Australians at War Film Archive

Ronald Perkins (Ron) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 1st December 2003

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1271

Tape 1

00:31 **So we'll start off with the overview that we talked about, so tell me a bit about where you were born and where you grew up?**

OK I was born in Lewisham, south-east London, on 24th April 1927. And I lived in London for most of my youth. My father was a clerk with the Board of Trade and he

01:00 was an ex-infantryman from World War I. My mother was Irish. But the family broke up early. Perhaps I shouldn't go into all that much detail at this stage.

We can come right back.

Yes, we can come back later. I got evacuated when the Blitz started, evacuated to the country, but I went back to London in the mid-'40s

01:30 and I became a cinema projectionist, and I did that until I joined the Royal Marines when I was 18, in December 1945, because I was only 12 when the war started so I couldn't join up any earlier than that. And I did service with the Royal Marines for about two.five years, after which I had a spell in the Parachute Regiment. And I came across to Australia in September 1949.

02:00 I landed in Fremantle on the 19th September, and I joined the Australian Army on the 21st. Stayed a few weeks in Perth, until they had a reasonable number of recruits to go across to the south, and I went across then to join 2RAR, 2nd Battalion Royal Australian Regiment. Actually, first off they put me in Recruit Company, until they found out that I could do most of the things

02:30 better than the instructors, because I had by that time three.five years experience in weapons training, etc. So they put me into Support Company mortar platoon and in May 1950, I was promoted to corporal and then they sent me to do a mortar course, to learn all the technicalities of a mortar course, including fire control, and that's when, whilst I was on the course the Korean War broke out on

03:00 25th June 1950. They called for volunteers to serve in Korea, and I was one of the first to volunteer for that, and I was sent across to Japan to join 3RAR, and got there in early August 1950. We had quick training there, not very much because we went on a training exercise up the

03:30 Japanese old war jungle training centre at Haramura for an exercise but a typhoon struck and our training only lasted for about two days. We got washed out. Marched back to Kure, about close to 30 miles, and within a few days we were on a ship across to Korea. When I joined, 3RAR, I joined the newly forming mortar platoon, most of us we didn't even know

04:00 each other. And, when we got to Korea, I was a section 2IC [Second in Command], which meant I was in charge of two mortars. When the mortars went into action on the mortar line, I looked after those, but as soon as we started getting casualties, they took two of our experienced sergeants away and for the next nine months I became an acting sergeant fire controller for the fringe mortar platoon. During my stay in

04:30 Korea, we did a lot of actions, advancing into North Korea, fighting initially the North Koreans, and we got up as far as a place called Chongju, which is about 60 kilometres from the North Korean-Manchurian border, and we were there when the Chinese entered the war. The American division that had gone past us

05:00 some eight-nine hours earlier, came back and passed us going the other way and didn't say a thing to us, and we were left for about eight-nine hours before someone said "You are the most northern unit in the United Nations Forces." And so we withdrew back to Pakchon, where we had an action a few days earlier and had our first big contact with the Chinese.

05:30 We suffered more casualties there than we should have done because we had a new CO taken over, because our first commanding officer, Charlie Green had been killed. And this other chap he took over,

and on the second action at Pakchon, they tell me he was drunk, he didn't know what he was doing, and he ordered the rifle companies to withdraw whilst they were in action,

06:00 and that's a thing you never ever do, and as a result we suffered more casualties than we should have done. After Pakchon we withdrew a total of some, I think it was close to 200 miles, and normally the Americans only withdraw two or three miles and set up a different defence position, but they just panicked and ran, a lot of them. It was rather frightening.

06:30 But we, that is the 27th Commonwealth Brigade, which consisted of 3rd Battalion RAR, 1st Battalion of the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders, 1st Battalion Middlesex Regiment, both those were under strength. We performed the rearguard for them, fighting our way back slowly, doing a controlled withdrawal. After a few months the United Nations started to advance and we were in quite a few actions

07:00 advancing back up into the North. We didn't cross the border, but clearing the roads up to the north, and we cleared hills around a place called Kapyong, and after having captured the hills there we had a South Korean division take over from us and we withdrew and went into Corps Reserve. Now, Corps Reserve, you might as well be on holiday, you are

07:30 30 miles behind the lines. We were in reserve for about five days I think when we were placed on one hour's notice to move, and they had only issued that order about 20 minutes or so when they said, "Move." The only briefing we got was that we were going to occupy some defence positions, it was only as a precautionary measure, and we would only be there overnight and we would be back in reserve the following morning. As a

