh yes I was thinking. You had to find someone who didn't mind, you've got to, a lot of guys get married and then suddenly find that the girl, the wife or whatever doesn't like the separations, long periods of absence and so forth, looking after the house, paying the bills,

35:00 that sort of thing so you've got to take that into consideration. Very early in the piece I was lucky to find someone who could be a home manager, financial and home at the same time whilst I was away. Otherwise you're trying to do it long distance which doesn't work.

So what sort of work were you doing in the regiment?

I was Regimental Headquarters and Operations. So it was pretty much on line with what I was doing before.

35:30 But then I was going nowhere and that was just before I went back to the east and then I got another stint to Vietnam and when I came back I got a stint into Singapore. So I've had a pretty good run really.

As a professional soldier who obviously enjoys what you do. It must've been a big thrill to get your badge.

To be badged and to

36:00 to get to the level that that's at in those times, yes. They had a wealth of soldiers there in those days, that went back to Thailand, to SEATO [South East Asian Treaty Organisation] and they could tell tales, and you go, "Oh listen to this." Lying in ambush on the Indonesian border in Sarawak and North Borneo and those places. Wonderful

36:30 tales. And some of them. One guy's still here in Queensland that you guys could really talk to and I'll give his name out because he's a wealth of experience. He looks after the Victoria Barracks Art Collection, the historical museum. But there's a, there's guys out that that, see I crossed from Vietnam to now

37:00 these guys, a lot of these guys crossed from Second World War to Vietnam. So you've got this link and their experiences are colourful is the word for it.

So would you have liked to do a tour of Vietnam with the regiment?

I would've yeah, but they were taking such a long time. They were only a small group. They only had one squadron and at the time they had four squadrons rotating. So to get into it you were three, four years there.

- 37:30 Whereas we had three battalions over there. So the chances of rotating more with the battalions was better, far better.

So would you say you got bored in the regiment and that's why you wanted to go back to Vietnam?

Yeah, it did. Plus you're single and in those days, you could say "I'm bored, okay we'll go somewhere." And just get the old paper work out, apply for transfer to XYZ. And in those days, not a problem, bingo and away you went. It was so easy. Nowadays,

- 38:00 "Why do you want to go there? No we don't have, we've got to think about your career management," and so forth. Now it bogs down in all this red tape. In those days it was another body that they could use. And you really, you set the posting trend, not them, like they do now. And for a young private soldier, it was great fun.

You'd met your future wife, how did you explain your desire to go back to Vietnam?

Not very well really. Not very well at all.

- 38:30 It was, I think the words she said, "Well if you want to do that, goodbye." She went to New Zealand for a holiday and when we came back, I came back to Perth for a holiday and we met. We'd been bumping into each other over the years. She was over it thank god.

So your final tour of Vietnam, did you come back to Australia? Sorry we'll stop there.

- 39:00 **End of tape**

Tape 9

- 00:30 **So you've returned from your last tour of Vietnam, do you have a plan?**

Well the plan was where they're going to send me and that was with 7RAR, they immediately tried to send me straight back to the west and I got a posting back to the regiment and I said, "Guys I've got other plans to head north with the battalions up north." And I had to apply for transfer after transfer and

- 01:00 finally they said, "Okay we'll send you." So I ended up in 5RAR in Sydney which was not as far north as I'd rather have had. So I badgered them for a while and I ended up doing continuation training there and did some jumps and that sort of thing to keep my wings alive. And a bloke walked in one day and said, "Do you want to go back to Vietnam?" And I said, "Yeah okay, third time, good." And there was a bunch of us from Five were picked but what

- 01:30 I didn't realise at the time was a bunch was also picked to go to Six in Singapore. So this came out and here I am you know going Private John Humphries, 6RAR, Singapore. "Oh okay, rightio, I'll go do that." And in hindsight that was the best posting because the guys went into, I think they went into 3RAR that last group, they weren't there very long and then we shut down and pulled straight out. But

- 02:00 we had, as I said we had the most marvellous garrison posting in Singapore. Single guy, the rate of exchange was perfect, as I say the Singaporeans were more than accommodating. In actually fact, a little known fact, I'm full of them today, when 6RAR came home in '75 after Mr Whitlam got in and took us you know, shut the whole place down, most of the soldiers complained because they were still half way through their pay plans.

