Australians at War Film Archive

Donald Beard - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 5th December 2003

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1187

Tape 1

00:39 **Can you give us a summary of your life?**

I was born at Ashford, near where the Ashford Hospital now is. Went to

01:00 the Richmond High School and my father had been in the public service, but with the Depression in 1930 things went bad. We then went to Moonta, went to Moonta School and things got worse with the Depression. We had to come back to Adelaide and move around in rented property and various schools all around Adelaide. Until eventually came

01:30 the Second [World] War by which time I had matriculated and started university. Did my medical training at the University of Adelaide. Then because I felt rather guilty about being at home while all my friends and relatives were away in the services I volunteered to go into the army for whatever they wanted.

02:00 They sent me to Japan and the occupation force, ostensibly for a year. Now at the end of that year they asked me to stay on for 6 months while they closed the force down. I was about to come home the day after, when Korea broke. And I was then invited to volunteer and as they had us backed up a brick wall I couldn't go backwards, and I found I had volunteered for Korea, somewhat reluctantly because I was

02:30 wanting to come home to start my surgical studies. So I landed up with 3 Battalion so I was there for another 18 months. Then came home and started my surgical studies in Adelaide. Went to, the next thing I went to England in 1953 as the medical officer for representing the corps at the coronation of Queen Elizabeth.

03:00 Came home and returned to England to do my surgical training there, and finally came back to Adelaide at the end of 1957 where I became senior surgical registrar at the Adelaide Hospital. And then when I'd finished that at last I felt that I had something to offer some young lady, and we became married.

03:30 I was a late starter. I'm then 36. And went out into private practice and very difficult because making a start in surgery is not easy. Then I worked as an honorary surgeon at the Adelaide Hospital, then the Queen Elizabeth Hospital and then became head of surgical services at the Modbury Hospital. And stayed there

04:00 until 1990, and during all that period of course, half time in public hospital, half time in private practice. Concurrently, I had my continuing army career in the reserve. In 1967 the Director General of medical services said

04:30 to me as I was consultant surgeon to the army, "What are we going to do about the casualties in Korea? We are going to get the Americans to look after them?" And I said, "Noway we'll do it ourselves." And he said, "We haven't got surgeons." And I said, "We'll get teams from the reserve." And he said, "Who are going to send first?" So once again I'm in the position of having to volunteer. And

05:00 January of '68 I took a surgical team to be attaché to the field ambulance in Vietnam arriving in Tet. and had arranged for someone to do my, look after my private practice while I was away. I then went on in the army as Deputy Director of Medical Service of what was then

05:30 Central command, South Australia and Northern Territory. And finally, as I mentioned the consultant surgeon to army office, and then the Honorary Colonel to the corps. In 1986 or there about, I got the best honour of my career

06:00 in being appointed as Korea's Honorary Surgeon which was a wonderful day of which I have always been proud. I retired from public hospital work in 1990 but continued in private practice which I have done ever since, although I have stopped operating

06:30 about 5 years ago and continued as a consultant which I am about to conclude in a couple of weeks.

Now is the private side of my life with being married in 1962 having two delightful boys. One of whom

07:00 is an economist and the other a physiotherapist. And they have a couple of grandchildren each and my wife and I are, unlike fortunately some marriages, we have 41 years of sheer utter delight. So here I am in Christmas 2003

07:30 and I still enjoy life and work and play. Unfortunately I can no longer play cricket which I did for 50 years but throughout all that time only won two premierships. One in Japan and one in Adelaide. So I have had a life of medicine and a wonderful family and sport

08:00 and of course the army to which I was devoted since first joining , what was the CMF [Citizens' Military Force] in 1947. And I've been very proud to look after young Australian soldiers for whom I have

08:30 the highest regard for their courage bravery and devotion to their units and to Australia.

A full life. Could you tell me about your earliest memories of childhood?

09:00 Earliest memories. Yeah this was at Ashford, and we had a, life was simple but very enjoyable. For instance, I must have, I suppose been about 3 and my father used to take me up to the Keswick Bridge to

09:30 watch the trains go under on Saturday night. I can remember with my sister building all sorts of things together and having happy times together. I can remember right from the very start my parent's stimulation of reading.

10:00 Reading and talking and that has stayed with me and been very important in the whole of my life. As soon as I had started school my parents showed me the importance of learning. And getting an education. Nothing forced, it was

10:30 more an assistance at home with study and showing how study could be quite thrilling. I can remember a lot of small things. I can remember going without a lot. Having

11:00 clothes had to be repaired and repaired and repaired during the Depression . Food, I can recall we'd have to have a joint, a leg or forequarter of mutton on Sunday and then that would virtually go for the whole week with various meals being cut out of that joint. Curried, made into a

11:30 pie, cold, until Friday. I noted in the Advertiser yesterday Rex Tory's article that he said people were scrooges if they reused food from one meal to the next. Not that it's being careful. However life was simple but very enjoyable

12:00 even though in Depression times. And see we had our own house at Ashford. But when we went to Moonta, we had leased it. When Moonta didn't work out, we'd come back to Adelaide again the person to whom we leased it wouldn't give up the lease. But on the other hand he couldn't pay the rent because of the Depression

12:30 so my father had to pay the rates and taxes, but on a house that we couldn't occupy. So we went from place to place renting a room or a back veranda and used a kitchen. And I went to a number of schools, up at Blackwood, around the corner here at Wellington Road, now Trinity Gardens.

13:00 And to Parkside Primary School and wonderful teaching all along the way although I'd only have a couple of years at a time. So you don't really need to go to college. As long as you have the stimulation

13:30 from your parents; it's most important that you have parents who are interested in your work. Then you've got to have a teacher who takes an interest in you and helps you. Even though the some of the students are not very good, but if he can take a bit of extra time then, plus anyone who shows great interest, well then he'll

14:00 look after them. Then of course you need some motivation as a student, him or herself. If you've got that you can get anywhere at all in life. And I can remember leaving Parkside Primary School aged, what, 11 or 12, and the headmaster, Mr A C Cattle came to the gate of the school, shook my hand and said, "Beard you've done quite well,

14:30 except at times your behaviour might not have been as good as it could have been, but if you keep on with your good work, you could end up a statesman." In a way I'm sorry that I didn't do that because I think that perhaps I might have contributed.

15:00 **You regret not being a statesman?**

Some regret that, not, contributing to Australia in that way because I've been upset about the behaviour of a lot of politicians and their seeming interest in themselves, in their futures. Rather

15:30 than the country, and constant bickering. Oh I may have fallen into the same path but I think I could have contributed in that way, but still, I also think that I've contributed in a different way to the health and therefore happiness of Australian

16:00 people, sick and injured. And particularly as I mentioned, the Australian soldier. And that is something which I will always remember. For what I did or tried to do for these wonderful Australian soldiers who deserve

16:30 recognition for what they did for the country. And particularly the young soldiers in Vietnam who were given a ghastly time by their own country. So at the end of my career, I look back, I certainly realise that many things I could have done

17:00 much better and I only whish that I could have had the time over.

It sounds like you enjoyed a lively home life of interesting discussion. Had your parents been educated people?

No, my father

17:30 had to leave school I think at about 12 he was then self educated . He worked in order to support, in part my uncle who went to university and did medicine and became a very good doctor and a medical officer

18:00 in France, and got an MC [Military Cross]. So he was a great contributor for Australian soldiers. So my father was virtually self educated from 12 onwards. And when he was working in the Land Tax Department on North Terrace, every day of his working life there

18:30 he would, at lunchtime, walk up to the State Library and spend his lunch hour reading about every topic imaginable. And so he learned a great deal and he used to talk to me about the problems of the world, and particularly I recall talks in

19:00 the mid '30s when I would have only been 11 or 12 about the difficulties in the Balkans, in Yugoslavia and Bosnia, all around the Balkan countries. How unsettled it was and how it could well be the nucleus of future wars, which of course it's turned out.

19:30 Now he'd made that assessment in the mid '30's. See we had everything, politics, various religions, science, English literature. Loved literature and stimulated me into reading all sorts of books, so I was

20:00 fortunate. My mother also had too, she'd left school about he same time. And she went into what was then known as domestic service. So she worked in homes as a maid of various types. But a

20:30 wonderful woman and she helped me also in my studies. So you don't really need highly educated parents, but they've got to be interested in their lives and they've got to be contributors. And

21:00 they've got to be careful. Unfortunately today people who are careful are accused of being mean, but that is not so. Neither of them smoked. Alcohol, we used to have at Christmas and other festive days. I can remember

21:30 there as a boy, a bottle of beer on the table and that was shared around with the family. And that was only very occasionally. Unfortunately it was in contrast to my father's sister who had married a man who was a very clever electrician but became an alcoholic. There were a number of boys in the family, and girls.

22:00 Because of his alcoholism, the family split up and the boys and girls went in various directions. Two of the boys went to the Salvation Army boys home down at Kempton, which is not far from here, the building on Forton Road. One of them, Jack Dowling, got his intermediate examination from the boys' home. Then worked for a year

22:30 then went into the air force. And became a wireless air gunner and he studied radar during that time. At the end of the war got out and went to the university and did electrical engineering. And jobs were not easy for graduates then but he went up to Woomera to work with the first, tracking the first rockets.

23:00 The Americans came out and invited him to go to Cape Canaveral where he eventually he became the Director of Cape Canaveral, which is not a bad story of a boy from an alcoholic family, went to a boys home, and finished up to the top, and directing all the satellites and moon landings.

23:30 So one's early life doesn't have to be easy. The Depression certainly, we were short of food, short of clothing, and short of, you know, you wouldn't have many outings, and if there were, they were pretty simple picnics in the parklands perhaps. But they were great fun.

24:00 Because the family was together.

Did you have brothers and sisters?

I had a sister who went into radio at, quite early, I think she was about 16 or 17 when she went into program department

24:30 initially at 5AD. And then 5KA and eventually 5DN as an announcer, in various parts of the establishment. And she enjoyed her days in radio. I just had the one sister.

And you had a good relationship with her?

Yes, in fact

25:00 I've just been talking to her on the phone. Because I had a message that had just come yesterday from the university. And they had a message from Darwin saying they wanted to have some details of an R Beard who had gone to Darwin with Goyder's expedition in about 1870, 1880,

25:30 they went up to Darwin. Goyder did some exploring , not only in the south with Goyder's line. And he'd gone up there all that time, 120 years ago, now they are seeking information. So I think the

26:00 family has always done all sorts of things like, an uncle was many years under sail and got shipwrecked and off the south coast of New Zealand, was 3 months on an island eating penguins. So they had done all sorts of things. An interesting family.

Did your uncle who was a doctor provide some influence?

26:30 Oh yes, big influence because , when I left primary school I went to Adelaide Technical High School on North Terrace, which is now University of South Australia. And I was going to do architecture which makes my wife laugh because she says I can't draw. I guess I didn't know

27:00 what I wanted to do and I think it is a difficulty with young people today being virtually forced to decide at a very early age what they want to do. But I could see around Adelaide what a very good name he had as a doctor. He'd been, as I say, medical officer in France. And at

27:30 the end of the war he billeted with a French family. And he fell in love with the daughter, but the father wouldn't have him on, apparently because, I guess partly he was Australian and partly because the daughter was only 16. So he came home to Australia and got established as a GP at that time. But then went back to France and represented himself. And this

28:00 occasion the father accepted him and as a wedding present sent the two of them to Edinburgh where he studied obstetrics and gynaecology. And come home to Australia qualified and had a wonderful obstetric life and a practice and his patients used to speak very highly of him. And I thought well if you

28:30 can make that sort of impression in life and do things for people and for them to appreciate it, that's what I think I'll do. And the school, Adelaide Tech didn't have languages, so when I finished the leaving, that was year, what you call it now, year 11, I went to Adelaide High to do the

29:00 leaving honours and French and German, sufficient to matriculate. So then I went to university at 17, turned 18 in 1943 by which time you were liable to be called up by the army, but if you were doing medicine you weren't allowed to because they wanted doctors trained quickly. So you had to stay at university. But

29:30 then , whilst I was doing medicine, and afterwards I certainly did, oh I suppose my work was partly, was certainly influenced by the work and the name that my uncle had. Plus the great assistance in study that my father had

30:00 and virtually he went through the medical course with me at night time and learnt a lot of what I did.

He sounds like he had curiosity?

Oh yes, a thirst for knowledge which, oh a lot of young people have it. I think it's better to get it from books than internet. Internet to me is

30:30 impersonal, books are lovely, but then those times have gone. There is a great deal of knowledge that you can get on the internet, but a lot of it I think is pretty useless. But you can certainly get knowledge that you do need, and some good knowledge. But books, books are beautiful I mean we are very lucky to have a new library here in Adelaide that's just opened.

You like the tactile quality?

31:00 Yes.

Why had you moved to Moonta?

Well my father, the family had been in Moonta and my father always loved Port Hughes and he actually, in his spare time built a house there. And his aim was to go to Moonta to set up

31:30 a taxation business. Now he made two mistakes. One, it was the Depression. People certainly wanted him to do their taxation returns, but they didn't have the money to pay for it. Secondly he didn't judge my mother, who was really a city girl, always brought up as a city girl and didn't understand or like the country.

32:00 So the project was a failure. So we had to come back to Adelaide and start again. In, well by that stage it was getting toward the end of the Depression. And one of the things about the Depression although there was no, you know, there were a lot of poor people, and people were given what

32:30 were known as ration tickets to purchase food, but they weren't given the money. They thought they might spend the money on unnecessary things. But at least they ration tickets to get food from the local stores. But there was a sense that it couldn't last and the Depression would end, and of course in the mid '30's it did start to improve.

33:00 And I suppose when the second war came it was an opportunity then for a lot of young men to join the services and at least have an income so they could support their families. Today, things are a different. I don't know that we can say great

33:30 improvement in the world because of the way we've destroyed the environment. We didn't think 50, 60 years ago about chopping down the trees and using the water. And now it's almost too late.

34:00 I worry about the land, I worry about the ability of Australia to survive with the great shortage of water. And there is a limit, certainly a limit to the number of people that Australia will support, because mainly of the water

34:30 which A, is short, and B, is salty. I went through Mildura recently and that wonderful chef Stefano de Pietri is extracting salt from the River Murray and putting it into bags and selling it. Which is terrible.

35:00 I shudder to see the number of new vineyards that are being put in, particularly irrigated. We can't afford it, although we are the ones that use it up. And originally we are the ones that set up the irrigation programs, put in open

35:30 open ducting and irrigation where a lot of the water went off in evaporation. At least now they are using drip systems and water conserving systems. Oh we can do a lot in Australia but we have certainly all got to help. And the older people can't just sit back and do nothing; they've got to help as well.