08:00 result we were issued a hot meal that evening, and that was the last meal we had until roughly mid-day on the 25th, a couple of days later. It was within a few hours that we were fighting Chinamen. So yes, we had quite a few actions in my 13 months. I think 3RAR without a doubt suffered the greatest number of

08:30 casualties, because three Battalion stayed there the whole of the war. We rotated out, when you had finished your period of time you went out and somebody else came in to replace you. And out of the 339 that were killed or died over there, 306 were army, and of those 234 were three Battalion. We underwent a lot of fighting, so.

Can you take me through briefly

09:00 **what you did when you came back from Korea?**

Well, when I came back from Korea I was posted down to Victoria, where I had been in the first place before the war, and I was a sergeant by that time, and I went on leave, and when they – when I finished my leave, I had a choice of postings, I said I was going to National Service Battalion anyway,

09:30 so I opted to come up to Queensland. I thought, "I have never been, I know what the weather was like down in Victoria." So I came up here and served in National Service at Wacol for a couple of years starting off as an instructor. I ended up as a platoon commander there, acting lieutenant, until such time as I was posted up to

10:00 Rockhampton when I was promoted. I stayed up there for a couple of years and then got posted to the Royal Military College as an instructor, where I was an instructor for four years in weapon training, map reading, tactics. Then the South Vietnam War broke out and they called for volunteers to form the Australian Training Team [AATTV – Australian Army Training Team Vietnam], and I volunteered for that. So I

10:30 trained for that and was amongst the first group of advisers to go across to South Vietnam. So I did a year there, partly training South Vietnamese civil guards, and part of the time I served with the American Special Forces A Team, what they called an A Team, where we were in one of the old French forts where we had Montagnards as our main

11:00 force, fighting force, who were just mercenaries. Most of them were pretty good. We did a few operations along and inside the demilitarised zone. Had a few casualties there too amongst the Montagnards, but on my stay with the Montagnards I managed to get myself amoebic dysentery so I came home a week earlier than I should have done.

11:30 Came back to Australia, hospital. I was posted a warrant officer class one by then, got posted as RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] over to Royal Western Australian Regiment, but only stayed in that for about six or seven weeks, and they posted me to the Officers Training Course, what we colloquially call the "knife and fork," just a officer qualifying course, that went for six weeks. I

12:00 graduated as a lieutenant there and went back to West Australia as a reconnaissance officer with the 1st SAS [Special Air Service] company. While there I was able to go across to the Philippines on exercise and while there I got a few jumps in, helicopter jumps and C130s. When I came back from there, I had several years as a staff captain and various postings in West Australia.

12:30 I was staff captain with the … Brigade and the went as the officer commanding 34 Cadet Battalion as a captain, then went up to North Queensland again as a staff captain and eventually I was promoted to

major and back to my old Battalion two RAR as a company commander, where I remained for three years as a CC until I retired in April 1974. And then I became a

13:00 civilian. Hard to take after roughly 29 years altogether in the military, but it was an interesting experience. I enjoyed it, I wouldn't have swapped anything else.

Might take you right back to the beginning and talk more about your childhood in London?

Right. OK

13:30 I had problems from the start inasmuch as when I was born I had what was called talipes, which is when the feet are pointing in, so I had an operation to straighten my legs when I was a baby and I wore splints for several years. And I suppose they must have considered I was a little bit anaemic, so I went to this special school.

14:00 Originally I went to Lewisham Public School which was a mixed school, but then they sent me to this open air school, open air huts, so you get fresh air and that sort of thing, and I was with them for quite a while. I don't know whether I mentioned, but my family broke up when I was about nine years old, my mother decided she had enough and left.

14:30 There had always been, to my mind, mild arguments going on, but nothing in front of us kids. That was hectic and she decided she would leave, and so my father tried to bring us up and tried to get a full time job as a clerk in the Board of Trade and bring up a kid of eight or nine. My elder brother was about 11, he could manage that, but not me, so I ended up with the Dr Barnardo's Home, so

15:00 I spent some time with the Dr Barnardo's Home on the Isle of Wight for a couple of years before I came back to London.

What was your reaction when your parents split up?

Well, I think they hadn't been getting on for several years, always bits of arguments, mainly on a Sunday, and

15:30 my mother eventually met another man and she went off with him.