- 02:30 You know, paying off their cars and so forth, they were buying in Singapore, so he wouldn't have got many votes after that. But they also brought home a large Asian population from Singapore. Probably the largest migration from a single unit that came home. I think there was about 185 to 200

That's wives and girlfriends?

Yeah. Yeah so that

- 03:00 was, that was, and they've only just had a reunion and it's amazing some of the stories and where the families have gone to and what they're doing. Which is really good to see, the success that they've had. But yeah and I came back and of course we soldiered on. And I think sadly, well I'll say that, I'd better qualify that, sadly the Defence Force started

- 03:30 dropping into its peace time role, no longer on a war footing. And of course over the years the experience gradually filters out or it dies out, discharges out. We did things like the Brisbane floods,

stomped on bloody grasshoppers up in Emerald. Cyclone Tracy, we cleaned up after Cyclone Tracy.

04:00 There was floods, bushfires, you name it we did all that right across the country. And thoroughly enjoyable, it was, not at someone else's expense but thoroughly enjoyable to say that here's a large organisation that's able to put something back into the country without costing the country something. We don't do enough of that. I mean, there's a lot of things out there, we can't afford to do this, oh well just use the army, they're already being paid. But they put a cost on moving things.

04:30 And it's I believe, a false cost. But we did that. And but as the years went on, the army gradually wound down and started getting a corporate image. Not very military.

Can you explain that to us, the corporate image?

The corporate image is where you have a business plan as opposed to an operational plan. The little things. You tend to spend more money on glossy magazines as opposed to training on a rifle range. I mean

05:00 there's more glossy magazines produced by the Department of Defence to a point where it impacts on the amount of rounds I can fire down a range to make myself more proficient with a weapon. And that's not what it should be and a lot of these glossy magazines, when you open them up, the storyline is poor, the cost is prohibitive and it's really repeating itself. At the present moment I think there's about 36 publications the defence produces, glossy, quite thick, four times a year.

05:30 And basically they're all repeating themselves. I can show you some of the examples and that's not counting things like equity and workplace health and safety, OH&S and all that stuff, all that aside. After a while you think about what I've been through and done and enjoyed, and then someone turns around and says, "Rightio, you've got to have a corporate image. Start thinking like a civilian outside. The business plan for the unit is this.

06:00 Think about costings and so forth." It's no longer about operational goals; it's more about an instatement of a business plan. And they actually train to do that. Now it's more about every defence unit must have a profit and loss at the end of the year. Hang on, you can't do that, it's a military unit. You don't have a profit and loss factor in this.

06:30 They do now; they actually put a profit and loss factor on defence. So at the end of the day, you've got something that's, there's no way in the world you can put a thing on it, a profit on it, but they have. So they can devalue it each year. So that way it's part and parcel. And it was very sad so in the end I thought to myself, no, this is... I'm going to walk away from this while I've got a good taste in my mouth. So I transferred to the reserves

07:00 in '95. And I thought that was good and I worked outside for a while with the Treasury Casino as a commissionaire and they went to 12 hour shifts and I walked away from that. And I thought I'll do a bit of reserve work. So I rang the reserve people up in barracks there and I said, "Guys have you got any reserve work for an old fart like me. You know, just see if I can be used?" "They want an operations person down at the hospital." I went down there and had an interview and said, "Look guys, what say we just do

07:30 30 days, if it doesn't work out I'll walk away and you haven't lost anything. Okay? But if it works out, we'll see how we go." They said, "Okay." I've been at it ever since. I mean I have done so many things so different since then, and as soon as Cosgrove went into Timor, suddenly there was operations all over the place and suddenly we're not talking corporate image any more, we're talking the army doing what it's supposed to do. And I have probably had so much

08:00 haven't had so much job satisfaction doing things, in Timor, as a Sergeant, I had the most fun doing, what I was a Liaison Officer at the Australian National Command element and I looked after trust fund nations. I looked after Portugal, Kenya, Bangladesh, Philippines, I'm missing someone, and one other country.

08:30 Now being a trust fund during INTERFET [International Force in East Timor] period, they came with, the only thing they brought with them were the clothes on their backs. We gave them everything else: trucks, planes, food, fed them, watered them, communicated them, everything.

That was a very new thing for the Australian army to do wasn't it?