36:00 **You sound very community minded in your early decision making. Do you think there was a sense of a country that has changed, a sense of service to a country that has changed?**

Ah, well

36:30 I don't know that it's changed all that much because when we grew up we were always, well, not drummed into us, but it was always a part of education and growing up that your life, part of your life had to be in service to the country. It was service to your school, service to your community, service, everywhere.

37:00 It was just this, what you did normally, it wasn't sacrificing anything. It was doing I suppose what everyone did and what you felt was right. I mean there are all the service clubs today, Lions, Apex, Rotary, etcetera.

37:30 You know the country couldn't have survived without them. All the volunteer organizations, St Johns and Red Cross, but they are having great trouble in recruiting, recruiting young people.

38:00 There are various reasons of course. Young people are so often are struggling to support themselves. And don't have the time to go into these service organisations and doing things for volunteer. Although there is this

38:30 organisations of St. John Ambulance, which I think is a wonderful example of how young people get trained as cadets, first aid, and then go out into the community in all sorts of ways. Not only at sporting venues but out into homes, all sorts of public activities to help, and there are a lot of organisations like that

39:00 that young people are doing. It upsets me to go into a supermarket on a Saturday afternoon, although I try not to. I don't believe that supermarkets should be open on Saturdays, I think there is plenty of time and I think the young people on the checkouts on Saturday afternoon should be out playing tennis

39:30 or some organised sport, rather than standing there. But they, many of them do it because they need the money or they feel they need it, I don't really think they do. But money means that perhaps they can get a car, well they'd be better off riding a bicycle. Like I still do, I still got my bicycle out there.

40:00 But I, it's no good in saying, this is how we did it and this is how it should be, because the world is not the same. On the other hand I think the new generation are

40:30 could be spending spare time a little better. And one of the things in sport, sport has changed, I think it's a great pity that it's become so financial. It's almost immoral what we pay to tennis and golf players and practically every sport.

Tape 2

00:37 **So you began university, can you tell us what you were doing there?**

University, the first fortnight was spent in digging slit trenches in the front of the lawn at the university. The aim was to then

01:00 get through medicine as quickly as possible. Now when you are 18 you are due for call up but you had to stay there unless you failed. The day you failed an exam, in the army tomorrow.

So that's why you were digging the trenches? War had started?

War had started and so you had to work hard, they cut out all the holidays; holidays were all reduced by about three quarters and you

01:30 just studied and studied, even all the university balls, the varsity sport, everything stopped. But you sort of worked and of course there was absolutely no alcohol anywhere near the university premises.

That's a bit different?

Different from today and I don't see the necessity to have so many bars.

02:00 Like one day I well recall a sudden buzz of scandal went through the university. I think I can name him, because Max Harris had moved in to live with Mary Martin. Max Harris the writer and Mary Martin became a book seller. Very clever people, wonderful with the English language. And

02:30 that was a scandal of momentous proportions. I can also recall some wonderful professors like Sir Kerr Grant, Sir Douglas Mawson striding down the road at the university with his carroty hair flowing in the breeze. All sorts of very, very good teachers. Now

03:00 in what holidays we did have, we worked. For instance I remember one Christmas riding my bicycle with another fellow up to Mildura to pick grapes. We also harvested salt—and so you worked and you studied and eventually graduated.

So it was a big scandal, does that mean that

03:30 **relationships between men and women at the university were quite conservative?**

Oh very conservative. I mean we were innocent really. I mean we might have tried a bit but if you got knocked back, well you laughed,

04:00 both of you laughed and you went on and you went out and had a game of cricket. And so it was a lot easier, although we were conservative, and life was certainly great fun. But all that, that scandal was something that went through all the students and staff, the buzz that they…

04:30 But life was certainly, there was still a lot of fun in it. But it was essential you passed your exams.

Do you remember the day you heard that war had broken out?

Oh yes, I do quite clearly, at that stage I was at high school, in 1939. And Mr Chamberlain had just come back

05:00 from Germany and then of course the unrest started in the Balkans and war developed and England declared war on Germany. I remember, although at that stage, 1939, I was 14.

You would have heard it over the radio?

I don't know if

05:30 it was radio or newspaper hording. When you say radio, we weren't, we hadn't had radios for very long. And it was just when I started school that we had crystal sets. With what were known as the cat's whisker and the crystal that you

06:00 tickled and then you got the sound of the broadcast. So in my lifetime a lot of things have happened. I don't know when we got a radio at home, certainly late 30s I suppose.

So you were at home when you heard that war had broken out?

Oh, no I don't recall.

06:30 **What did you father think of war breaking out?**

Age 14, where I was, at that stage we were living at Unley. Well he was very disturbed, although I remember him telling me that he didn't think it would last very long, that England would be too strong. But of course

07:00 that was a mistake and Germany was very, very strong and had been preparing you know, ever since '32 or whenever Hitler came into power. But war time, it was terrible because all the time we were hearing about people wounded and killed.

07:30 My own wife's brother was a Lancaster pilot and he was shot down over Berlin. Of the family, as I mentioned, Jack Dowling who became Director at Cape Canaveral, there were three other, three

brothers who were killed. One was a tail gunner in a Lancaster, and he didn't last long. Another one in Rabaul when the Japanese

08:00 attacked. And so this brought great sadness to families when they got the news. But again, like the Depression, it was always felt, well, it will end eventually.

What was the thing about the war amongst university students?

Do you know

08:30 I don't recall, its terrible, but I don't recall a lot of thought and discussion. Ah, I think the main thing we were doing was spending all our time, day and night, in study in order to get through the exams. And it's a terrible thing to look back and

09:00 to say well, what were you doing? We certainly contributed in many ways and I know I joined emergency services and became trained in first aid and all sorts of emergency services that might help. But apart from that I don't think we

09:30 realised what was going on in the various battles.

You didn't realise the enormity of it?

No, no.

It was a long way away?

That's the thing and Australia has always been so isolated.

And a lot of the names of places were people were being sent were very exotic?

Didn't mean anything, because very, very few people in Australia had ever travelled and didn't know the rest of the world. And

10:00 that is one of the things that made it difficult for migrants. Post war migrants who came here from Italy and Greece and Europe. In a way they were ostracised, partly because people were frightened of them, perhaps they were frightened they were going to take their jobs; they were frightened because they didn't understand

10:30 their culture, they didn't understand their language.

They were extremely foreign?

Yeah, and it must have been, I know it was, very hard. You talk to them now about the migrants who came here and Australians virtually put a brick wall against them, wouldn't have anything to do with them. It's taken a long time for that to recover.

11:00 **What were you studying? What classes?**

In the early part its scientific subject, chem. and zoology, and then anatomy and physiology, that was for the first 2 and 1/2 years. And then you go to the hospital and gradually introduced to patients.

11:30 But still studying the, what are known as the basic science of pathology and physiology, which I think are very, very important. And today they're not being taught, they are gradually being phased out and I don't agree with many of the subjects of today's

12:00 medical curriculum. So then at the end of third year and into fourth year you started to learn about surgery and medicine, obstetrics, gynaecology - all taught by honoraries, that is specialists who were appointed to the hospital but did all their hospital work, 50 percent

12:30 of their life was in an honorary capacity. And they did the teaching and lecturing to the students all in an honorary capacity. So, but that was what was done. It was though, in those times, that this is what you did to contribute to medicine, in teaching and in looking after people

13:00 in the public hospitals for those who couldn't afford private medicine.

Do you think it was a more generous society then?

Oh yes, I do. Although generous, it sort of means, well you knew you were doing it, you were sort of saying, well

13:30 I'm doing all this and I'm a great fellow. But it wasn't quite like that because this is the thing to do. Maybe it was generous but people didn't think so.

It was the done thing?

Hmm.

There was no attempt to fast track you through university?

Oh yes, instead of doing 6 years we did 5 years by cutting out all the long holidays.

14:00 See, instead of three months at Christmas it was one month, instead of three weeks at term, it was one week. And a lot of other holidays and Saturdays you went into lectures.

The intention being to get you out there?

As soon as possible.

14:30 **Did the war influence the direction of your study?**

Oh yes, we realised that want they wanted us to get through as soon as we could so that we could go and help in the service because they were short of medical officers, and a lot of medical officers were killed and injured and sick. So they needed replacing but I guess we did it because

15:00 again that was expected. Didn't hurt us.

Frank Fenner went through Adelaide medical school, I think he was earlier than you?

Yes, quite a bit earlier. A lot of them did their, went through medical school and did a few months at the Adelaide Hospital and then went into the

15:30 army or navy. But it was, the medical school was very active, most of the, most of the teaching was done in an honorary capacity except the scientific subjects of anatomy, physics, chem - were taught by university people.

16:00 **How many students were going through at your level?**

Well we, I think there were about 55 in our year of whom, and that was the biggest there had ever been at the university medical school. And there were 47 graduated and we have a reunion every year. We had our 56th

16:30 reunion only a couple of months ago. We're dropping off a bit now, but we have an annual reunion and I think we still had 27. We also had the Western Australians because they didn't have a medical school. And they had to come to Adelaide or Melbourne to do medicine. We had

17:00 7 Western Australians. Now again, looking back, we didn't look after them, we were perhaps too interested in ourselves. And Western Australians were a pretty lonely group we now realise. Particularly as they were only allowed to go home once a year for about a week, I think it was at Christmas.

17:30 They still come to the reunions. We had 7 girls in the year, unfortunately there is only one left now, 6 have died.

Was that unusual for women to be doing medical school?

Yes, and that was about the number 7 out of 50 we'll say. The first female graduate, Adelaide's got a pretty good name for,

18:00 well the opportunity was there at least. I think the first female graduate was in the 1880s, in medicine. But I guess they just didn't do it, or it was expected, it wasn't the normal career for a girl.

18:30 But we had a wonderful relationship with the girls in our year. Purely platonic.

More games of cricket?

Yeah, I don't think there were any affairs in the whole lot of my….

Well it sounds like you were too busy studying?

19:00 Yeah and you sort of, you know, if you are a young man, you got out you played cricket, football, did everything, and girls did their things. Occasionally you'd come together, maybe on Saturday night. You'd go to a dance; there were various dances, mostly in church halls.

19:30 A great one was a St Columbus, and you'd go along there and dance all night, dance your head off, and it was great fun. But not much went on.

It wasn't the main thing in life?

No, no. There wasn't the pressure

20:00 and the same as doing anything. Smoking, drinking, drugs, there's pressure on young people today that we never had. Smoking, my father said, oh he didn't say don't smoke, he said leave it until next year; they are hard to get now. Next year would come, oh well leave it for another year. And suddenly I found it was too late. I

20:30 never did smoke, even in Korea when we used to get a pack of Lucky Strikes or Camels in the rations everyday and I used to swap I think four packets of Camels for a tin of beans. I still like baked beans

too.

So you were at medical school for 5 years. What year did you finish?

Well by the end, at the end of the war, they started to revert gradually back to

21:00 the six year course, gradually, so that we did 5½ years. Also by the end of the war, various activities and clubs and societies commenced at university. Inter-varsity sport recommenced.

21:30 And that was wonderful to play for the university against interstate teams.

Were there big celebrations when the war was announced finished?

It was huge, the whole, everyone massed in Adelaide, down Rundle Street particularly, and Kingman Street and they had bands and everyone was jumping up and down,

22:00 some alcohol but not much. Everyone was very, very excited. In a way the fun and enjoyment was a bit forced, a bit unreal because people were very tired at the end of the war.

22:30 I think even more for the vast number of people who stayed home and worked, in munitions factories, in all sorts of organisations. A lot of them worked harder than a lot of serviceman. Now we know that a lot of serviceman had ghastly times in the Middle East, Tobruk. There was Tobruk reunion lunch yesterday

23:00 and in New Guinea and of course in the prisoner of war camps. A lot of them had a terrible time, but there were a lot for whom the actual fighting was not in lengthy periods. A lot of

23:30 waiting and organising and training etcetera. The services, and particularly the navy, a lot of the small ships, had a pretty bad time in the Pacific. Air force of course, they were dreadful, particularly those who were, well anywhere in New Guinea in England, in Germany, flying over Germany, the

24:00 Australian squadrons. But to come back to the people in Australia, well I mean women worked on the land. There was Australian construction teams. They were teams of builders and carpenters who worked up in the northern Territory building army camps. And certainly in the munitions, making

24:30 tanks, making airplanes, and they worked dreadful hours on pretty poor pay.

Ddi you know someone doing that kind of work?

Oh yes, in fact I wrote a paper some years ago and gave a lecture. I forget who it was to, to the people who stayed behind because at the end of it

25:00 there was no recognition, no medal, no thanks, it was all over, go home. And these people had been doing all this work and they had no jobs

Was there a feeling when the troops came home that those that stayed behind in the essential services were somehow less?

Oh, there was and that

25:30 was only natural, that servicemen who had been under terrible hardships and terrible food and conditions and the sands of the desert and the mud of New Guinea, bombings and terrible injuries, that we couldn't look after as well then as we can now, the medical evacuation

26:00 systems. So they felt that they'd been away while there were people at home in safe jobs. And so there was a bit of resentment, during the war. There was too, I remember I got a white feather once and I came under criticism at times.

Can you talk about that, the white feather?

The white feather was an

26:30 indicator of cowardice. And you'd get a white feather sent to you, not only in war time, not only at war time but at any other time. But cowardice to your country or society, and it was a terrible thing to get. That society would think that of you. And at the time that this came

27:00 in the mail, I didn't know where it came from, but certainly there were…

That must have been heartbreaking?

Oh yes, particularly as we were trying our best with our studies, we might eventually be able to contribute. And

27:30 I know that there was, throughout the war, some sections of community, not necessarily of servicemen, but families who had their sons and daughters and relatives who were away and could see us as young fit men.

Laughing and seeming to have a good time?

There was

28:00 some resentment. And understandably, it's the same sort of thing that developed in Vietnam with some families who had their sons in Vietnam in terrible conditions and getting injured and so

28:30 and they wondered what the war was about. And of course they wanted to take it out on anyone. Unfortunately the anti Vietnam protesters chose the wrong people to take it out on, that was the men themselves.

29:00 **Were some socio economic groups more highly represented in the forces than others?**

No I don't think, virtually, nearly everyone volunteered.

Rich and poor?

29:30 Maybe there was certainly more opportunity for those who were educated to go to officer training schools, there was more opportunity if you were educated. Say you went in the air force to do flying training and to become maybe a wireless operator or,

30:00 that needed technical ability. Whereas without an education you were a rifleman, or in the air force you worked on the plane, maintaining them. So, but everyone volunteered from top to bottom. When I say everyone, almost.

30:30 **Did you have friends who went to war?**

Oh many, many. I've just been over on a motoring holiday in New South Wales and Victoria. I had a great friend at Adelaide Technical High School, we went on to Adelaide High together. He then started forestry at university but half way through first year he volunteered for the navy.

31:00 And he went in as an ordinary seaman and came out as a naval seaman. But he worked, he served in destroyers and mostly corvettes, and I used to get letters from him, wonderful letters describing the conditions.