And as an eight year-old, what do you remember thinking about that?

Well, I was quite distraught of course, and whenever I walked along with my father in Lewisham in the markets I would look and "That's Mum over there," but of course it wasn't. I was looking. But I didn't see my mother again until I got out of the Royal Marines in 1947. So

16:00 I didn't see her for quite a long while.

And what was the Dr Barnardo's Home like?

Well, it was refreshing, it was quite strict, quite strict, there was a fair amount of discipline. You weren't allowed to run away and be normal boys all that much. Every Saturday morning,

16:30 every child in there had to have a special cup of tea, which was a senna tea, to make sure your bowels, and you got that that day whether you liked it or not. So I have never drunk senna tea since.

And what do you remember the other boys being like?

Well, a lot of them were quite friendly, they were all about my age, some a little bit older. But all without parents or

17:00 parents who had broken up. Of course there was no social security as such in England, so you couldn't sort of draw pension or anything to look after a kid, so that's why my father had to put me in that, because he still had to earn enough money to keep my other brother alive. So it wasn't easy in those days.

How often did you get to see your father and your brother?

They would come down perhaps once

17:30 in six months, that sort of thing. Of course I saw much more of them once I came back to London again, because by that time my brother had joined the Royal Marines, my father was instructing Air Corps Training Cadets, and then of course we had the tail end of the Blitz and the flying bombs and the rockets, so it kept us quite busy. We got

18:00 bombed out three times, lucky no-one got injured.

Just on the Dr Barnardo's Home, how was it structured in terms of who looked after you and who…?

Well, they had staff there, teachers, they had teachers and carers and a matron. I was still only nine or 10 so my memory is fairly vague on that, but I do know that they used to look after you pretty well, make sure you didn't get sick.

18:30 But I do also remember that the first meal I ever had there, it was cheese on toast and I hate cheese, and I have never eaten cheese since. But you had to try and eat it and that was it. I didn't, I just left it.

I guess, who provided you with a parental figure or role in that time?

Mainly the teachers. That's all, about all you had.

19:00 My father did what he could when I saw him, but that wasn't often enough. Of course my brother had joined the Royal Marines so I didn't see too much of him, because he was nearly three years older than me, so I didn't see a great deal of him until he got out of the Marines, which was just about the time I went in.

How long did you spent in Dr Barnardo's House?

I must have been there for about

19:30 two years, I suppose, about two years before I came back and went across to Brentnall Open Air School, because once again it was a school that would take care of you, and by that time I was about 11 so my father was able to handle me a little bit better then. So I could go to school, catch a bus over, school was about eight or nine miles away, catch a bus over there and come back late in the afternoon, by which time he was knocking off from his job in the Board of Trade, so I used to go

20:00 off all right there.

And what was the Open Air School like?

Very interesting. The sheds were of course open air, the shutters on the side would lift up to let fresh air in. The teaching was all right, not too bad, and the teachers were quite kind and caring. It was run by an ex-World War I army captain,

20:30 headmaster. Pretty strict disciplinarian, not afraid to introduce you to the cane. I received that several times. All on the hand. three on one, three on the other.

What sort of thing would you have to do?

Well, in my case it was just talking in school when I shouldn't have been, the first time. Boys will be boys and

21:00 so....

And did this open air school improve your health or...?

Well, it must have done, because I started off a sort of puny kid, partly crippled; I was eventually able to perform in the SAS. The hills on Korea were not exactly little foothills either, so it sort of turned me around health-wise.

21:30 So pretty good, really.

And sort of living in London or England before the Second World War, do you have any memories of the way the Depression was affecting...?

Not a great deal, because I was born, as I say, in 1927, when the Depression over there must have been getting close to the end by then. Can't remember any of that, no.

How about,

22:00 **you mentioned your father was involved in the First World War, what sort of things would he tell you about the war?**

Wouldn't. Never spoke about it. Never spoke to me at all. I know he was a sergeant in the infantry, and that's about all I do know.

Given that you had an obvious interest in the military since you and your brother had joined up, would you try and ask him?

Not really, I don't know

22:30 why, but we never did. He never volunteered anything. Whether my brother questioned him I don't know. I guess we were trying to get on with our own lives, young fellows getting up to teenage, I guess my thoughts were more on myself and, you know, see if I can find myself a girlfriend, I suppose, even in those days.