Yeah, it was, I mean the water bill for the period January through to February, we were using water from Nippies of South Australia, was fifteen million dollars

09:00 for a two month period. That was for a force of eleven thousand. And some of the thing we did. I mean when they changed the Brazilian group over, we went down to see the new liaison officer, and they were drinking their little tea gourd with a stainless steel thing. The bloke's standing there sipping it, and I said, "Good morning Sir." "Hmm." "Sir, I'm Sgt Humphries, I'm your liaison officer,

09:30 I'm here to liaise with... does anyone speak English here?" "Hmm." And out comes this, they finally found this officer and he was the Commanding Officer of the entire contingent. I said "Sir, I'm Sgt Humphries, I'm your liaison officer." "Aha, you need to speak to liaison officer." "Who is that sir?" "That's this person here." "Hmm." And I'm going, "He doesn't speak English." "That's right, I speak

English." "Well can I, will you be...?" "No he is liaison officer,

10:00 I just speak English." And this was the sort of thing you were confronted with every day. The cultural diversity, the cultural differences, the fact that 90% of the Trust Fund Nations don't like working with senior NCOs, it's got to be an officer talking to an officer. Very much so. And for us, "I'm all you got baby, talk to me you don't talk to any one else. You want trucks out of my country, you've got to talk to me." And I had that sort of power.

10:30 The Kenyans, "What do you want?" "We need fifteen trucks." "Not a problem, do you want number plates?" Ken one to Ken fifteen, them done at the Darwin Jail. It was just so much work bloody, I just enjoyed myself so much. You were doing things. You were standing there saying, "What do you need? Yeah we can do that. Can do." The "can do" attitude had come alive and it was great. It was very very good.

A lot of that I suppose would've come from being a soldier at the other end and suddenly being in that position.

Yeah. It was

11:00 marvellous. And I can never speak highly enough of the group I worked with. Me and Stevie Button, we used to go down, get ticked off so we'd go down to the Dili Wharf, walked in amongst the, where they had all the containers stacked up and we'd, he'd have a smoke and I'd have a cool drink and we'd sit down and we'd say "Look at this, this is a magnificent view of the Dili harbour and we're self employed so to speak. We're our own bosses.

11:30 We're looking after five Trust Fund Nations." And it was just bloody marvellous. Very good. Very good.

How'd you get across to Timor.

On the JB [HMAS Jervis Bay], oh boy. We went to Darwin to do the training and I was told by some very good friends of mine who I've since killed. They says, "Oh when you get up there, what'll happen is you'll do a bit of cultural awareness,

12:00 rules of engagement and legal stuff for the UN. And the PTLs will take you in the morning and sort of walk you around, orientate you to Robertson barracks, and so you'll start acclimatising. Nothing very hard." The first morning I gets up there, this PTI killed us. I thought I was going to die. I'm going, "My god, what's this guy trying to do? Let me get to Timor first before you kill me." So we're running down this range, the second last day

12:30 of our week up there and he's yelling out, "All those guys under 30 drop and give me ten." Thank god. "All those guys under 35 drop and give me ten." And I'm still running along. "All those guys under 40 drop and give me ten." Still going. "All those guys under

13:00 45 drop and give me ten." Still going. The guy's looking at me. "All those guys under 50 drop and give me ten." I'm still going. He said "Right, all those guys that I haven't mentioned, drop and give me fifteen." "Oh okay." Because I was 54.

13:30 It was, we got out to, we were supposed to go out on a Saturday morning and they said, "Rightio, Saturday morning the JB will leave, but that night Darwin went on cyclone warning." There was a cyclone coming up the Timor sea. So the skipper of the JB, a young bloke said "I can beat it. Get everyone on board." So me and a mate, John Ellis, said "We'll go down." We'd say, "you going to have something to eat?" "No, no." "We'll go across to the,"

14:00 we didn't know about the debate going earlier, "I don't want any tea, we'll just go across and have a couple of beers in the Sergeants' mess." They had the most magnificent Sergeants' mess I've ever seen. So we were having a few beers over there and we were sinking these things in because we were just going to go back and sleep, next morning wet on the JB and go. We had about our eighth beer and the guy comes running, "Are you two guys going to Timor tomorrow?" "Yep." "You're not now, you're going now." "Holy smoke." So as we galloped across to our, we were living in the gymnasium.

14:30 Picked all our gear up, handful of Quells, because we got the word and we gets down to the Darwin wharf and the JB's, low tide, right down like that and the ramp going on it was right up and it's, I'm standing full height and the ramp was up here. So we've got full pack on, your webbing and your Dili bag and you're scrambling on like that, you go down and then you've got to climb up through the six floors of the JB. There was only, less than 20 of us on that ship.