Whereabouts was he?

All over the Pacific and up in New Guinea and

31:30 times when they got bombed and strafed. Another in our class then, David Underwood joined the air force, went to Canada in what was then the Empire Air Training Scheme, and then to England and within a year was killed. Another one in our class

32:00 was Les Zeiss who was a brilliant student, brilliant sportsman, he went straight into the services from school, and I used to get, we used to communicate as much as we could. I think he lasted a couple of years. So I had many friends in the services

32:30 and I used to, you know, write a lot of letters. Writing again, is a, should we say an art form that we are losing. We used to have things during the war called pen friends. Now listed in the Sunday paper was a list of pen friends. Now I

33:00 picked out one in about 1941 a Brenda Mills, 14 Graham Road, Bristol Farm, England. So I wrote to her, we were then, what 15, 16, and we used to have to write on a thing called an aerogram. Now this was a small sheet of paper that was then photographed on

33:30 35mm and I think they used to photograph 100 of them, so they could send 100 letters on a tiny capsule through to England. And I communicated throughout the war and then we started to send food parcels to her family in Bristol. Finally when I went to England for my surgical studies, just before I came home, I went down to visit her. And

34:00 unfortunately I've lost touch. I used to write to, oh there was another cousin of mine who was in Tobruk. I used to do a lot of writing; unfortunately I didn't keep many of them.

What kind of information, I suppose the letters were heavily censored from Tobruk?

Oh yes,

34:30 it was mostly day to day things, and funny happenings, and the food and the sand, rather than actually fighting. People didn't talk about he battles very much. But I wrote a lot of letters to my parents from Korea and when I went to Vietnam I decided

35:00 to keep the letters in triplicate. I had a book that every day I would write, by then, to my wife, one copy to my parents and one copy stayed in this book. And every night when I'd finished operating, often midnight, 1 o'clock in the morning, off would do perhaps 3 pages of the day's happenings.

35:30 And I've still got that

In triplicate?

Yes, so that was good because I was able to keep them as a diary. But you certainly communicated with your friends and relatives that were in the services.

The pen pal did you have in England. Was she able to give you an impression of how the war was affecting them?

36:00 Oh yes, day to day and all the bombing of Bristol and all this, you know, the houses down the street that were destroyed and the sound of the bombers coming overhead. She painted a tremendous portrait of the war in England when the English people suffered so much but

36:30 also continued to work. It's wonderful what people can do.

Well they normalise.

You just go on with all the fires and wreckage. When the world is almost falling down around you, that you can lift yourself.

What was society like after war?

37:00 **Did Australia or Adelaide adjust to the post war phase?**

Yes they, as much as possible they returned to their old jobs, but a lot of them, a lot of them had no jobs to go to

37:30 and had to do all sorts of things. Derek our VC [Victoria Cross] had no job and he rode his bicycle up to Berri and he went fruit picking. They did any sort of work they could. There was a wonderful rehabilitation scheme where the government would send you back to school or university

38:00 or trade school or an apprenticeship in order to get established.

That seemed to have a lot of positive results.

Oh wonderful. Yes that was.

Whose government was that under?

Well I think Mr Chifley was still Prime Minister. Mr Chifley did a lot of good things, and for myself, when I started medicine, we had to pay all the fees.

38:30 But Mr Chifley introduced a Commonwealth scholarship system where the majority of the fees were in fact met by the government.

Medical school?

Oh, the whole of the university. And, oh I think

39:00 any post war period is difficult because a lot of those who were coming back had suffered illnesses, malaria and dysentery and they really weren't very fit. And they were all thin, not much anger, there was certainly some.

39:30 It was reflected in the writing and in poems at that time, you know, anti war poems or poems against the suffering that had occurred. And how we should try to ensure that another war didn't happened. And of course end of 1945 and five years later

40:00 in 1950 we were into it again in Korea.

What are the poems you were talking about?

Oh Wilfred Owen, was a wonderful writer. There's a tape that's in the

40:30 State Library of poems of the war. In fact I've got it out now but I haven't been able to put it on. I've got a new car and I found there is no tape player in the car.

Tape 3

00:40 **Donald after your medical training you felt some sense of guilt having not gone away and then what did you do about that sense of guilt?**

I was a house surgeon at the Adelaide Hospital in 1948,

01:00 but during that time they'd activated the reserve army or the Citizen Military Forces it was called, and so a lot of us joined that. Then I thought I should do something more and they were needing medical officers in the three services so four of us volunteered for the army and we were sent to Japan and the

Occupation Force.

01:30 **Do you remember the names of the other men?**

Yes. Hugh Douglas who is a paediatrician, Graham Wilson who became a surgeon and Brian Cornish an orthopaedic surgeon. We all went up together and we sort of thought that we were doing some good. In

02:00 fact we were only practising medicine not very much different to what it was in Australia. It was a very difficult time in some ways because MacArthur had a policy of non-fraternisation, that is to say you weren't allowed to have any non-work communications with Japanese, you weren't allowed

02:30 to enter any public places, galleries, museums, cinema and so you were virtually confined to army barracks. We had a lot of sport and we I looked after a number of army units, there were some, a couple of them worked in the army hospital,

03:00 and we saved money for our future post-graduate training. The end of the year we were sent there, I think I mentioned previously the others came home and they wanted me to stay on until the force closed down, because the Americans were taking over. And it was at that stage, a period when North Korea attacked and everyone who was in Japan was

03:30 asked to volunteer, because we were Occupational Forces and it was actually a police action, it was called. When North Korea attacked South Korea asked for help from the United Nations. The United Nations agreed and they were, I think there were 21 countries who sent units; all of the Commonwealth,

04:00 Turkey, Greece, Norway, came from everywhere. Now we felt at the time that we were helping these South Koreans who had been attacked by a vastly superior military force from the North and those attacks had been going on for centuries,

04:30 the North attacking the south. However, it was a concerted attack, we thought we were doing the right thing and I think we produced a situation of stability in Korea and that the job was worthwhile. A couple of years ago I went back for the 50th Anniversary and it was amazing how the Koreans came up to us and

05:00 showed their appreciation of what we'd done as part of the United Nations. We almost felt that we were better recognised by the Koreans than we were in Australia. It's understandable it was only five years after World War II the Australians didn't want to become involved in it, in another war.

05:30 They had to gather an army from all sorts of places, from the Occupational Forces, from some of the regulars in Australia and volunteers from Australia. Now those volunteers went partly from a sense of duty and partly they didn't have much to hold them in Australia

06:00 and maybe there were a few who were wanting to escape from something in Australia. Out of it all, in those various groups were welded absolutely magnificent units in Korea who worked and fought together and built up a great reputation, particularly

06:30 with Koreans and the other nations and the Americans. So Australian soldiers could be justifiably proud of their work in Korea.

We'll certainly come back to Korea shortly and there's quite a lot there for us to investigate. You said that when you arrived in Japan the medicine you were practicing was similar to that which you'd been practicing at home. Who were you servicing and what were the main complaints?

07:00 I looked after several units, engineers, service corps, intelligence. Now they would have day-to-day ordinary illnesses plus injuries from training because the infantry units kept on with their training and that was pretty rigid,

07:30 and so they had accidents. There were the accidents on the sports fields, so you look after fractures and all sorts of injuries and that wasn't much different to, shall we say, to a general practice in Australia.

Gun shot wounds from training?

The odd one, there's always an

08:00 odd accidental firing but not very much. They were pretty well trained. There was of course some venereal disease, that was a bit understandable. See the forces were pretty well

08:30 confined to barracks or if they went out into the community they couldn't have any personal relationships with Japanese. For the officers who were working, there were the nursing sisters, the Red Cross girls, AWAS, Australian Women's

09:00 Army Service, AAMWS [Australian Army Medical Women's Service], there were a number of women could be invited to an officer's mess or to an NCO [Non Commissioned Officer] sergeants and warrant officers' mess. But the conditions in the soldiers' canteens were unsuitable. In any case, all of the

women

09:30 virtually commissioned at that time, there was a distinct barrier between commissioned ranks, officers, and non-commissioned. So the men, all the soldiers had virtually no female companionship. As I mentioned earlier, to me it didn't matter a great deal

10:00 because there was a lot of sport, lots of things to do, but we still had female companionship, but the boys had nothing. They were committed to find or seek Japanese friends, but it was banned and if they were caught they were put on a charge by the military police and then charged

10:30 with a crime for co-habitating with Japanese women. So they would go up into the hills and they would set up a house with a Japanese girl and they go up there at night time, but if they were caught they were in trouble.

How would they get out, was security quite easy?

No there was,

11:00 you certainly had to, you know, if you were disappearing up into the hills you'd be watched maybe followed. Now that produced strange, difficult relationships. Some of the boys became married with Japanese. And then came the time for them to come home, Japanese weren't

11:30 permitted to migrate. By this time they may have had children. So they'd leave the girls behind. Many of them, most of them in fact supported them, sent money to them so they could be supported. In some cases, eventually the money ceased. The girls were ostracised by the Japanese because they had an

12:00 Australian child and they had nothing to do but go to the streets. In many cases the boys went back, once conditions were relaxed, got their wives brought them back to Australia and had an Australian civil wedding, but it was

12:30 very difficult for them. Some of the other boys of course, who hadn't been able to form a semi-personal relationship, permanent relationship would go anywhere to seek female companionship and that's where some of them picked up venereal disease. So they had to be treated. Understandable.

13:00 **Would they be charged if they got a venereal disease?**

They weren't charged for the disease, but they were put into a special hospital, a special wing of the hospital which was under security, barbed wire, and kept there until they were cured

13:30 because they don't want them going out and reinfecting other girls, and so they wanted them cured, so they were kept under security. While they were in that special hospital, pay and leave entitlements ceased so it was pretty hard, but the aim was of course, was to reduce, if possible, this incidence

14:00 of venereal disease.

So it was a high incidence?

No, no it wasn't high, but it did occur, and treatment in those days, we'd only just got penicillin which was very good for gonorrhoea. Syphilis could only be treated by

14:30 injections of bismuth and arsenic, unlike today. But it was very hard for the troops because they had no opportunities to gain Japanese culture.

15:00 We were virtually confined to our own people and I regret not having learnt Japanese, yet I was there for three years in Japan and Korea and never learnt Japanese. 'Well there was no need to', and this was the attitude of Australians all along. I mean of all the migrants that came here after the war, we didn't go to the trouble of learning Italian and Greek.

15:30 The attitude was 'they should learn English'. So it wasn't much to do and…

Did you understand why this had been put in place, that you weren't to?

MacArthur, the Americans are very rigid, it's either this side or that. MacArthur felt

16:00 that you couldn't be an Occupation Force overseeing the cessation of their military activities, disbanding all the armies and helping them to establish a new democratic society, and you couldn't be the

16:30 Occupation Military Force on the one hand and be great friends on the other. There was still a lot of feeling against the Japanese at that time. I think it was far too rigid. I mean to go to the extent of not being able to go to

17:00 the concert halls, to museums and art galleries and learn a bit of their culture and teaching. We could have, and should have, had teachers coming into our units after work and telling us all about Japanese society. We didn't do it.

17:30 We lost a lot by not doing it.

Donald can you put your hand on your heart and say you didn't ever go to a museum or art gallery the whole time you were in Japan?

18:00 Don't recall. We had an opportunity, once a year we had leave, a big hotel up near Tokyo called Kwana and we'd go and stay there for six days and play golf and

18:30 we could go into, I suppose you could into a Japanese shop, an open shop and they certainly had art, some of them, and I brought home quite a few examples of Japanese art. And

19:00 there was one concert hall in Tokyo, a sort of burlesque cabaret we went to, but apart from that I don't recall anything. It was, you just didn't do it.

19:30 Of course I was a great sport lover so I had my time and I did a lot of reading and listening to music, and we had an officers' club that we could go to and have dinner and dancing and bingo nights. It was all pretty simple.

20:00 **What sort of music were you listening to at that time?**

I was only really just getting very interested in opera and classical music. A lot of it was the modern, popular music of the time.

Do you remember any songs that make you think of your time in Japan?

Well in Japan, I remember there was a song called 'Irene', there was

20:30 On top of old Smokey, and there was all the old jazz from pre-war times, that was very, very popular. Somehow the time went and in Japan it wasn't very hard and

21:00 there was a lot of enjoyment. You couldn't do much travel because there was nowhere you could stay; you weren't permitted to stay in Japanese inns. But there were a couple of army establishments in Osaka where you could go and stay for a short time, but very little. We saw very little of the country,

21:30 which is again, a great pity.

There was enough fraternising between the troops and the Japanese women obviously for, at some stage, there to be unwanted children. If a Japanese woman wanted an abortion from a child she'd produced from an Australian soldier would the army take any action?

22:00 No. The army didn't have anything to do with them; well they virtually thought they didn't exist. If a soldier had a woman that he'd, and most of the soldiers looked after them very well and they would take them food, they would take them their own food

22:30 from the army, save up their own rations and take to look after these women and children when they grew up, with powered milk and so on. So they looked after the children pretty well. Afterwards, worked very hard to try to get them back to Australia and they had a hard time

23:00 when they did get back because there was still a strong anti-Japanese feeling. In my mind, was quite wrong, but you can understand there are some soldiers who suffered terribly under the Japanese, but the time comes when you've got to get on with the business of life and work. One man who suffered as much as anyone was Weary Dunlop,

23:30 and yet he had no hard feelings about the Japanese, in fact worked very hard to help them and support the Japanese surgeons coming down to Australia. Japanese students came down to study, he didn't harbour bad feelings. But there are still some that exist today.

24:00 Quite wrongly the same as anti-German feelings, but I think you've got, well you can't forget, but you just put it back and get on with things. The same way as the Jews. The Jews suffered terribly in the Holocaust, but they're really carrying on a terrible way now. I think that the Jews

24:30 are, cannot be excused for some of their behaviour now and particularly in Israel and the West Bank and the Gaza Strip where the Jews are lucky to have Israel. Well, and they built up a wonderful country and worked hard, but they shouldn't be eating into

25:00 Arab lands. Then when they do go and settle in Arab territory, and maybe the Arabs resist and maybe there's a bit of shooting, then immediately the Jews come in with tanks and planes with a terrible retaliation. I think it's wrong.

25:30 It's ghastly that Hitler and Germany took such a terrible, in their behaviour, what they did to the Jews, but terrible things have been happening in the world from beginning of time and we can't let it govern our present behaviour.

26:00 So it gets back to Japan and most of the young soldiers who had Japanese weddings and eventually had Australian civilian weddings, and eventually, after some years, got them back to Australia. There was

some regrettably, who were left, the girls and their babies were left

26:30 behind and they had a terrible time. But again, that's happened all over the world, that women have been left with children and the two of them have been abandoned, and it's one of the less understandable

27:00 behaviour of men that they could possibly do this, have children and neglect them.