23:00 **I guess in a more general sense, do you have any memories about how World War I was remembered or talked about or...?**

No, it was only really remembered on 11th November, of course, Remembrance Day, but other than that.... And of course I hadn't even heard of Anzac Day in those days. No, my memory is fairly vague on that.

What are your

23:30 **memories on the declaration of war of World War II?**

Well, I remember hearing that on the radio on 3rd September 1939, yes, I remember that.

What do you remember hearing?

Well, I was still going to school in London at that time, Brentnall Open Air School, so yeah, we weren't really apprehensive. It went through a rather quiet period

24:00 initially, I mean the British military forces went across and fought in France and that, and there was evacuation from Dunkirk which we would read about and saw occasionally in the newsreel, of course there was no television in those days, and you heard about it on the radio. But other than that very little. It wasn't until they started the Battle of Britain that you felt yourself was in the war when they were over, bombing,

24:30 strafing.

I guess I am so used to hearing of people who have memories of hearing Menzies announce that Australia was at war on the radio. Who announced it in Britain, what do you remember hearing?

From memory I think it was Attlee, I am not sure. No, Chamberlain announced it because he was still the Prime Minister at the time, it wasn't until later that

25:00 Churchill came and took over the control of government. Chamberlain proved so ineffective he was soon shunted aside. Yes, I do remember of course, the rationing, everything was rationed, food, clothing, everything. You had to have food coupons, clothing coupons, everything.

And what are your memories of seeing the

25:30 **troops heading off or in the cities?**

Well, you would see them, not so much in Lewisham, because Lewisham is a suburb away from the main stations, it's a.... But you would read about it and see a few troops, but not all that many. Most of the movement was done by night, anyway.

Do you remember your father's reaction?

26:00 Not really, because he was too old by that time to go to war, having served in the First World War, so he was too old to join any of the regular forces. So he joined the Air Training Corps and became a warrant officer instructor with them.

And you mentioned the Battle of Britain was the first time it really started to impact on you,

26:30 **can you tell me about your personal experiences?**

Well, yes, at that stage we were evacuated down to a place called Crawleydown in Surrey, not that far from Gatwick Airport.

How were you evacuated?

By train, we went down by train. The whole school were evacuated, we were broken up, we went to a school in a little place called Crawley. You would hear the planes

27:00 coming over and you would see the fighting in the air with the Spitfires and Hurricanes attacking the Messerschmitts and Dorniers and what have you. And one was shot down not far from us. You know, there was quite a bit of activity going on.

And how much warning did they give you before they evacuated you?

I think it would have been probably a couple of days

27:30 saying you were going and told you where to assemble, so you took your suitcase of clothing and your gas mask, and that was it. Everyone got issued with a gas mask.

And what was the gas mask like?

Uncomfortable to wear.

And how did you carry it?

In a little cardboard box, a little cardboard box slung over your shoulder. Whether it would have been of any use if there had been any gas I don't know, but everyone had one.

What

28:00 **do you remember feeling about being evacuated from your city with a gas mask?**

Well, I guess it was all rather exciting to a young kid, I suppose I was about 11 or 12 then, a great

adventure going off like that. But it wasn't all that crash hot when you got down there. I ended up with a family with two young boys and, boys being boys,

28:30 I used to play with them; and if they got themselves dirty, I got the blame, I pushed them in the mud or something like that. The kids never took the blames themselves. I got transferred to another childless group then, and that was much better.

How long did you spend in Crawley?

I was down there, I suppose, in the

29:00 area about two.five or three years. When I was 14 I left school and got a job, or they found me a job on a big country estate there. The fellow who owned it owned some big company and I became initially a gardener, which I hated, and he also had a handyman who had a workshop there and I gravitated to that, and

29:30 I hung around so much they said, "OK, you may as well be his offsider." So I did that, climbing up huge ladders and cleaning the gutters, repairing the gutters, helping with this that and another, helping thaw out the cattle troughs in the winter.

Did you ever get to go back to London in this time?

Not while I was down there, no.

How about did you see your father or your brother?

Well, my brother came, my father came, he came

30:00 down a couple of times while I was down there. But apart from that I didn't really see them a lot until I went back when I left that job. I went back to London and so I got a job there in the cinema as a trainee projectionist.