15:00 It was full of cargo. So, pulls away from the wharf, and this thing gunned this, you know it went roar, and by the time it got to the harbour outer moll it just ran straight into a wave and it was awesome. Normally a twelve run into Dili from Darwin on a normal day, it took us 22 hours and it, this thing had crashed, climbed up the waves, about six metre waves,

15:30 right to the top and just drop over. Roar down and of course, we're in there and of course immediately all the people who went to tea that night, brought it all up. Air conditioning closed down and I'm going, and then to top it all off, they had a little cafeteria there and they had two cases of Worcestershire sauce in bottles, came off the top shelf in one of these waves, shattered on the floor and you can imagine,

- 16:00 Worcestershire sauce and all this vomit and I'm gong, "Oh this is charming." And I, what we did was, you actually tied yourself down between the chairs and just hung on. It was the most awesome ride I've ever done. Because you couldn't walk and somewhere through the night it would've been about one o'clock in the morning, they had a big Coca Cola machine on wheels, bolted to the wall, and it tore itself free. And I'm watching these three sailors, risk life and limb trying to do this thing
- 16:30 because it would've gone through the wall and they ended up lassoing it to the bay area to stop it from moving. But it was an awesome run in. The next day of course I had those dinners, because no one felt like eating except me and the mate and it was marvellous. You'd pull those things apart and you'd break open a water vessel and it starts heating itself. And there a American idea. And it fogs the whole place up, marvellous. Great idea. Loved it.
- 17:00 **So you were in the Force Logistical Support Group over there?**
- Force Logistical Support Group, yes. And we were, we, it was a hangover from Interfet. Interfet had just wound down, actually we were in the last ten days of Interfet control. And the Force Logistics Group was, it would look after the UN people. It was quite a large organisation when you think about it but, and they had
- 17:30 the headquarters, operations, and liaison cells were in the radio station, and all the logistics were up in the taxation office and the coffee sorting house which you'd go up there to pick up stores. And it was a coffee warehouse and what they'd done is, on the actual, on the front of the building, there was, no one had changed anything. It was the Portuguese Tax Collecting Office, written in Portuguese and then the Indonesians came along and they put
- 18:00 Indonesian Tax Collecting Office straight over the top of the other sign, it was, you could see it underneath, and then we come along. We just put a bit tarp over it saying Nine Force Support Battalion, over it, so we were sort of following suit. But it was an amazing place to be in to see all the different cultures. The Timorese are very lovely people.
- And what sort of tasks did you have there?**
- Basically we started out looking after all the Trust Fund nations because we gave them everything, bar none.
- 18:30 And when that task finished, we took over container management. What the UN did, was it came in and said, "Rightio, what the Australians are doing is too expensive. We don't do it that way." So they sacked the Australian supplier, brought the European supplier in. So the Australian supplier said, "Stuff you, I want all my containers back." So hence, five of us came to get them and we had to chase 500 freezers across Dili,
- 19:00 and about probably 8,000 containers. And you go, "How hard can that be?" I have a list, jump on a plane, and we had frequent flier points all over the island looking for them. And you'd turn up. The Russians, they run all the helicopters out of Dili. They had taken one of our containers, this Australian guy's container and cemented it into the middle of their building as their lock-up, for all their special tools. Our own air force had
- 19:30 turned them upside down and built forts out of them around the air port. The Kiwis had turned them into toilets and showers and fortresses on concrete in the border areas. Everyone had done something different with them. We said "Guys, that container, I want it." "No, no, no, this is operations, we're using it." I said "Uh-uh, want it back." "Oh can't have it." "Okay, you can pay for it then." Well the New Zealand Government said, "No, we're not paying."
- 20:00 I said, "You're going to have to give them back because they belong to someone else." And the ones that got away from us turned up in the most weirdest of places. There was three in Alaska, seven in Belgium. And I said, I put my hand up, "I'll go and pick them up. You beauty." But it was, it was a very interesting job. We had a little vehicle and to this day, it'll make you look at containers,
- 20:30 every container we touched base with, down at the bottom in each corner, there's a little square peg. If you see one with a yellow bit of spray paint on it, I have touched base with that container and that container's been to Timor. I've actually been driving down the road here in Brisbane and you've seen a container go past, and I thought oh my god, this is getting really bad this is. There's a bit of yellow paint on it. It was the only way we could do the audit process.
- 21:00 So that's what we did.
- What about, you worked with the tri-nations run hospitals.**
- When they were starting to downsize, I was able to get an extension and we went across to the hospital. The hospital was rather unique in the sense that at that time it was the RAAF component. One of the surgical teams was naval, in triage and day to day was a Singaporean, and then you had an Egyptian which was running one of the wards and surgical wards.
- 21:30 We looked after all our own stuff, for our own people, no one else touched it. We allowed the Singaporeans to do it. The Egyptians were always a problem, both culturally and, one of the things, we were in a little compound and it had a ring road and it's not, nothing to do with the faith, but if you bring a person from the back blocks of