You were very much confined to barracks, did you see any of this, abandoned women or children?

No. It wasn't evident and it wasn't, shall we say, prevalent.

27:30 When I say confined to barracks, you lived there, you ate there and you worked there and you could go out into the streets and shops and stores, but virtually within only the distance you could walk.

How did you find Japan at that time, of what you saw of it?

28:00 Beautiful country. Hard working, the farmers and the rice growers and the shopkeepers who were struggling to make a living, but difficult to understand. We had a lot of Japanese that worked with us. All the units, shall we say, Japanese cleaners and interpreters and all sorts.

28:30 But communication was difficult in stilted language so you couldn't get close and the whole of their culture was completely different. So you didn't really try very hard because they were different people. We were there to occupy, to make sure that they disarmed and

29:00 close down all their forces, and that was it.

How were you treated by the Japanese people?

Very well. It was not exactly a cold relationship, but an almost sterile relationship in that you were trying

29:30 to converse and mix, but there was not much communication. Their attitude was very good to us and anything we did for them, they appreciated any small things, particularly in regard to food where we'd help any of the staff that worked for us.

30:00 You couldn't, it wasn't really the opportunity to make friends. I have since and I've been back several times and been back to do some surgical study with a particular surgeon in Tokyo who is a world expert on cancer of the stomach, been back for surgical conferences.

30:30 They've developed all sorts of technology; medical equipment, particularly the Olympus equipment had been magnificent.

How long were you in BCOF [British Commonwealth Occupation Force]?

I was there for 18 months and then went to, when the war started in Korea

31:00 I'd been made a Major to encourage me to stay, then the war started and by that stage I was the surgeon in the hospital. Now I was only 25 and two or three years out of medical school, but I'd been pretty well trained and I could look after the fractures and injuries and I could do

31:30 appendectomies, all the simple surgery that was necessary. So I was the surgeon in the hospital. Once the war started, and we started to get casualties from Korea, I realised that I was getting out of my depth and so the Director General in Australia managed to get a fully qualified surgeon

32:00 who had just come back from England to come up to look after the casualties. So he came up and I then became his assistant. He subsequently became Sir Edward Hughes who was the President of the College of Surgeons and probably the greatest Australian surgeon ever.

32:30 Then the English forces arrived and an English hospital which joined up with us.

Where were you located?

Kure. That was a bit difficult because the English arrived and sort of became superimposed on our hospital and they thought they were going to run it, of course the Australians weren't having this on. They soon put them in their place until we integrated

33:00 and worked together. Now by this stage, 3 Battalion is over in Korea, MacArthur had, the war in Korea initially, all the United Nations were pushed all the way down to Pusan down in the south, then when the United Nations built up, it's forces started to break out and go forth.

33:30 And then there was a landing on the west coast and cut off a lot of the North Korean forces and the whole of the army swept north pushing the North Koreans right up to the Yalu River, on the boarder with Siberia. And MacArthur said, "You'll be all home by Christmas," this is Christmas 1950. The medical officer who's in the battalion,

34:00 his wife wanted him back in Japan. They'd only just been married a week before he went over to Korea, and as it was nearly over, and there was another medical officer who dearly wanted to get over to the battalion to get some war experience, so he went over to replace him. Now at about that time when they're up near the Yalu, suddenly a half a million Chinese appeared out of the snow,

34:30 because they'd been gradually working their way south. In the day time buried themselves under the snow, night time they'd come out and advance. Our planes didn't venture too far north because the North Koreans had big planes, Russian planes that were better than anything we had.

35:00 So we didn't know the Chinese had massed this force until suddenly it burst forth. Now again we start to get knocked down and it was called the Big Bugout because we couldn't withstand this charge of a huge well-trained Chinese force, assisting the North Koreans.

35:30 Now about that time the medical officer that had gone over fell sick, he had a stone obstructed his kidney and had to be evacuated for an operation. I was called up by the Director and said would I volunteer to go to Korea to the army. I thought bother it, I'm due to go home tomorrow, to Australia. I didn't want to go to

36:00 Korea. But I said, "Yes sir." He said, "Well, when can you go?" Jokingly I said, 'Tomorrow." And he said, "Right. Well there's an air force plane leaving at first light. You can go out to the reinforcement unit and get yourself kitted and be on that plane." Well then the farewell started and we're all in the officers' mess,

36:30 the sergeants' mess and all the hospital sisters all farewelled me so by the time I got to bed at about two o'clock I wasn't in very good shape. All my gear was scattered over the floor, at about four o'clock a Japanese driver came to collect me and I just stuffed everything into a sausage bag and off I went down to the air force base 40 miles away and as dawn was breaking got on a

37:00 Dakota and it was just starting to snow and I was cold and hungry, king-sized hangover and frightened. Off I went to Korea.

Just before we go into depth about Korea, can you tell me what your time in Kure was like? And how it had been different from your time in BCOF?

37:30 Kure was part of BCOF, all the army units and an army hospital were all part of the Occupational Force.

Were you receiving wounded from Korea?

Korea hadn't started then, but when it did start, when Korea did start, yes, all the casualties from Korea were flown

38:00 over to us. They were flown over by the Australian Air force, landed and then they were put on an ambulance train and sent up to our army hospital which had been the Occupation Force Hospital.

So when you left Kure it wasn't operating in that way, taking wounded yet?

Oh yes, it started taking wounded virtually straight away. That's when, whilst I,

38:30 by that time I'd been transferred into the hospital, I was out with field units previously. I was in the hospital as the surgeon so I was then receiving casualties from Korea.

Can you tell us about the injured coming into Kure?

The injured had had their preliminary operations done in

39:00 Kure in the MASH [Mobile Army Surgical Hospital]. They were evacuated from the 3 Battalion, which was the only infantry at that time, evacuated by an Indian field ambulance taken to the MASH. Now MASH was very similar to what was portrayed in the film. It was very difficult.

39:30 For the first time they had an army hospital right up near the front line, because we had air superiority up to the front line. The North Koreans and Chinese had short range artillery, they could push it up. It meant that casualties came in that previously would have died. So they had a lot of casualties with big injuries. It was also the introduction of the

40:00 helicopter which was bringing casualties in. There were two difficulties. One was women, never before had nurses been exposed to front line conditions. This made it difficult providing facilities for the nurses. It's

40:30 different today, men and women mix, but at that time men and women were separate and also looking after them because they were under fire. It wasn't easy. Now the surgeons had been, like me, they'd deferred their national service in America during war time. After the war they started their surgical training, like I was. Now

41:00 while they were doing that their national service was deferred.

Tape 4

00:40 **Before lunch we were talking about the MASH units and also the introduction of women to the front line. Can you talk about the impact of that?**

01:00 I didn't see much of it personally although I was a patient in the MASH because I got pneumonia up in the mountains in the snow when the temperature was about 30 below, and coughing blood in the snow, it goes a long way. However I was taken down by the Indian Field Ambulance to the MASH.

01:30 So I saw a bit of their work and the difficulties they were working under. With regard to nurses, certainly they had to work very hard and it was really only by hearsay that I knew that taking nurses

02:00 up in the front line created difficulties for the unit. Because they had to provide proper facilities and as soon as you had men and women together under those sort of conditions, things are going to happen. When all you should be thinking about is your work. Now there weren't many of them, weren't many nurses, and

02:30 I suppose the difficulties were friendship. Now the imposed difficulties, if the nurses became friendly with one particular soldier then it created jealousies for the rest. There were all the special facilities that had to be guarded because of what the soldiers might do. So

03:00 later, by Vietnam of course nurses in forward lines were completely acceptable. And they lived and worked together.

Must have been difficult for the women?

Well difficult for the women, difficult for the men, certainly difficult for the commander of the unit trying to keep law and order, and that's why he also had difficulty with his surgeons.

03:30 His surgeons had been deferring their national service; it was different for us because we were volunteers. All the Americans were national service in their army units, the surgeons that went to Korea. So that they'd finished their surgical training, it was say 1950, suddenly they've got Korea and the army says, yes you're just what

04:00 we want, young trained surgeons, come to Korea. They didn't want to go to Korea, they wanted to get on with their surgical life.

They were at all used to army discipline?

Not at all and what's more they weren't interested in army discipline, and they weren't going to have any part of it. Or army dress. They did their work and they were magnificent surgeons but they weren't going to be subjected to army discipline like the

04:30 rest of the force. So that made difficulties for the commanding officer.

The television program, would you say that was what it was like?

Oh yes, it was very good. Of course they made it humorous and they highlighted certain things, but basically that's what it was because they were getting casualties in with massive injuries that previously would have died. And here the surgeons were confronted

05:00 with all these casualties that they had to deal with. And they developed all sorts of new techniques. A lot of vascular surgery was first developed in the MASHs in Korea. There was another MASH, a Norwegian MASH that did a lot of good work too but it was a unit that did have difficulties.

05:30 As I say, by the time they got to Vietnam it was s smooth operating.

Can you give me an example of difficulties?

Oh well the difficulties having women, the difficulties of having the unit right up the front line, the difficulties of having casualties they had never previously had to deal with because they got them so quickly, that they would have died previously.

06:00 The difficulties of some of the members of the unit of not wanting to be subjected to strict army discipline. They were the difficulties but the work went on. It didn't affect the function of the unit, they still looked after the casualties. See the Australian casualties when they left me in the battalion, they were hand carried out until

06:30 the field ambulance, the Indians could come up and meet us. Then they were taken out by jeep down to their main unit where they do first aid really and readjust the dressings that I put on. And then they were taken on by larger ambulance to the MASH. And from the MASH after they had their initial surgery

07:00 they were then taken and loaded onto aircraft, sent to Japan where the definitive surgery was done, and grafting and that was...

So all nationalities went through the MASH?

Oh yes.

Because I only recall American accents on the program?

07:30 No, the program didn't show it, but see there were all sorts of units strung out along the front line, and only, oh I think, I don't know how many MASHs there were, and the Norwegian MASH. So that it wouldn't matter if you were a Turk or a Greek or Australian or British,

08:00 you'd all eventually get into the MASH. Then if you were American you were flown to an American hospital in Japan. If you were Australian or New Zealand or British you were flown to us at Kure, where we looked after them. So it wasn't easy. With 21 different

08:30 nations all in there together and all talking different languages.

And not calling it a war?

Yeah and not calling it a war. And being forgotten in Australia. If there was a big battle with a lot of casualties it would get into the paper, otherwise the rest of the time there would be nothing, so the soldiers felt that they were neglected and forgotten while Korea was going on. And

09:00 the same when they came home, people didn't really want to talk about Korea. But now, it's different, the last few years, they have been acknowledged and accepted and the Korean units appreciated that very much.

I think more people have been educated about it?

They didn't know, because we didn't have big forces there, initially we

09:30 had one division. Initially we were in a British Commonwealth brigade consisting of three battalions - the Argyle and Southern Highlanders and Middlesex Regiment, British headquarters, and as I say, Indian Field Ambulance. Now the Indians did a wonderful job and you must remember

10:00 that that was only two, three years after partition of India and Pakistan, that they, the Indian government agreed to sending a unit there. Now I made some good friends amongst the Indians, and strangely enough when Mrs Beard was clearing a desk this morning she

10:30 found a letter that had come from the 2IC [Second in Command] of the Indian Field Ambulance, a colonel Rengoraj, or major then, because in about 1968 he contacted me because his nephew needed a kidney transplant, and they couldn't do them in India but we had just started doing them

11:00 in Queen Elizabeth, and that was the best unit in Australia. And so I was able to organise for his nephew to come to the Queen Elizabeth and have a transplant. His grandmother came with him and gave her kidney, a live donor, and she stayed with us. So I felt that it was something that I did for rhe Indians because when I had been in the MASH with pneumonia and

11:30 I was getting better, they wanted to evacuate me to Japan and I didn't want to go and I said, "The Indians will look after me." So they sent me up to the field ambulance. The Indians treated me with rum and curry, and that is the best treatment for pneumonia. Rum and curry. This army headquarters, New Delhi, July '70. So

12:00 we were able to give him a kidney transplant and he went on and did medicine. So there is a nice little story.

Going back to Kure, you had reluctantly agreed to Korea,

12:30 **when did you first go over to Korea?**

Well the battalion went over in about August, September and then I went over just after Christmas.

So about 6 months into the war?

Yes.

You flew in there

13:00 **from Japan, what greeted you?**

What greeted me was an American airbase. When I got out of the plane the plane took off and went back to Japan and I reported to the American orderly room. And I said to them, "Well I'm looking for 3 Battalion." And they said, "What outfit's that?" And I said, "The Australia Battalion."

13:30 And they said, "Oh say captain, we didn't know there were any Australians in the country." They didn't even know that they were there. And they said, "Anyway, the Big Bugout's on," the big retreat, and they said, "Well we don't know where the Australians are but they will be up forward somewhere retreating." And they said, "Anyway you can't go up there in that gear." Because I only had an ordinary uniform on

and so they

14:00 went out to the clothing store and got me a beaver lined flying jacket. And so that was good. So I set off with my sausage bag over my shoulder, heading north, not knowing where the battalion was. That was the greeting I had.

Set off in what?

On foot.

On foot, in a country you had never been to before, looking for the front line?

14:30 Yes.

So you just headed north?

Yes, on my own, and of course I've still got the hangover and I'm still cold and frightened.

That is a very funny image.

It's even funnier when eventually after some hours I saw a jeep with a slouch hat in it, and I

15:00 raced after this and I called out. And it was a records officer who was also trying to find the battalion to see what casualties they had. So I hopped in with him. When darkness fell we went into a little Japanese hut.

Korean hut or Japanese ?

Korean hut, and we covered up the jeep and we were three, the driver and the two of us. And we took

15:30 turns on keeping watch and it was cold and we had no food but what I did have in my pack was a loaf of bread with a bottle of whiskey stuffed down the bread. So we carried it, which I was taking to one of my friends up in the battalion. But I said, "Oh he wouldn't mind if we just had a shot of it." And we tore off some of the bread and had that. And then there was a terrible noise outside and we looked out and this whole horde of white smocked men

16:00 coming down the road. And we didn't know whether they were north, south, east or west, who they were. And we were in two minds whether to stay where we were or go out through the back of the hut and wriggle along a ditch in the paddy field till we get to the mountains, and then go south. But we thought if they are South Koreans evacuating and they are friendly, we are going to

16:30 look terrible leaving our jeep and so we stuck it out and they all went past. They were, in fact, all refugees. South Korean refugees fleeing from the oncoming Chinese and North Korean forces. So they passed by. Next morning we went north again, not knowing if we were going to hit the front line or what. Eventually, I don't know if it was the next day or that day, we found the battalion.

17:00 And this I reported to the CO [Commanding Officer] and he said, "Good, I'm pleased to see you because we've got casualties." And I said, "Where is the RAP [Regimental Aid Post]?" That's the regimental aid post. And he said, "Over there in the ditch." So there they were with casualties that the RAP sergeant was looking after and that was my welcome to the war.