How do you think, in terms of being at the Dr Barnardo's Home and then during those first years of war with other families, what sort of things

30:30 **did this build in you in terms of independence or I guess a sense of…?**

Well, I guess it taught you that you had to look after yourself. Because you know, you couldn't rely too much on anybody else, because the families had their own children, they looked after their own children. Really they were getting money for billeting the evacuees, and there wasn't a great deal of rapport

31:00 between the families and yourself. Well, OK, you got three meals a day and a bed, but not a great deal of friendship. That's the way it goes.

And how did you feel about how the war was going at this time?

Well, it all looked pretty bleak, I mean after the withdrawal from Dunkirk. Well, there was the Battle

31:30 of Britain with the fighter planes, and then of course there was the Blitz on London with the bombing night and day, so things weren't looking all that crash hot. As I say, I was lucky that I found a job that I really, really liked, with the projectionist. I was lucky that after I left a small theatre I got a job with Gaumont British who owned the biggest theatre in

32:00 Europe. Seats three,500 people, huge place. I started off as 8th projectionist there and over the course of a few years I worked my way up to second projectionist. I was pretty experienced, because I had gone to a special school with Gaumont and learned on different types of machines, and it was like the pilots do with their tests on a thing there, you know, they switch something off, the projection light would go off or the sound

32:30 would go off and you had to tell them exactly what was wrong and rectify it. As a result I ended up as what they called "relief projectionist" and I used to travel round about seven or eight small theatres in south-east London relieving people, because projectionists were in short supply, relieving people so they could have a day off, otherwise it was a seven day week. As it was, we used to work six days a week.

How did you come by this job?

Well, my father got me a job

33:00 initially at over at Deptford I think it was, a little rear projection place, they are pretty few and far in between. And it was quite interesting there, there was only the main projectionist and myself, and he was a bit of a lackadaisical sort of a fellow, very nice fellow, he used to smoke his pipe, and films were scarce so I had a great experience there.

33:30 We had a – I will never forget this, we had a film come in called The Adventures of Laughing Jack and it was six reels of a serial. And you know the serial, at the end of a serial, at the beginning of the next serial, it shows you what happened in the first one, and it goes through, and I had to try and splice all these up to make one continuous story out of it. It was horrible. I mean, I had no experience of it, I just

went through and said, “That must be it,” cut it and joined it,

34:00 so I don’t think the patrons would have made too much sense out of it. Anyway, it was quite amusing.

And what other sorts of films do you remember showing at some of the bigger theatres?

Oh, I did show that one with Clark Gable, Gone with the Wind was one that I showed; quite a few war stories, because they used to churn out quite a

34:30 few war stories, ones covering the air force or the army, got quite a few of those. A lot of the old films, because there were just no new films being produced. So it was quite interesting.

And what was, for example, that big, huge theatre in Lewisham that you were talking about, what was it like in terms of –

35:00 **was it grand?**

Which one was this?

The one that could seat 3000 people.

3,500. Yeah. Oh, it was a huge thing, virtually three stories, and before the war, before the Second World War, they used to show a second feature film and then they would have a stage show and an organ recital, and then they would show the second film. Sometimes the stage show was a circus act.

35:30 So it was a huge theatre.

And during the war what was the program they would show?

Just mainly old films, but all the staff there, we used to be air raid watchers, spotters, so when they were sending over the flying bombs and things like that we used to have to go up on the roof when the things and spot them, and there was a bell on the roof down to a shop down below, a large shop

36:00 that sold meats and vegetables, to give them a warning so they could get people out, or flat on the ground before they hit. And I remember there was a bomb coming straight to us, and I pressed the button, and luckily – the engine, the engines were designed to cut out, and it nosedived down and struck Lewisham market about another 200 metres up. So a couple of us went up to try and help with the casualties. There were about 52 killed, several

36:30 hundred wounded, and I was helping people to try and get stretchers there. And there were people with no arms, no legs, no head.

What does it sound like when one of those flying bombs…?

They called those a buzz bomb. It was a primitive form of a jet, it was a pulse jet and you could hear them coming, and when it cut out that’s when you had to start worrying because it would either go straight down or

37:00 to one side or another. And so yeah, it could get pretty hairy. I think the V2 rockets were worse because you didn’t know where they were going. You just heard them breaking the sound barrier and the next thing there was an explosion.

What’s it like living in a city that’s constantly under threat?

Not happy, but you know actually the morale was really pretty good.

37:30 I’d say we got bombed out three times, lost all our furniture, most of our possessions, I had my original plaster leg pieces that I had saved, and I was going to save those forever, they – when the first house we lost they went.