- 22:00 Australia and put him in a culturally different area, he's going to stick out like a sore thumb and probably not be as astute in his comments. The same comes from an Egyptian coming from similar back blocks environment to here. So you've got nursing officers and female nurses and doctors and so forth, puts their little running Nikes on and so forth, and earphones on
- 22:30 and go around the training circuit. And of course the first problem we had, we've got all these young strict Muslims calling them whores and sluts and all sorts of issues. And we thought, it's become a real nightmare. So we resolved that but they didn't do themselves any service because they brought equipment that was very third world, and we wouldn't let our people be operated on them. One of the funniest things I ever saw was the Super Pol organisation
- 23:00 from the UN, take police from all over the world and they're pretty hard done by because they don't get a great deal of support from the UN. And the only reason you would do it would be for the experience gained. So I come walking around the corner from the mess tent one day and here's this American policeman, got a broken leg, he's got a pistol in the hand and he's dragging himself out of the ward. He didn't want to be there. And I've seen guys come
- 23:30 in, said, "Who's on triage?" "Oh the Egyptians are." "When are the Singaporeans or the Australians on?" And they go, "Tomorrow or the next day." "I'll come back." You see a guy walk away with his arm in a sling." I said, "How bad if it rained, and if you look at the way that the Dili Hospital, it's situated on the old museum, got a court yard. And they had an eleven by eleven tent there and it was straight on the floor. So when it rained it had that much water floating across this area. So I walked, I looked into this tent one day
- 24:00 and here's this dentist with an old pedal power drill, and you've got lighting and wires dangling and this poor Portuguese soldier in this chair... whir...And I'm going uuurgh. And I'm going, "Yep, now I know why these guys are dragging themselves out." You know." It was very scary.

What about the Timorese people?

Timorese are

- 24:30 they're about as diverse as they get. And their language is quite unique. It's an example, Tagalog which is Filipino, and Tetum, use the same vowels apparently. And I said, "How do you know that?" to the Filipinos when I was working as a co-ordinator for the liaison officer. The Filipino said, "We can sing their songs, beautifully. Don't know what we're saying, but can sing it. Very melodious. Because it's just like our
- 25:00 Tagalog song." He said, "But I can't talk the language." It's just one of those unusual things. And they have a, they're able to break into Tetum and there's something like 30 or 40 different versions of it right across the island because they're very tribal. You know this group here will speak a version of it, that if you go two villages away, sometimes doesn't work. So it's quite unique. The
- 25:30 people themselves, we had a coming out party. And one of the things you do at Darwin you say, "Now remember there's philisyn, phila, phila, big worms in the tummy, there's all sorts of parasites and so forth so you only eat in the messes, you only eat in the kitchens that are approved by us," blah, blah, blah, the whole thing. So the hospital foreman's brother, his son
- 26:00 came of age and over there, if the son turns two, it's a big thing because by the time he's made two he's surmounted all the natural birth obstacles, the, and he's deemed to have a good chance of surviving. So it becomes a big issue. The whole street closes off. He gets dressed up in, like a Christening outfit. And everyone puts on their best Sunday outfit and big cakes made up and the bet food's brought out
- 26:30 and it's a celebration. So along comes this invitation to me, I was looking after the people there and the boss, and I said to the boss, "What are you going to do now? You're telling us not to go out and eat." And he said, "Well there are exceptions to the rule. Let's hope that we've got a good group here." "Okay." Went down there and we all sat down there and they said, everyone, the whole street lit up, it was like a wedding and here's this little kid, two years of age sitting there, all trussed up in this outfit, it was marvellous, and I mean
- 27:00 everyone just couldn't do enough, we were fed, beer, and there was food, there was cake, there was traditional food, and the one thing that really floored me was the music. They loved tango, they'd go absolutely crazy about tango. I mean here we've got all these Asians, couples, tangoing because of the Portuguese influence. It's still very strong. I was marvellous, and a good day was had but no one got crook.