17:30 But all the fear disappeared because I straight away realised that I was in a unit of Australians all looking after each other, and while I was in that I was safe.

The 3 RAR [Royal Australian Regiment] had a good reputation?

Yes, because I knew that everyone looked after each other, and I soon realised what

18:00 fine soldiers they were, although they had come from these diverse areas in Australia, and diverse reasons why they were there. And so I very quickly became extremely proud that I was their medical officer. And then the war went on and the winter

18:30 came and it got colder and colder and we got a lot of frost bite.

When you first landed in Korea what was your impression of the terrain?

Oh hilly, everywhere is hilly and their paddy field, rice fields are made wherever there was any flat area or it's terraced into the hills, so it was much hillier, and some sharp

19:00 hills and high mountains with not a great deal of flat plains. And the Koreans had virtually fled to the South, so that throughout my time in Korea I would have met very few

19:30 Koreans because as we advanced north the villages were mostly deserted. I suppose the most Koreans I saw at one time was the group that were going south in the night.

Where had you landed?

At Taegu, which is central, central South Korea.

Had you been told how far you were from the front line?

20:00 No because when I was taken over there the CO had said to me, “Now there is one other problem. I can’t tell you where the unit is because they’re retreating, but they are somewhere, somewhere about Seoul or a bit south of Seoul, in the centre. So if you find your way north and find them…”

20:30 And I’m not a very good solider. I might be a good medical officer, but I’m not a good solider. So that’s why I was pretty uncertain.

Did you have a map?

No, head north.

You knew which way north was?

Hmm.

You are walking along,

21:00 **what were you expecting you would see next?**

Oh, I think I felt a bit numb. Really beyond caring. And I knew that eventually I would have to hit the front line. It was different in Vietnam where there was no front line because the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese were everywhere.

21:30 Above the ground, under the ground. But Korea was different in that it was still front line. So I knew that if it was south of the front line that eventually I would catch up to it and eventually I would find out where the British were, where the British Commonwealth Brigade was. And when I got there, of course, to be greeted by the CO,

22:00 and we formed a wonderful relationship, CO and MO [Medical Officer]. In my time, Colonel Ferguson, you may have heard mention of him, who was a very fine solider and looked after his battalion. And because they had developed a good reputation, the Americans wanted to send them off to all the difficult spots.

22:30 **Was Charlie Green still alive at that stage?**

No, he had just been killed. And have you met Owen Green? Yeah. Charlie Green’s story—was a wonderful soldier and a wonderful CO. He really was incredible, although he was only with the unit for a short time. The troops loved him.

So you arrived just after that. You got along well with the commanding officer?

23:00 Yes because he used to see me every evening at about 1700 and he’d tell me, he’d give me a resume of everything that had happened and what was likely to happen the next day. What sort of battles might occur, actions and what casualties I might expect. So I’d be pretty well briefed.

23:30 On the other hand he would enquire from me all the sick and injured that I had dealt with during that day. So that he knew what was going on in his unit. And in addition he would enquire from me about my relationships with the soldiers and the officers, and talking to them to get their feeling of

24:00 what stresses they were under; how they were feeling; how they were coping. Because I would get that out of them, where they wouldn’t be likely to tell him. And so I would be able to give him information that he couldn’t get. So we formed a very, very good partnership throughout the while, of my time with them.

24:30 **So what medical supplies did you have with you?**

Virtually none. I had carried some penicillin and there was one other antibiotic that had just been developed and I carried quite a bit of that in my pockets. Now apart from that

25:00 there was only the supplies that were there in the ditch. In the RAP jeep that was carried in, that’s all the dressings and splints and things that were there. So I just carried on with looking after the troops there until we were… I think, of course

25:30 we were on the retreat, except that day, General Walker 8th Army commander was killed. General Ridgeway took over and said, the retreats finished, we’ll stand and fight. And that’s great, by this time I didn’t mind retreating. I didn’t mind if I got out down the south and went home. It really didn’t worry me very much about the outcome of the war in Korea.

26:00 I mean it did later and it does now, a great deal, and I think we did a lot of good. But we then had to form a line and it just happened that the Chinese and North Koreans had extended themselves, and they couldn’t push on very hard either. So

26:30 it became a bit static for a couple of weeks. And it just happened that the worse winter on record hit them and everything froze over, the snow froze over into ice.

What kind of distance was there between the two forces?

Oh, foot patrol distance. You know if

27:00 we went out on patrol you would come under fire so it was a matter of, you know, a few hundred yards I suppose.

So you are hit by a ferocious winter?

Yeah, with a lot of frostbite and there was one American marine that was knocked too. They were retreating and they had thousands of frostbite casualties because

27:30 it was so cold. About every three weeks we'd get a bottle of beer with the rations. By the time we got it in the late afternoon it would be frozen. You'd stuff it in a sock and sleep with it all night, and in the morning when you dig a hole in the snow to sleep in, you put your hand down and grabbed the bottle of beer and drank it before it froze up again.

28:00 Vehicles had to be, although they had antifreeze in them, they had to be run every 10 minutes to stop them from freezing. My antibiotics and any injections, morphine etcetera, I had to carry in my inside pocket against my chest to stop them from freezing.

What temperatures are we talking?

20, 30 below freezing.

How were you clothed?

Inadequately.

28:30 Well they hadn't realised they were going to be hit by such a bad winter and Australia never had cold weather equipment, never needed it. And so everyone was frozen. I was fortunate in having that beaver lined jacket and I felt pretty guilty about it

How did the soldiers keep warm?

29:00 Well they didn't. They were cold all the time, until, although in the day time, when the sun came out just for a few hours, just a few hours the sun came out, you could get warm. Then by 3 o'clock it started to freeze up again.

Presumably the Australian authorities would have known the soldiers where freezing? Why didn't they

29:30 **send coats and warmer clothes?**

Well, they didn't have any cold weather equipment and ordinary overcoats; long overcoats you can't march and fight in them. Eventually, by the following winter

30:00 they got much better equipment. But the first winter, well you either survived or you fell sick. But the soldiers were, they really were magnificent, they didn't complain much.

Where were they sleeping? How were they sheltered?

In the snow.

In what?

30:30 In a bag, but the sleeping bags were only one thickness, blanket bags they were called.

Would they huddle together to keep warm?

Well sometimes but you'd dig your own weapon pit, maybe a couple in it, and sleep close together. But oh,

31:00 they were survivors. The worst thing was at night if there was an attack and you had to get out of your bag. Then it was impossible to get warm again, everything ached, all your joints ached and I mean it was similar to the descriptions of some of the Everest expeditions.

31:30 Of course they only lasted, oh a week or a couple of weeks in the bad part, climbing the mountain. There was a wonderful book written recently, 'Thin Air'.

So they had no heating facilities at all?

We used to get our rations

32:00 with a, like a shoe box and in it were a couple of tins of oh, stew and sausages, beans, and a tin of crackers. They were American rations each soldier got a box and a packet of cigarettes,

32:30 a tin of cookies, biscuits, and some canned heat. Canned heat was jelly petrol and you lit it and put your tin of beans on top of that to heat it.

I just thought it was a band?

There was a French Canadian unit, the Van Doos, they used to get some of this

33:00 canned heat and they'd get a piece of cloth, and squeeze out the alcohol from it, and then put either water, or sometimes fruit juice would get in the rations, and drink it. And the only trouble was it was methyl alcohol not ethyl so it would send them mad and blind. But they would still drink it.

33:30 **Given that Australians are quite ingenious at creating something out of nothing, was there nothing they could do to make fire?**

If you were in a wooded area certainly you could tear down some of the branches and light a fire. But you wouldn't want to light it at night time because it would draw a different sort of fire on you. So you could light a fire

34:00 for heating the food, or during the day it may be getting a bit warm but only occasionally when you are out of range.

So were you sleeping in the snow as well?

At times, not all the time, occasionally I'd be, oh when I could I would have a tent,

34:30 when we could carry the tent around. While we were able to go up tracks with the jeep, then the RAP and the headquarters staff would all be in tents, it was still pretty cold but at least. But then when we were going out further then, to collect casualties, we'd sleep in the snow.

35:00 And a terrible thing was with injuries, with gunshot wounds, if you get cold, frozen on top of your injury then its bad news for shock. And I remember there was one action; we were supposed to go down one side of a hill across then up the other side, attacking the Chinese on the other side,

35:30 and while were doing it and holding them, the road was supposed to be opened by another unit so we evacuate the casualties down that road. Well it happened we, they couldn't get control of the road, so when I got down the bottom and got the casualties I held them for a while hoping that the road would be open but it wasn't so I then realised that I'd have to have them

36:00 hand carried over the top of the mountain to the other side. Now that was a carry in deep snow, with the stretcher bearers knee deep in snow and carrying the casualties and many times of course, they'd trip and fall and the casualty would fall off the stretcher. And that particular night was about a 10 hour carry and by the time they got up and down

36:30 the other side they were in very bad shape and I think a couple had died. It wasn't until late the following day, the advance went on and the road was open.

Was there ever a thought to leave casualties behind given the difficult circumstances?

37:00 That's always something that you have to consider even with, particularly with MASH casualties, we never did it. We always got the casualties out whether they were living, dying or dead. Always. And so the troops,

37:30 the soldiers knew this, that if they were injured that I'd look after them together with my RAP staff, sergeant and corporal and some stretcher bearers. And two padres who were wonderful stretcher bearers, one from the Salvation Army, representative, and another one a Roman Catholic padre,

38:00 and they were a great help to me looking after sick and injured.

How big was your team?

Well I had, was 4, I suppose. But in each company there was a medical orderly, a corporal and there were stretcher bearers who had been

38:30 members of the unit band. As soon as the unit goes into action they'd been trained to be stretcher bearers as well. So they were all out with the casualties and they would hand carry them to me and I would put their splints and dressings on and stop them bleeding and give them morphine, and on they

39:00 went. But we had times when we had a lot of casualties. Came the battle of Kapyong, you've heard probably that was the battle that the Australians won the Presidential citation. It was in April, the middle of April, we went out into corps reserve for a few days rest and

39:30 we were going to celebrate Anzac Day with the Turks, which you know, was interesting and we were going to get some extra food and some beer, and we were going to have a sporting contest - wrestling and boxing and running and all sorts of things with the Turks. However on the 22nd, I think we began to get

40:00 news that the Chinese might be coming down. On the 23rd there was news that the South Korean unit that had replaced us had come under fire from a heavy Chinese force. But we thought we'll be alright.

Tape 5

00:38 **Can you continue telling us about Kapyong?**

Well we then heard that we were going to be sent back to reinforce the South Koreans which meant that we were going to miss out on our Anzac Day with the Turks, and as we went out in trucks we went past this great pile of food

01:00 and beer. We don't know whatever happened to that beer, we certainly didn't get it. However we went, up initially we were just digging in behind the South Koreans, but then it was apparent that there was a huge attack on and the whole division was coming down to Kapyong valley. The boys had to spread up into the hills with the companies, into defensive positions, and dig trenches in the rocky ground.

01:30 And then the assault came. And unfortunately the South Korean unit was overwhelmed and a lot of their troops retreated through our lines and we didn't know whether they were north or south. And then a lot of Chinese and North Koreans got through our lines too,

02:00 because we thought they were the retreating South Koreans. They cut behind us and cut us off. And then the battle was on in a big way. That night was the night of the 23rd. I think we had, out of the unit, we had 600, there were about 30 killed and about 90 wounded that had to be looked after and evacuated.

02:30 Next morning we managed to, most of the unit fought its way out and then the CO, Ferguson, called me up and he said, "We've got two companies still up there, short of ammunition and they have got casualties." He said, "I've arranged with an American tank regiment, for a squadron of tanks, we'll go up there with ammunition and see

03:00 if we can get the casualties out. Will you come with me?" I didn't want to go because I only just got out of the battle. However, of course I said, "Yes, sir." We went up the valley and immediately got fired on by the Chinese. Now we were inside the tank, it makes a big rattle when you have got a lot of small arms fire on the tank, the only thing you are worried is if

03:30 the track is blown off. And we got up to the units and were able to… The Americans put our defensive fire in a radius and we got the ammunition off and we got the casualties onto tanks, two inside. And then I had to decide what to do with the others. If they were left there they were going to get captured or shot

04:00 so I decided to strap them on, lash them onto the side of the tank and for the tanks to go helter skelter down the valley with the hope they get through the enemy fire. Now what happened in fact, as we went down with the casualties, the Chinese stopped firing for which I will be ever grateful, and our

04:30 casualties too. And they let us get the casualties off. We turned around and went back again to get more, the firing started up again. So the Chinese were very good soldiers and eventually the whole of the unit managed to get out and we reformed the line. The Gloucester on our flank, the English battalion, they didn't get out and the whole unit were taken prisoner.

05:00 We lost a few prisoners but not many. So then we reformed the defensive line and the Chinese never got further south again. And because the Australians had played such a big part in stemming the assault, was awarded the Presidential Citation by the American President. Now that was a wonderful

05:30 effort of all the Australian soldiers during that battle.

Can I hear about your work during that battle?

Well my work was looking after the casualties. Now I don't believe in medical officers being armed. I'm completely opposed to it. And I'm a bit the same way with the police force. What I was doing was getting on and dealing with the casualties.

06:00 Splinting, or not do any splints, I didn't have any at that stage. Putting dressings on, stopping bleeding and giving morphine and getting them out. Now I was very busy as you can well understand with that many casualties to deal with during the night. And it was a lot of small arms fire around and a lot of tracer bullets you could

06:30 see in the sky. But people have said to me, oh weren't you frightened? And I'm not a brave man by any means but somehow I wasn't frightened at all because I was too busy doing my own work. I didn't believe that any one of these bullets could hit me. So throughout the whole of that night and the next day I dealt with the casualties as

07:00 best I could until I was able to get out. And we fought our way out through the battle and then spent the next day retrieving casualties. Formed a line and we then started to move forward again. So

07:30 my recollection of the battle was simply that I was doing the job for which I had been trained. Everyone else around me did the same.

Did you get any sleep?

No, no, no time for sleep nor food nor, I might have had a water bottle. I must admit when we did get out

08:00 the next day, to the American unit further down, they gave us some breakfast. Of course there was no time for sleep that day or the next. I don't know when was the next I got any sleep.

What does that do to your performance as a surgeon?