What happened to the first house?

Well, there was a bomb landed nearby, and all the windows and doors were blown out and a minor fire inside, and

38:00 we weren’t in there at the time, luckily.

So what did you do after that?

We moved to another place then. You just had to try and get a flat somewhere. We moved to a small flat in Lewisham High Street and we were there nine or 10 months or more, and then a bomb struck a small cinema about 100 metres away, and that blew all the doors and windows

38:30 out of that place too, so we had to leave there. So I went over then to my uncle’s who lived about another couple of miles away – well, he was still away with the army in Italy; my aunt put me up then. Yeah. So it was a bit hairy at times, but if you heard them in the street just going down, you dived into the nearest gutter, if you weren’t ear an air raid shelter or anything like that.

What were the

39:00 **air raid shelters like?**

Well, they had, most of them were surface air raid shelters, virtually built out of breeze blocks or something like that, they wouldn't stand a direct hit but at least they would stop shrapnel and stuff like that. And a lot of people lived in those. My father did for a while, he lived in there. He had a girlfriend by that time, he lived in there with his girlfriend while I went around to the uncle's house.

Were you allowed to live in an

39:30 **air raid shelter?**

They might frown on it but no-one ever went round to check. And he wasn't the only one, because there were quite a few other people. There just wasn't the accommodation. And of course a lot of the underground stations were used as an air raid shelter, especially during the Blitz. Night time, people would leave their houses and go down to the underground shelters in the subways. And that was about all you could do

40:07 End of tape

Tape 2

00:35 **You were just telling us about a friend you made, you said you jointed the Cadets, tell us about that?**

You are talking about the friend of mine that got killed?

Yeah, but tell us about the Cadets first.

Joined the School Cadets, in fact it was the Kings Royal Rifle Cadets. So we got our initial

01:00 infantry training with the Cadets, I mean as much as the Cadets do, you don't do all that much with the Cadets. You do go – well, normally you would do weapons training, but ammunition was that scarce that we didn't get round to that. As I say, my friend got bombed out, and he and his mother and his younger sister moved across to these other school friends of mine, and they had only been there a couple of months

01:30 when they were bombed and all killed. The whole lot of them. So very sad. Still got a photograph of my friend, still keep that for memory. He had been a friend of mine the whole time, the whole time I was at school, virtually.

Does that have any effect on your motivations to join up?

I was anxious to join, but I had seen so many people killed

02:00 I thought it was time I got stuck into it. But I was so young at the start of the war it was, the war in Europe was over by the time I was able to join up. As soon as I was 18 I volunteered for the Royal Marines, because my brother had seen service with the Royal Marines, and it wasn't until December 1945 that I got called up to the Royal Marines and did my training with them. After I did that training I went and trained on naval gunnery

02:30 and got posted to a light cruiser, HMS Diadem. It had six-inch guns on that. A light cruiser in those days is equivalent to a destroyer these days. Pretty small ships. And I was part of the Royal Marine detachment on board, and we were on the King and Queen and

03:00 Princess' tour of South Africa in 1947, but I never got to South Africa. Halfway across there I got appendicitis and I got offloaded at Sierra Leone into the military hospital there, and I had my operation there. Unfortunate part about that, when I woke up all my clothing had been stolen with the exception of my shoes and Marines cap, blue with the red

03:30 band around it. It was quite funny when I walked around wearing my cap. I happened to go near the guard room one day, and they turned the guard out for me, they thought I was a brigadier or something, so they turned the whole guard out. I only stayed over there for five or six weeks recovering and then got shipped back to England, back into the Marines.

What was Sierra Leone like at the time?

Very hot, very humid. I didn't see

04:00 a great deal of the place apart from the military hospital, of course. The orderlies were all black Africans and they were very keen on acquiring clothing of any sort and they just – while I was laying unconscious they flogged the lot, apart from my shoes because they were too big for them, and my hat which was probably too big for them too, and too conspicuous.

What did you wear?

They issued me a West

04:30 African shirt which is totally different to ours, West African trousers. When I got back to Plymouth and I marched into the barracks wearing that, they nearly had a fit, totally wrong dress of course for that time of the year.

What did they say to you?

I had a letter, I made sure I had a letter explaining the clothing had been stolen, so that was OK I didn't get my gear back from the Diadem until it came back about five or six months later. But yeah, it was interesting, I really enjoyed it.