So how would you sum up your Timor

experience?

I would say the word rebirth. Yeah. That's why I'm probably still wearing uniform and enjoying myself. One would have thought I'm 57, and one said, "Well why aren't you retiring? Unwinding." "I'm sorry guys I'm greedy, I'm having too much fun."

- 28:00 I've actually got, I at my rank and my experience, I can sit there and say something and people say

"John that's not a bad idea." And then when we're doing work and dealing with upper virus trials, liaisons with the Vietnamese and so forth, instead of just being a gopher, I'm very much an integral part of the team. And it feels bloody good. You know there's a lot of job satisfaction doing it and instead of sitting back there and waiting

- 28:30 for someone else to stuff it up, you can actually put your two bob's worth in and suddenly find, "Gee that worked, must do that more often."

Can I ask you a bit about 49 Battalion RQR?

49 Battalion was part of the Regular Reserve scheme. It was a lot of fun; we did things there that we were continually told were cost effective, but were never. 49 was a Ready Reserve. My job there was to look after the

- 29:00 Ready Reserve Job Scheme and the Ready Reserve Education Scheme. So for guys who wanted to go back to school and so forth. At the same time I had to get on a phone and talk to employees and say, "Well look guys, you know he's, we only want him for 50 days of the year, you've got him for the rest and we're paying you money, we give you 50 days wage and so forth..." For big companies, to a certain degree it worked. For small companies where Mum and Dad were two thirds of the work force and we're going
- 29:30 to take one third for 50 days of the year, who's kidding who? It doesn't work. And it, that was one of the short comings of it. You can't. And especially when we had to structure around when the university education semester breaks were, and they also corresponded to the holiday breaks. So if you've got someone who's one third of a tourist type operation, it just didn't work. And a lot
- 30:00 of family groups had set their companies up based on daughter and son and this sort of thing and it just didn't work. And it was, but we got all the politicians rolling through on their junkets saying, "This is working, I'm here to tell you it's working." And we're all sitting in the audience and knowing full well they're wasting money on it. We actually hired Ansett jets to pick all our people up from around Australia and take them straight to Shoalhaven Bay and then hired the same jets to take them
- 30:30 home at the end of their 25 days a year, half year. It's got to be the greatest waste of money I ever saw. But it was a phase they went through and when they shut it down, it's never going to come again because now they can say that it was not cost effective. But there were good times in 49, very different times.

There were a lot of regular blokes leaving the army at that stage, weren't there?

There was yeah. They were pruning the place back. We never learn, we never learn from our experiences.

- 31:00 And the only way to get into the regular army then was, if you were successful in the ready reserves, they were taking a small quota from the ready reserves into the regular army. So all these guys were trying to get into the ready reserves knowing full well that their one and only chance of getting into the regular army was via this quota system through the ready reserve. And if they didn't make it, I've seen a lot of guys who were very disheartened because they missed out on the quota system and were stuck in the ready reserves. Thankfully that's all gone.

So were we still

- 31:30 **suffering from what had happened there when Timor started?**

Yes, very much so. I mean the best example of that is, Cosgrove had gone and we're feeling the pinch, weren't getting enough people into the area. And out of nowhere there's a little notice on the board, the downsizing team will be coming through and will be giving presentations on downsizing of the defence force. So I went along to this and you know,

- 32:00 "Excuse me sir, can I ask a question?" "Certainly Sergeant, what is it?" "Did you guys read the newspapers?" "Why? Your point?" "Well we're screaming about not enough troops and shortages and so forth, and you're downsizing?" "Oh, no, no, no it's a different story." I said "I'm just asking the question." They got as far as Townsville before someone finally said, "Back." Pulled them back.
- 32:30 Moylan was at that time doing Divisional Commander three days a week, and then Theatre Commander, Chief of Army two days a week. He came back one day, just before December and said, "Everyone to the briefing room now." We got in there and he said "This is ridiculous. They think they've got away with it. They're going to try and go for the downsizing again." And we were looking.
- 33:00 Just because they got away with it, it was such a close run thing, they were going to try and go back down that road of downsizing. They can't now because they've heard too much.

Can I ask you about Anzac Day in Timor?