I don't think it does much at all. I think there is a whole lot of

08:30 nonsense talked about today in the hospitals, of the medical and nursing staff having to work long hours, and the dangers to patients and causing death and illness. Don't, naturally your performance is going to go off

09:00 and your concentration has to, but not to a dangerous level. Because if you have a job to do you find the energy and the adrenaline comes and keeps you going. Now eventually, of course, you've got to collapse but you are not going to collapse, it would only come after days, you can last. So that I think

09:30 the dangers of overwork today are unnecessarily stressed. And throughout the whole of my surgical lifetime I don't think my work has been markedly affected by working long hours. I can remember one time in Adelaide Hospital, as a registrar, worked all day and all night on casualties and sick, and

10:00 in the morning I had a shower and then went up to the causality ward to clean up from the night before. That took all Saturday morning and then I was due to play cricket at Glenelg oval at 1 o'clock and the sister in the ward gave me a pint of head mixture, which was a noxious brew that we put into a stomach pump, into unconscious patients

10:30 from head injuries. And to make it a bit more palatable she put a tablespoon of brandy in it, she said, "That will give you another yard of pace." So I jumped in my car, changed into my creams on the way down to Glenelg oval whilst driving along, jumped the fence and ran and opened the bowling.

11:00 And had one of the best performances of my lifetime. If things are happening tiredness disappears, you get tired when you are waiting around and you get bored. But no, battle of Kapyong and other battles you just keep going while there is something to be done.

11:30 **You weren't keen to go to Korea in the first place, can you tell me any other reasons you were reluctant to go to Korea?**

Oh no, the only reason was, well I guess the main reason was that I wanted to get home to start my surgical studies which meant

12:00 working here and then going to England. I'd managed to save enough in the army to get me to England. And also I didn't know anything about the land of Korea. I knew what the war was about but I wasn't' particularly interested in it.

12:30 I wasn't opposed to it but I wasn't interested in the battle. Didn't want to spend my time there, it wasn't as though I was, had any great feeling against it.

Did you retain your rank?

Oh, that was another thing. The director had said, well the posting in Korea, in the battalion, is a captain so I will have to ask you to resign your majority. So

13:00 I had to take my crowns off and put clips back on again. I didn't like that too much either, and a drop in pay of course, and the crowns mean a lot when you get them in the army.

What other battles stand out for you as important events in Korea?

Well that was the biggest of the battles apart from

13:30 that, in the first part during the winter it was all patrolling. The platoons and companies would go out patrolling into enemy territory to probe and see what forces there were there. And they of course, would pick up casualties while they were doing it. There were a number

14:00 of other episodes where the Chinese and North Koreans attacked us and we had to fight back. And there were…but mostly at the end of the winter we had started to fight forwards. And advancing all the time and at times we would come up against resistance and get casualties which you dealt with as they occurred.

14:30 **Can you detail the kind of unique surgeries you were doing in your role?**

15:00 Well I wasn't doing any surgery at all, because I was only up in the mountains with a pack on my back or at times with a tent. So I couldn't actually do any surgery. All I could do virtually was first aid. Then the Indians took them out and they went to the MASH, that's where the first surgery was done of

excising dead tissue.

15:30 **So you didn't ever work in a MASH?**

No. I was only ever with the battalion on my own. But from time to time the CO of the Indian Field Ambulance, Colonel Rengoraj, would come up to see how I was getting on and whether I needed any help. But no, and times when there wasn't fighting, because it would be ordinary sick parades of ordinary sickness

16:00 that you'd see in a general practice. There were some other diseases that developed that I saw that I was a bit mystified about, haemorrhagic fever, that I'd never come up against before. We took precautions

16:30 against malaria and had been fully inoculated against typhoid and other diseases but I would see all types of sickness. Plus of course, the frost bite. The big thing with frost bite, if possible, is to prevent it. That wasn't easy so I suppose it was a mixture of being the

17:00 doctor to a large battalion, meeting some diseases that I hadn't met before and looking after casualties. So it was, you know, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. And knowing that you were looking after

17:30 wonderful young Australian soldiers, and some of them not so young. Some that had volunteered and then put their ages down to get there.

What was the most unusual disease that you saw?

Well I guess there was some encephalitis which was

18:00 nasty and the most unusual, as I'd mentioned, acute epidemic haemorrhagic fever. Now this was a virus disease carried by mice, on the fleas of mice, and with spring time the mice had come down from the north through the fields

18:30 of rice that had been left. And if you got bitten they transmitted this fever which caused kidney failure and also caused, affected the blood so you've got bruises all over the body and a fever.

How did you diagnose that?

Well I didn't, I knew they were, I knew they were sick

19:00 and so I had to evacuate them. Now when I left Korea and went back I then did some work on it, some research work and then we found, exact, all about the disease. So there were, in war time you run up against some disease like this that you don't see in peace time.

19:30 **Were you able to inoculate the men once you discovered the disease?**

We did for encephalitis but haemorrhagic fever, at that time, there was no inoculation. But by that time of course, I was out of Korea and back in Japan. And I'd been replaced by another medical officer.

20:00 **They must have had enormous respect for you being on the front line with them?**

Well if you make yourself available and you're always there. What I used to do in times, maybe when things were a bit quiet, I'd get out and go into the

20:30 lines of the men and into their trenches and talk to them. Now I talked to them about how they were, about how their state of health was and their fitness. Also talked to them about their fears and their thoughts; and talked to them about their families; their girlfriends back in Australia and their parents, and how they were coping

21:00 with it all. And so they came to realise that I was interested in them. I suppose I was really a bit of a counsellor, psychologist or whatever and yet I was really not much older, the same age. I was then 25. I turned

21:30 26 in Korea, and so I suppose I developed an interest in people and their illness and their injuries and their feelings. That was far more important in my subsequent medical life, far more important. People say you went to Korea you must have learnt a lot of surgery and did this and that.

22:00 That's what was important, it was understanding people and I've tried to impart that and to use that during the whole of my medical life, and I think it's been of benefit to me and to my patients. And I always tell my young students and young doctors

22:30 to treat the whole patient not just the sick part. And there are a whole lot of good doctors out there. I think I am leaving, with my retirement; I'm leaving a profession that is in better shape than when I went into it.

You had almost became a padre as well as a doctor?

Oh yeah.

23:00 **Some of the things those men told you must have broken your heart?**

Oh yes, because some of them there, were say, on the brink of breaking down. Now I would recognise this and help them and talk to them and always be around. And they,

23:30 I mean they put faith and trust in me beyond, far beyond anything that I really was worth or could give them. And I mean it's an overwhelming feeling knowing that you've got the trust of people in your hands.

24:00 And it's been the same in the whole of my medical life. I mean the faith and trust that some patients put into you. I mean for instance, a woman with a carcinoma of the breast, now she'll come to me, or used to, and I would tell her what the problem was,

24:30 and tell her that I was going to need to operate. And when I did and took the lump out and had it examined under the microscope, that it might be something nasty. I never used the word malignant, I think they are swear words, they knew what I was talking about. And that I might have to take the breast off either in part or completely,

25:00 and I'd say to them… Now, see today it's different because we can do, we do biopsies and examine before the operation so we know whether it is malignant or not and we know we can plan the type of operation and discuss it with the patient. But that is only in relatively recent times. So a woman would say to me, well I'd say, "Well if I find something nasty and I've got to

25:30 go on and do some major surgery. Would you rather wake up from the anaesthetic and the next day we'll talk about it and you can tell me what sort of surgery you want me to do". And they'd say, "Well no, I'll leave it entirely in your hands". Now for someone to

26:00 put faith in me with one meeting, or usually two meetings because I would ask them to come back the next day with their husband and talk about it again. Really that's putting a lot of faith in you for…

Is that faltering or difficult for you?

Well both, I mean it's wonderful to know

26:30 that I can give the attitude to a patient and give the impression that I am going to do the very best for them. And for them to accept what I have told them and for them to say, no I will leave it up to you, to what you think is best. Now that is pretty hard for a patient and

27:00 maybe it's a big burden on the surgeon too because you may not do what is absolutely right, there may be something that you could have done.

But they know that you are doing the best you can with the information available to you?

Yes, yes. And I would say now, would you like, before

27:30 I do anything, another opinion, and see someone else? Oh, I think it's only happened a couple of times in my whole lifetime that they would ask for that. Some patients are absolutely terrified and some patients

28:00 accept it and just get on. Well you know, you are going to do an operation, you are going to fix me.

In war what sorts of incidents were coming up like that?

Well can we go to, a good example is in Vietnam.

28:30 Now frequently we'd get casualties come in, in a helicopter. I might add, helicopters, we never had in Korea. Not in our battalion because we were usually up in the mountains and the helicopters would only function up to 1500 feet from where we usually hide them at. In Korea we got most of our casualties, came in the fast helicopters. Now there were two

29:00 casualties brought in lying side by side in the reception area. One was a national serviceman of 20 and another, an army corporal of 25. Now the national serviceman looked at me and he said, "Sir, I know what you are thinking, you are trying to decide which of us you'll operate on first. Take my corporal because you might be able to save his legs." Now the boy had both legs virtually blown off.

29:30 The corporal, because they had both trod on a mine, the corporal weren't quite as bad. And yet the boy, I mean it's wonderful for a 20 year old boy to say, take my corporal first because you might be able to save his legs. And I saw that time and time again. And there were

30:00 times when I would have a casualty and I'd say to them, "Well now, I'm going to do everything I can to save your leg or your arm." Which by then we were able to do, where we couldn't do it in Korea and certainly not in World War II, because of the development of vascular surgery and arterial grafting. But I'd say,

30:30 well things are too bad you may lose your leg. Now the boy wouldn't know when he went under the anaesthetic whether he was going to wake up with his leg or not. Amputations are a very nasty thing.

But I hear from soldiers that I've operated on all over Australia,

31:00 from time to time. It's wonderful walking down the street, and I'll get approached by someone that I've looked after. So I don't regret one single minute that I spent in either Korea or Vietnam.

31:30 **You had a good rapport with the men in the field.**

32:00 **Can you tell me about what you observed of their mental health?**

Oh yeah, they had a problem because some of them were very young and they really weren't equipped for warfare and the dangers

32:30 and they were literally frightened to death. But they went on with their work and they were supported by men around them. See the army is a wonderful organisation. When there is a division and a brigade and a battalion and eventually you get down to a platoon and a section - a section of 7 men who

33:00 do everything together and look after each other. And if there's one, shall we say, weaker member, they look after him and help him through his difficult times. It's a system which develops in the army. So he is not ostracised at any time. As long as he makes some effort, he'll be looked after.

33:30 And that goes on forever really. After leaving the army in civilian life and if you're in, run into difficult times, someone from your unit in the army will come in and help you. And you know there are people out there who will do that.

34:00 **That must be very comforting for men?**

Oh it is, in times of difficulty, financial hardship all sorts; there'll be someone come to your aid.

I've heard some people describe the army as their big family?

Some of them, for some it becomes virtually the only family. For some the army and army service

34:30 is all they have to live for. And that's a pity, because really, you have to get on with life and work. For some it plays too big a part, but then if they come home and they haven't got, shall we say, 100 percent family support.

35:00 Or got support either, from a previous employer, and then maybe they start drinking. Vietnam of course was far, far worse and we can talk about that later. But they would tell me all this.

35:30 I would then, each evening, be able to let the CO know that there were some problems in a particular area. Not by name but I'd let him know that there were, some of the troops who weren't doing it well, and need a bit of extra care. So he would make sure that that

36:00 company wasn't pushed into some very difficult situation for a few days until they had time to rest.

Did you ever have to suggest to men that they should leave or be discharged?

Never.

36:30 Not, no, I made sure that they were looked after and supported. Not only by me and my staff but by the other soldiers around them. And they would eventually come good and go on.

The badly wounded,

37:00 **were there men who didn't want to go on anymore?**

Oh, yes there were. There were occasionally men who just couldn't take it any more. And sometimes on sick parade, I mean

37:30 it might happen, you know, once a month, they would come in and it would be what was called trying to get a homer. A homer was a medical evacuation. Maybe they had injured their back or maybe they felt sick and they thought that I might

38:00 send them off to the field ambulance or the MASH or send them back to Japan. Now I had to decide whether they really were sick or whether they really did have a disabling back injury bad enough to go out. And if I didn't think they were bad enough I would have to send them back up the hill. But that only happened occasionally but it was difficult deciding whether a man was bad

38:30 enough. But there were times when they'd just drop their bundle and everything seemed forlorn and maybe they weren't getting any mail from home; there was nothing in the papers; they were dispirited; it was cold, and times when they just got down . And that's understandable, and it was up to me to see if I could lift them up again.

39:00 **Did you ever come across situations where men were so critically injured that they would not make it? Where the only option was morphine?**

No, well

39:30 there were rarely situations where I couldn't get the man out by one means or another.

If you couldn't get him out?

If I couldn't, oh well, I did. I mean I gave them enough morphine to overcome their pain. But see in Kokoda when they got trapped up the top of the mountain

40:00 they knew that it was going to be days and days until they got them out. I didn't have that situation, I always felt that the Indians were going to help me, and I had my own stretcher bearers and the Indian Field Ambulance, and we'd get the casualty out and get him down to the MASH and he'd be looked after and on the plane and back

40:30 to Korea. No I, what you are asking is did I give morphine sufficient to completely overcome their pain.

Yes.

No, I would only give enough morphine to stop the pain but never enough to know that this dose of morphine was going to finish a man.

Tape 6

00:40 **Conditions in Korea were extreme and medical supplies were limited,**

01:00 **what did you do when supplies ran out?**

Oh well I used carb soda for indigestion, for sore throats, jam and aspirin stirred up. For frostbite I used some stuff called barbasol. Now that was a shaving cream that used to come up in the rations but it was useless to shave with

01:30 but it did contain lanolin so what I did was to take the labels off and I have boxes of this, and this was special frostbite treatment. And I'd tell the troops to massage it into the toes and fingers and ears. And they thought that it was specific treatment for frostbite until eventually, after some weeks, they found out about it and they nicknamed me

02:00 Barbasol Beard. So you improvised with all sorts of things. And they got, today we've far too many drugs. It makes me shudder to see the list of drugs that some elderly people are on and younger people too.

Barbasol Beard sounds like a good title for an operetta?

02:30 I love opera and I fortunately I've been able to play in three, Samson and Delilah and Electra and Macbeth. That's another side of my life.

There are a lot of sides to your life.

03:00 **How were the POWs [Prisoner of War] treated in Korea? Did you ever treat any POWs after they were released?**

No because by then I was back in civilian practice. I really didn't treat any of them but they were certainly very harshly treated. I don't know whether you have interviewed Colonel or Brigadier Greville

03:30 who was a prisoner and you know, put into boxes and left there out in the snow for hours and hours on end, and not fed. Very harshly treated, the prisoners. There was one, one of the, I think it was a Gloucester, Major Farrah Hockley who escaped 6 times and each time he was

04:00 recaptured and beaten almost to death, but survived. And I met him in Korea a couple of years ago. But no, they were very bad, badly treated but then the Chinese or some of them, and Koreans were cruel and would do the same to their own people. So it

04:30 wasn't that they were particularly picking on the allied prisoners.

Did you have occasion to work with Yong Kil Choi, a North Korean who escaped and ended up working with the 3rd RAR?

He was one of the refugees that were coming down and he

05:00 was actually taken into the RAP because he was lost and bewildered and about 15 or 16, by my predecessor, and then I took him over when I arrived and he looked after things around the RAP and helped with casualties and used to do a bit of, heating our meals and gathering firewood and until eventually, did more and more

05:30 in the RAP, and then eventually migrated to Australia. It's a wonderful story.

With the help of the 3rd RAR?

Yeah.

What did you do with the dead bodies?

Well they're not a responsibility of the medical staff, as soon as they die they were

06:00 taken out by the quarter master and put in temporary coffins and taken away. But I never handled, didn't have anything to do with them. Except of course to certify them as being dead.

Were there any times in Korea when you thought you were tested to the point of not being able to keep going?

06:30 Yes, there were times when I did feel that. But immediately I would be helped, usually by my RAP sergeant. Any feelings that

07:00 might have come into my mind disappeared because something would happen, a casualty would be brought in or someone sick and I'd have to deal with it. Didn't have time and so the feeling disappeared. Anything will disappear if you give it a chance. But it sure said that if ever I feel like exercise I lie down and the feeling passes away.

07:30 So, no, I didn't ever get to that point.

Were you in Korea for the end of the war?

No, because the war didn't finish until '53. I was replaced and then came out to Japan and worked in Tokyo organising the casualties' transfers,

08:00 and looking after the Tokyo units for a few months, three months, and then came back to Australia at the end of '51. War didn't finish until July '53 and at that time I was on the coronation contingent on the way home.

08:30 And I think we were in Hawaii, crossing the Pacific in the [HMAS] Sydney aircraft carrier when the war was over.

coronation contingent?

Comes 1953 and the coronation and they selected someone from all the units around Australia and corps, signals, artillery etcetera. Now for some reason or another I was

09:00 selected as the representative for the medical corps. To go to represent the corps at the coronation. That was another very proud day; we went in the Sydney. We got to the Mediterranean and we had an exercise with the Med fleet with

09:30 Mountbatten and at night all the officers were invited, about 20 of us, to dinner with the Mountbattens in Malta. But I slipped off the back of a truck and broke my wrist which I tied up into my jacket and still went to dinner. Now we arrived in England, we went to the brigade of guards training battalion, and were trained to march for the coronation. When I appeared on parade the regimental

10:00 sergeant major looked at me, and I suppose I was young and tall and fit and he said to me, "Front rank, left hand marker." Then he saw my medical corps flashes and then he said, "Oh but in England, sir, medical officers are not known for their ability to march and drill." He said, "I understand, sir, that things are different in Australia, sir, so

10:30 if you take up that position now, we'll see how things go." Now he tried to get me out of it but what I did was to go to the sergeants' mess that night and ask if I could speak to one of their drill instructors and I said, "This is my problem, the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] is trying to get rid of me and I want to stay there, can you give me some private lessons?" So we went out in the bush and every night I would get better and better, much to the annoyance of the sergeant major. So I retained the position

11:00 in the march and that was very exciting, marching 10 miles around London with the Queen. With all the cheers and 15 million people and then we took part in the Spithead Naval Review and came home on a goodwill flag waving tour to Canada and America on the [HMS] Gosford Pacific. So that was a pretty exciting appointment.

11:30 **Did you have any time for girlfriends?**

Oh yeah, I guess the odd one, but I never allowed it to get too serious because I knew that my main aim was to get that surgical fellowship and I knew that I had a limited amount of money to do it.

And you did get your surgical fellowship?

Yep,

12:00 in London in 1957, in Edinburgh, another one. But there was one lovely girl that I took to Saxby in Regents Park once and we were walking home and crossing Westminster Bridge. And as we stood there and looked down, the moon was coming up on the Thames and it was beautiful and I looked at her and she was too.

12:30 And I thought what a wonderful wife, but then I thought, no, I can't afford, I haven't got the time and I haven't got the money. I've got to somehow break this moment and the feeling. So I turned around and I said, "Oh look up stream!" And of course it was all dark and just the moon. So that fixed that. But we are still friends.

13:00 **That's a lot of self discipline?**

Yeah, I felt that I couldn't, I mean I might sound a bit self righteous, but I couldn't take advantage of girls knowing that I wasn't going to go on with it. And if they

13:30 were showing signs of wanting to go on, and I, well I'd go for cover or terminate or whatever.

Or find a war to go to?

That's what we did in Korea and my predecessor in the battalion, in Korea, he'd done just that to escape another female doctor in Melbourne. But

14:00 6 months later she appeared in Japan. She'd overcome a lot of difficulties and got into the army and got herself posted to Japan. And they were married, as I say, a week before he went and joined the battalion.

She was determined?

Yeah, and they had a wonderful married life. Another

14:30 one of my friends was married in, you had to have two marriages in Japan. One in the church, but they didn't have civil rights, they were registrants of marriage. You had to go up to Tokyo to the embassy to have a civil wedding. He'd be married in the church and then suddenly sent to Korea

15:00 where he was killed. His wife had no rights, she was a not a war widow, she was not anything. She had, because the marriage was not recognised although it was in the church. And it was several years before they were able to overcome that, which is a

15:30 terrible thing. Terrible that he was killed too, he was a lovely man.

How many Australians were killed in the Korean conflict?

About 500 I think.

More than Vietnam?

Yes, I don't, I can't put a finger on it.

So you get your surgical fellowship?

16:00 See I came home, started surgical studies at the Adelaide Hospital, doing the basic sciences of anatomy and physiology and pathology. I'd started at the Adelaide then of course, in '53 I went off to the coronation. That broke it for 6 months, not that I minded it was a wonderful appointment. And very, you know, I was honoured by it,

16:30 then I went back to England in '55 and got the fellowship in Edinburgh in January '57. Then in London and then came home, then did the Australian exam. Then started as senior surgical registrar at the Adelaide Hospital, which was a 3 year

17:00 appointment. And then went into private surgical practice and had an appointment at the hospital as an honorary surgeon, like I mentioned earlier, your hospital appointments were all unpaid, until 1973.

So in that time you met Margaret?

17:30 Met her in '61, we were married in January '62. And things weren't easy for the first few years, when you are establishing a surgical practice. Particularly when you've only got half time to do it.

How did you meet Margaret?

At the wedding of a

18:00 mutual girlfriend. It was one of my ex girlfriends who was at school with Margaret and a great friend of hers. And she invited me to her wedding. And at the reception there were several fellows standing around and I said, "What are you doing here?" And he said, "Oh Sue was an old girlfriend of mine." Well we found that she had invited 4 of her old boyfriends.

18:30 Now I don't know whether she wanted to tell us it was all over boys or whether she wanted us to meet her girlfriends. Anyway I met her at that wedding and that was it. I was immediately captivated and

have been ever since.

She is a very captivating woman.

Yes.

And do you remember hearing of the Vietnam War and when that began?

19:00 Well it sort of gradually built up. I mean there was the war, the French Indochina war when the French were involved, and eventually the French left after some ghastly battles. A lot of casualties and then there was all the unrest

19:30 of the North Vietnamese, the Viet Cong and the Americans were involved and then SEATO, South East Asia Treaty Organisation, asked for assistance from other countries. That's when Australia became involved, initially just as advisors and then as fighting troops. The soldiers went there under the same, virtually the same conditions as Korea. They

20:00 were asked to go and they volunteered and they went because they thought they were helping the South Vietnamese. Now the end of '67 when the General had said to me, "What are we going to do with the casualties?" And I said, "We'll form surgical teams to go up." Which I did,

20:30 and we added them onto the field ambulance, and so we looked after all the casualties. But we were doing, we went there, and we thought we were doing the right thing. We went there with sincere motives; we thought we were doing good. We didn't realise

21:00 that the South Vietnamese were a divided country. Some of them not fully motivated towards defending their country, some of them actually opposed to the government, like the Viet Cong who were opposing guerrillas in South Vietnam. It was a divided country which, in retrospect,

21:30 we should have realised. If you have read the book or seen the film, 'The Quiet American' in Vietnam, Graham Green wrote about that in 1950, 50 years ago, about the divisions in South Vietnam. So that gradually it became apparent how strong the

22:00 Viet Cong were. They were everywhere all around you and their units tunnelled underground. The resistance was huge. Whereas Korea was all volunteer, in Vietnam almost half the army were national service.

22:30 The number of troops gradually built up, the war became more and more difficult. It became probably apparent in '68 that it was not a war that was going to be won. And maybe we should have got out then, but it would have meant losing a lot of face. So more and more troops

23:00 were poured in. More and more air strikes. And then of course, the Australian population, mostly headed by academics and left wing politicians and the ordinary general protestors who

23:30 had come from nowhere, any time there was something to protest about. And they took to the streets which was terrible because they took to the soldiers. And it was a terrible thing that when you came home, the troops in Vietnam were subject to great hardship. A lot of injuries

24:00 and yet at home all these protests were going on. Then they came home and had to take their uniform off before they entered the country - now for a soldier to do that. And some of them clearly were literally spat on because all sorts of rumours had spread around about the terrible atrocities that they had done which was mostly untrue.

24:30 They had a difficult time, a lot of the troops, when they came home. Whereas previously in World War II and to a lesser extent in Korea, when soldiers came home their jobs were there waiting for them. And their families were there waiting for them.

And there was a big welcome home.

A big welcome home, and they were made to feel as if they had done something good. Not only were they not welcome home but they were rejected. And

25:00 they had nowhere to go except themselves, so they'd get together and you know, start drinking and eventually drugs. Hard to find work because they had lost their training. And so they developed dreadful psychological problems, worse than any war of which I had been associated.

25:30 **Also, as you mentioned earlier it was a very different war, there was no front line, there weren't many safe places, they were in a constant state of alert.**

No, nowhere was really safe. The war is well described.

26:00 There is a couple of books called Cross Fire by Bob Carney, a South Australian, and Trackers, the tracker dogs, and that describes some of the feelings that the troops had in Vietnam. Knowing that they weren't getting anything from home, they would come home to a hostile reception.

26:30 So Vietnam was terrible. Eventually of course, they had that parade in Sydney and that did a lot to

overcome it. Did a lot and now they're much better recognised and acknowledged and accepted.

A deeper understanding. Getting back to your personal experience of Vietnam, what year did you go over there?

27:00 I went over in '68 and I arrived just at the Tet Offensive which was a big Viet Cong and North Vietnamese offensive against the allied troops and the Australians. We had a lot of casualties. I arrived just in time to walk straight in. A lot of casualties, so I worked, you know,

27:30 as a surgeon in Vung Tau and all Australians were choppered down there.

You arrive just post? And you are in Vung Tau and in this war the helicopters are being used?

Yes, virtually all the time. If you were injured, if you were injured in the field

28:00 there'd be a chopper, would come in, usually Australian, maybe American, and they were very, very brave pilots and crew, who would come in under fire and either land and pick you up or winch you out of the forest and away you'd go. And I'd get the casualties within half an hour of wounding. Now again,

28:30 previous times they would have all, well a lot of them would have died because of bleeding and shock, and they'd arrive and I would have to set to work straight away and look after them. So that wasn't easy. You'd work day and night. You asked previously about getting exhausted and not being

29:00 able to work, it didn't happen. And probably my efficiency fell off and certainly doing fine work, fine arterial grafting and repairs, you'd get a headache but you went on. See there was one; I remember one mine injury of the leg

29:30 and buttocks and I operated on him from 7 o'clock at night until about 1 o'clock in the morning. I then went up to my tent, and I hadn't been there for a bout 20 minutes when the medical orderly came up and he said, "Sir he is bleeding again." And sure enough he was. So I had to undo everything and do the

30:00 operation again. So it was 7 o'clock before I finished. He still had a leg which was a great thrill for me and the operating staff, the anaesthetist and the orderlies who assisted me. Then I had a shower and breakfast and went on with the day's work. But

30:30 oh I'll never forget that, at the end of that time, the leg was saved. There were times when I thought I could have done better and at the end of it I might have done this or that, and that the outcome might have been better and that would be upsetting.

31:00 **Much different conditions than what you encountered in Korea?**

Oh yes, I mean Vietnam was hot, very hot and also, originally the field ambulance was tented but then fixed huts and so we were operating in enclosed huts.

Much better equipped?

31:30 Yes good surgical equipment and I mean that was really the Australian equivalent of the MASH. The Australian 1st Field Hospital

Were all the doctors operating in Vietnam part of the army structure?

Oh yes,

32:00 all of them, all volunteered, but all the specialists were reserve. All the medical officers in the battalions, they were either volunteers or had gone through under the army undergraduate scheme where their fees were all paid as a medical student on condition they then did 4 years of service. There were some of those

32:30 and some national service. But in the, and some of those were out in the field. But in the hospital all the specialists, all of them were reservists. We did have one surgeon who had been there in '66, '67, but he was the only qualified surgeon in the Australian Army.

Were the injuries different to what you were treating in Korea?

33:00 Yes most of the Korean, most Korean ones were small arms and some artillery, and a few bomb wounds. Whereas in Vietnam they were largely bomb and mine wounds, antipersonnel mines which made terrible injuries.

33:30 But the, you know, the staff, and we all helped each other and you went on with your work and I would allow a coffee break after every 7 operations.

Hard task master?

And we'd go outside,

34:00 and the hut and the meals would be brought down. So yeah, once you start having coffee breaks they start getting more frequent and longer so I said no, we won't have them.

So what was the drill when people were unloaded from helicopters?

Well they were unloaded and taken

34:30 into what is called the triage area were they were sorted into priority. The priority of immediate operation or urgent or some that could be delayed. And you'd set to work and you'd, I'd often have two casualties in the theatre at the same time. So we'd

35:00 anaesthetise one and I'd do the operation, then the orderlies would put the dressings on and he'd be allowed to wake up while the anaesthetist went to the other patient at the next table. And I'd start on him, but we could keep a watch on the first patient while he was recovering.

It sounds like you could have done with more surgeons.

Oh we did, when I came home I was

35:30 replaced by two surgeons. But they were all army reserve volunteers. There were civilian specialists who went up to look after civilian casualties. They had their own hospital at Bien Hoa, a few kilometres up the road. And they looked after all the civilians.

Whoever they may be?

Yes, anyone and

36:00 they were also volunteers from the hospitals all over Australia and they did a very good job.

Whereas in your position you were only treating service people?

Service people.

Did you find some of the work disturbing, given that the injuries were a result of mines?

Oh very disturbing, knowing that

36:30 loss of limb and permanent disability, and from then, prothesis and artificial limbs, were improving more and more. Well ultimately I had a young man that I looked after at the Modbury Hospital and

37:00 he lost his leg and I sat on the bed and talked to him about the future and what legs were like, could be made and he had his injury on the soccer field. And I said, "You'll get back to sport." Well he runs now in the Para Olympics, you may have seen the one legged runner with the spring heel on his artificial

37:30 leg.