Anzac Day was pretty awesome really because the, we went on to the, they actually had the memorial set up at the end of the runway. And they went, we drove all the trucks on, there was, Five Seven was instructing at the time,

- 33:30 so they had the whole of Five Seven, they had all the miscellaneous units so it was a very large service

and everyone was armed and of course there was, they set some lights up for the eerie effect, but it didn't work because the sunrise took it away and the sunrise affect on the Memorial was absolutely stunning. It was quite an emotional thing to see, for me it was a long time since I'd been on an Anzac Day on active service so yeah it was

34:00 very emotional.

Can you recall Anzac Days spent in Vietnam?

No not really, apart from one where I've got photographs where we got drunk and that was at ARU, but the rest of the times on operation. It's very hard to do it, in actual fact you lose track of time really, you sort of, you're out there, yes it's daylight, it's night time, it's daylight, how many days have we been on this now? You don't follow until you get back to camp and then you catch up if you want.

34:30 It's just a way of dealing with the process.

What are your thoughts on Anzac Day?

I think Anzac Day is relevant as, I think it's been written up that its relevance is backed there. I think Anzac Day is good medicine for a country that is having trouble finding where it wants to be in this world. We have an identity crisis, we're continually trying to reinvent ourselves. I mean at the end of the day someone's got to say, "You can't manufacture history.

35:00 Whatever history you've got, you're stuck with. If it's bad, move on. If it's good, remember it. Don't try and reinvent yourself because in history's perspective it doesn't work. And to me, Anzac Day has gone from strength to strength now, and I think its relevance is probably more important than ever it was, because we're remembering it for the right reasons and all the past.

What about your thoughts on what's become

35:30 **known as the Vietnam Remembrance Day, the anniversary of Long Tan?**

I disagree with that I don't see the need for it. We have, I mean in the scheme of things, Vietnam was not as big as people make it out to be. I thought it was a war and we suffered, but I mean, it pales into insignificance compared to the First World War, Second World War,

36:00 I mean the guys in Korea, although they didn't have as many or lose as many, had a far harder time than we did. So, I think there was too many political machinations going on, and that was more political than really, I feel very embarrassed about it. To me, Armistice Day, Anzac Day, suits me down to a 'T'.

How much have you spoken about your experiences to your own children?

36:30 Not a great deal, I think they, they're more proactive with me than what I am with them on this. Kirsty, the youngest, the one that was just there, yes, she's more proactive. I have no issues or problems with them about that. I have a problem when people say, "So what's the badges or buttons, what are they for?" But my kids don't do that and they ask the questions.

37:00 **You haven't had any problems with PTSD yourself, do you know other Vets that have had problems with that?**

Yeah. I, again, it's like I said before, I'm not going to say that there is an issue or problem, we've each got our own ways of dealing with it. To me, I'm lucky in the sense that I have a caring loving family and I've always seemed to have that. I also have a quirky sense of humour and a way of dealing with

37:30 stress. If I didn't I wouldn't have lasted as long as I have lasted. I would've fell off the wheels a few miles down the track so to speak. And you've got to look at it from that point of view, a lot of it is self help. We've had, it's a great country, I've had a great life. Still having a great life. I've got three wonderful caring daughters, I've got a great family structure, organisation, I have a hell of a big extended family. I'm a little bit concerned about some of them.

38:00 They're almost as wacky as me. But it works. And I do feel sad and sorry for the people that suffer from post stress, because a lot of it I think is, and this is where I get into hot water, because I'm not game to say anything to them because you tend to push your own wheelbarrow. My wheelbarrow at the moment is, a little bit more self help in situations like that and less feeling sorry for yourself

38:30 and pity, it's very easy to just grab the old bottle of brown ale and disappear into a whole somewhere, that's the easy way out. My wife has a very simple statement, you're a long time dead, enjoy life. And that's what it's all about.

How do you sum up your experience in the army?

I haven't finished yet. I haven't finished. I said to my wife the other day, "I'm not going to Baghdad darling." She said, "So what's different?

39:00 That means your going." I said, "Well if I get a chance I'll go." No I think, I had an absolute blinder of an experience, you couldn't have bought this if you'd gone to Harvey World Travel and booked it because as soon as you step off the plane, the boat, the train, whatever, what makes it different is the military environment. It's a hard thing to explain but it puts a

39:30 military slant or touch on it where, if anything will go wrong you can guarantee it'll go wrong and it'll have a military slant on it and it just makes it that little bit different.

INTERVIEW ENDS