What is his name?

Fuller, Neil Fuller, that's a big story.

A lot of big stories?

And he is a wonderful young man. And he can beat a whole lot of two legged runners.

You also mentioned the mental health of Vietnam veterans.

38:00 **While you were in Vietnam did you sense that the troops had a different attitude? Was it a very different war at a fundamental level?**

Well it was different. But I regret to say that I didn't recognise what difficulties they were working under.

38:30 I knew what things were like there and at home but I thought, well there will be an end to it and your term of service will be over and you'll come home. My attitude was well, you get back and you get on with life and work. You resume what you were doing before and if you do that, the bad feelings will go away.

39:00 And I made a mistake because from Vietnam the bad feelings didn't go away for them.

What made you realise you had made a mistake?

When I could see what was happening to them, that they weren't in fact getting back to their previous life. They were having troubles with their families and friends and work.

39:30 **When people came to you did you have much opportunity to deal with them when they weren't on the operating table?**

Oh before hand, only when they first came in, and that I'd try to encourage them and try to indicate to them that I was going to operate on them, and I was going to make them better.

40:00 And then afterwards, maybe they were on crutches and they had lost their leg and had other injuries. And I would again talk to them like I did in Korea. And talk to them about their future and what they

could do. Where they could go and what could happen to them and they'd get back to useful life.

Tape 7

00:38 **You were talking about the way the Vets were presenting and you didn't realise?**

I didn't realise that they were in great trouble. I had thought that if you gave it time and that

01:00 you gave it your efforts and work and play and return to your family and did those things, unpleasant feelings would pass away. But it didn't.

Is there anything that can be done for PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder]?

Well I'm a bit concerned about the term of PTSD,

01:30 that if you have an unpleasant experience you've got to get this syndrome. I think for the majority of people prevention from the outset. And a lot of it is self prevention, for the development of

02:00 the thoughts of anxiety and depression are overcome if you are supported by your friends and family who show some understanding of what you have been through and talk about it. And then as hard as, you can

02:30 get on with life and work and play and any sort of activity, physical or mental. You've got to become occupied because if you are not occupied then you sit and you start to have fears and you start to get anxious and you start to

03:00 relive the incident, whatever it was. And you become unhappy about it, and maybe there is anger as to why it happened - road accidents are the same.

So you think the inactivity of Vets and their inability to secure employment was factor?

Yes a big

03:30 big thing. And they had difficulty getting back into their sporting teams. Although Graham Corns did very well. He served in Vietnam and came back and soon got back into playing for Glenelg. And playing pretty well too.

04:00 And a lot of others, so that sport and work are a good means of preventing anxiety and depression. And I think its wrong to relive the experience over and over, which is advised by some counsellors.

04:30 **Why do you think a lot of them go to the bush?**

To get away from people they can't, they don't like the way they are treated. And particularly when they are not recognised, not acknowledged and even made to feel bad about going to the war. So they don't want if people are going to be unpleasant.

05:00 It's not that everyone does, but they've only got to meet the odd person who is unpleasant and they've got to get away from them. So they go to the bush and they get a Harley Davidson and join a motorcycle club. And they are not all bikies, some of the motorcycles clubs are very, very good in the way

05:30 they visit the children's hospital. There is a very strong group of ex Vietnam soldiers who've got a Harley Davidson club, and they visit the jails and help the prisoners and help them when they come out of jail. But they do, in a way, become loners and

06:00 one of the difficulties was it took us a while to realise. And even myself, as I've tried to indicate, I've thought in working with soldiers that I've understood their thoughts and their worries and done something about it. But I didn't initially, didn't pick the Vietnam Vets well enough.

06:30 And there were sections of the community that were, said, we've got to look after the Vietnam boat people because of all the terrible things you did to them when you were in Vietnam. We went there to help them, not harm them. And with refugees

07:00 I believe that they've got to all go through the proper processes of migration, because we just cannot take people from all over the world because they want to come here. There is just not enough water and

07:30 any migrant has to be able to contribute to the country. Mind you we did, in a way, think the same thing about the migration from Europe after World War II, and many of those have turned out to be wonderful citizens who have made marvellous contributions to Australia. But it's

08:00 not an easy situation.

Do you remember amongst the difficulties, ever enjoying yourself in Vietnam?

Oh yes, the physician who was in the team that I went up with

08:30 Tom Beare, who was a paediatrician, well qualified in tropical medicine. Now after I had finished off the morning's operation, at lunchtime instead of going to the mess and having lunch, some days you just worked through. Instead of going to the mess, Tom and I would go down to the local beach. And we'd run for a mile

09:00 then have a swim with the sea snakes and then go into what was called the Badcoe Club named after Badcoe VC [Victoria Cross] and have a cheese roll and a can of beer. Now that hour was something that I remember with great pleasure.

09:30 Other times at night, maybe 10 or 11 o'clock, and sit in the mess and listen to music. And they were, and have a talk with the medical officers. And they were happy times.

10:00 I only left the unit twice, once to go up to 3 Battalion, my old battalion in Korea, to address them on Kapyong Day and they turned on a very nice lunch in the field for me and, in the way in which I was accepted by the battalion,

10:30 really because they knew that I'd been the medical officer in Kapyong. And that was a very happy occasion. Oh, happiness in the form of fellowship, I suppose, that knowing some operations were more successful than I'd ever imagined were

11:00 going to be. Happiness with working with people with no bickering and arguing . And happiness in civilian life. I'd say there were times when I certainly enjoyed being in Vietnam, and eventually

11:30 coming home. And being met at the airport by my wonderful wife and the two boys that I'd left her with, one aged three and one a few months when I went off to Vietnam and she had to look after them

12:00 while I was away. That was a great homecoming. I'm very proud of how they have developed and achieved in life. I've been very, very fortunate in the family. Although again, I didn't realise what stresses that I'd put on them. Terrible time that I'd

12:30 really given to my wife without recognising what a hard time she was having. Particularly as I was having, establishing my surgical practice and working day and night and not seeing much and she'd have to bring up the boys and I'd come home and expect her to be there and I didn't realise what a hard time she was having. And I think

13:00 that a lot of men like myself are guilty of that. And recognition and acknowledgement, people don't look for thanks and praise abut they do expect acknowledgement and I think there were times when I failed in that. And I could do that better if I had the opportunity again.

13:30 **Would you have gone to Vietnam again?**

Oh yes, because it was a job that had to be done. And I'd had a complete general surgical training where I could operate on any part of the body. Which unfortunately young surgeons now can't because we can't

14:00 train them to do everything and it's too complicated and so it means that a lot of specialisation. the surgeons finish up they can only operate on one part. Whereas I was almost at the end of the line of general surgeons. Incidentally I mentioned about 4 who went to Japan with me,

14:30 all four also went to Vietnam. Graham Wilson who is a general surgeon and Brian Cornice who was a orthopaedic surgeon. Hugh Douglas had become a physician. So we all contributed again

15:00 if there is a need to do something then I will do it. I don't know that I regret doing anything in life. I perhaps spent more time playing cricket

15:30 than I should have but then, it's full on, you either play and go to practice or you don't play. Or the time I spent looking after injured cricketers, maybe I should have been at home looking after my family. Things like that that you can look back on but

16:00 I'm fortunate that I had the opportunity to see what Australian's from all walks of life and all sorts abilities, what they could rise to, tremendous heights of the achievements of the Australian soldier in Korea and Vietnam and how,

16:30 as I mentioned several times, how they helped each other and were always there in times of need. And not only under fire but afterwards. And back in civilian life so that, I'm proud and I feel very humble that I've had a chance to play a part in the

17:00 medical and surgical care of young Australians and I feel fortunate, that I've done so. And, I suppose, I've had wonderful support from the family where I have been able to do these things.

17:30 And I went off the Vietnam thinking that Margaret would cope with the house and two babies. I did keep in contact and I certainly did make sure that I wrote every night to keep in contact

18:00 and writing is a wonderful way. It's much better than the telephone, that is an impersonal communication.

Tactile?

I don't know whether it is the Australian way of life and the background that enables them to rise to the occasion no matter

18:30 what it is. They're and they've done it now, whether they be Anglo-Saxon or middle European or Asian or what. They all do, do their bit for their fellow Australians and their country.

19:00 The army has made it possible for me to do more in my civilian life than otherwise I would have.

You are obviously proud of and sing the praises of the Australian soldier.

19:30 **Have you been able to talk about these experiences with members of your family?**

Oh yes I do talk to them. I

20:00 don't talk to the boys a great deal about it because I feel that they would think now I haven't done that with my life, I haven't done things that you have. And so

20:30 they may feel well of me for what I have done, but it doesn't help them at all, and because they haven't had the opportunities. They have done it in many other ways in their own lives of helping people. And they have done it very well, I'm proud of them. Margaret, my wife's done a great deal, she's been a

21:00 wonderful worker for St Johns Ambulance, she is on the council and she's the Australian representative of the St. John Eye Hospital in Jerusalem, which is having a terrible time now because the Jews are making it very difficult for the Arabs to get access to the hospital. The fences they are building up and all the firing that makes it very hard for the

21:30 people on the West Bank and the Palestinians to reach the hospital. And that is why I'm losing sympathy with the Israelis. She's, Margaret's done a whole lot in fund raising for all sorts of charities.

22:00 She's become a tremendous gardener and she throws the garden open at times for fund raising. She'd be the best cook in the world. And the best wife and companion and so I am very, very fortunate that I'm now, no I look back and I know that I could have done a lot more

22:30 for her, than I did. If there are a few years left I will try to make up for them. She's done a lot for all her friends who have been sick. She was a radiographer in her own work.

23:00 Everyone has got a chance to do something. Not everyone grasps the, life is different, we've got to recognise the fact that things are not the same that they were

23:30 50 years ago or a generation ago or whatever, and that we have got to adapt to the changing way of society and the world, and realise there are many people in the world struggling for existence and struggling for satisfaction and

24:00 happiness in life. But a whole lot of simple things, a whole lot of simple enjoyments that one can have that are not always used. I think a lot of people can do a lot more to help themselves and help people around them.

24:30 But they need encouragement and recognition and it's very hard for them at work to see that they are struggling to get on and get promotion and do things, and then they see people at the top who are getting millions now and then the firm goes bust

25:00 and the bosses get off with all the money and there is nothing left for anyone. and I think that is very, very depressing. I don't know how these absolute rogues can put an honest head on the pillow at night knowing that how they diddled the firm and diddled society and got away with it.

25:30 And then run overseas.

Have you found that your medical training has given you distance and not become melancholy about the human condition?

26:00 Oh I'm sure. I've been very fortunate to have been a doctor. It has been of great help to me and maybe I have been of help to some people. It's enabled me to live a very satisfying life in which I have made certain accomplishments

26:30 and I would certainly do it all over again. There are some people who would say oh, I would never do medicine again it's a terrible life, and I'd never send my son to a medical school. Well people are different; there is a bumper sticker that says

27:00 'Be kind to your friendly lawyer; send your son to medical school'. That's not good because one of the problems with litigation and the cost of medicine, and the way in which doctors are apparently

overcharging,

27:30 is the cost of defending trivial charges. I was a doctor for 17 years and never ever did take out medical insurance. Certainly no one sues a doctor. Eventually I did and it cost 5 pounds. Today, as a surgeon

28:00 it's about 50 or 60,000 a year, premium. For obstetricians it even more and certainly a lot more in the eastern states. Now you got to see a lot of patients before you can even start to earn a penny and this is all because of, well there are some greedy patients,

28:30 if they are not greedy, their friends or relatives say, "Oh sue, he shouldn't have done that." And then around the corner are parasitic lawyers who feed off them. Judges who think they have got a bottomless pit of money they can hand out and a government that did nothing about it to stop it, and so the situation

29:00 really today is not good. And it's a situation that might be difficult to recover from. But you can only do, do your work in the best possible way and be careful all along looking after your patient and looking after the complications.

29:30 They're the things that are, not go for cover. Now I'm sure my army experiences helped me in my overall practice of medicine and I've benefited from it and am very grateful to everyone that I worked with in the army to make that possible for me. I'm

30:00 sure I'm a better person from my army service.

Is there anything in your army service that you have never told anybody?

30:30 Um there was once in Korea which, well after Kapyong and things had settled down and I didn't know how long I was going to be there, the war, we were advancing all the time

31:00 and so there weren't the dangers that there had been and I started to think of all the time that I was losing, that I should be getting on with my surgical studies. And that I'd rather, having done a fair bit, get home. And so

31:30 I wrote a letter to the director at medical services in Japan and said that I felt that I'd done enough and I really wanted to get home and get on with my civilian life, because I knew there were two or three medical officers in Japan who could replace me.

32:00 And I sent it off in the mail and I always regretted doing it because it showed a sign of weakness, that I would have left it to him to recognise that I had been there long enough. And there was someone to replace me and that he would make the decision instead of my asking for it.

32:30 That's something I've never told anyone, but everyone has failings and moments of weakness. No one is perfect.

That seems that came from common sense rather than cowardice.

33:00 **And you had recognised that you had fulfilled your duty?**

Oh yes, but in a way I was betraying the soldiers I was looking after. I had this appointment as medical officer to 3 battalions and they

33:30 needed me and I was helping them. If I asked to be relived of that position no matter whether I had done sufficient, or what I thought was a sufficient voluntary contribution, I would still, in a way, be letting them down. Now they didn't know and I guess

34:00 the ADMS [Assistant Director Medical Services] he probably tore the letter up, or I don't know what happened to it. But about a month or so later I was changed over. No in a way it is a matter of

34:30 letting down the people who needed you and letting yourself down when you should show greater strength and press on.

Would you judge it so harshly if it was somebody else?

No

35:00 I would have been happy if it had been one of my own students who was acting similarly in writing to me, I would have understood their feelings. It doesn't matter what they do, it's what you do that matters. You can't judge yourself really by what other

35:30 people do, you judge yourself by what you do yourself. You judge your own life, you can. But I've been able to, fortunately combining military life, civilian work, civilian surgical practice and a family and

36:00 50 years of cricket which has been an absolute joy, all over the world. I always take me boots with me. And made a lot of friends,

36:30 you make some wonderful friends in the army. And they stick together. Oh the experience has been worthwhile and

37:00 I don't have too many regrets. I've still got a lot of work to do, what will I do in my retirement? I'm going to write a book about my life's experiences, somewhat similar to

37:30 what we have we'd done today - my thoughts about society, what we are going to do with this world of ours. We've certainly got to be a lot more careful. But I have appreciated the opportunity of talking to you and I think you have both carried out the interview with great feeling and

38:00 I'd like to certainly congratulate both of you for the way in which you have done it. And particularly as you are having to do this with so many veterans, with so many different stories that many of them have not ever given before. And it

38:30 must at times, be rather a harrowing experience for you and I wish you well in your further interviews.

Thank you, Donald.

INTERVIEW ENDS