05:00 **Tell us about the training at Cornwall?**

Aaaah, a place called Dorlwich, it was a butt end of the universe just about, old Nissen huts, freezing cold in winter, but I did my initial training there,

05:30 that's when they discovered I had a flair for rifle shooting. I virtually became sniper there, because those days I was a crack shot. Yeah, so that was interesting. I guess Marine training is a little bit different from a lot of the others, but I really enjoyed naval gunnery, I

06:00 am a bit mechanically-inclined, I liked machinery. I can still remember the six-inch naval gun drill right from back in those days, back 50 years ago.

What does that involve,

Mmmm.

what is the drill?

There are different types of drill, but the misfire drill is a "Stand still, misfire," and they had what was called an interceptor switch, "interceptor switch open, stand clear of the breach, out tube," because it had a tube there, fired by electricity,

06:30 and the tube would come out and they had to inspect it and see if it had been struck or not, then they would place another one back in and carry on. If they put me in front of a six-inch gun I could still do most of the laying and trailing and the gun-loading drills.

What kind of things would you learn in the Marine training?

07:00 Well all the foot drill is different, there is no such thing as.... You see the Guards lifting their legs right up and smash their feet down a lot; you don't do that in the Marines because you are on board ship a lot. So it is just bringing the legs up together without stamping. But mainly you learn such things as a lot of field craft and that was one thing that struck me, the drills for contact, drills like they still use in the Australian Army today.

07:30 Used to be taught as drill. And it would be a drill thing, so you would go through this drill for contact drill, and it was quite interesting. Anyway that's 55-odd years or more. A long time.

Is there anything particularly unique about learning training in the Royal Marines?

No, I guess it learns you discipline.

08:00 You learn that someone – if someone gave you an order you carried it out. That was it. It taught you discipline, the British armed forces did. Bit strange perhaps, when I came to Australia, but nevertheless it was character-forming, I think.

When you went to South Africa, did you meet any of the Royal party

08:30 **or....?**

Before I had my appendicitis we had the King, Queen and the two Princesses come on board the Diadem, they did an inspection and I was part of the Royal Guard for that. I mean, I don't know whether you can imagine it, but it was a fairly small ship. The laundry facilities are pretty crappy. Everybody used a bunk, your hammock had to get hung up and it had to be relashed every morning.

09:00 It was in the middle of the Bay of Biscay and the ship was rocking and rolling and trying to stand guard on that and present arms, and you start slithering down the deck a little bit, you had to shuffle a little bit and try and hold your position. That was quite amusing. The Princesses were quite lively, wanting to look around – of course, they were only quite young in those days. It was quite amusing, yeah.

09:30 **Tell us about what you did when you came home from this trip?**

When I came home from that trip, I went to a shore establishment then, HMAS Jervis, and I was mainly on the guards there, they had guards on the gates, and mainly doing three shifts of guards by day and by night. Just preventing unauthorised access

10:00 to a naval establishment. It was used for training naval cadets, so it was quite interesting. Actually one

of the naval stewards there took up boxing and became the world champion, not the world champion, but a British champion, Randolph Turban. So it was quite interesting. But when I finished up my

10:30 time there, I went across to the Parachute Regiment for about 18 months. I did my initial parachute training with them. Actually, the Royal Air Force does the training, the parachute training, all the parachute jump instructors were air force people. But that was a six weeks course. You do a couple of jumps out of balloons, you do night jumps and that sort of thing.

11:00 No, it was interesting. And then kit bag jumps, which was interesting, a great big kit bag full of gear on you. No, very interesting. I have still got a few photographs of that.

Tell us about your first jump.

Well, that was quite hair-raising because on a balloon, of course, a balloon is stationary, tethered, and you jump out and you go straight down and a parachute doesn't fully deploy until you are about 200 ft down,

11:30 so that's a 200 ft jump almost before your parachute opens. So that was a bit hair-raising, the first one. So you do the first two of those, one jump what they call a "door jump," jumping out of the side of a basket, and the other was a "floor jump," when they open up a hatch and you jump out of the hatch. And then we graduated on to the DC3's, the old Dakotas, and I did all my training in England, the rest of my training in

12:00 England, and the rest of my training on Dakotas. Wasn't until I came across to Australia that I was able to go onto the Hercules. While I was in the Philippines and in South Vietnam I was able to get a few helicopter jumps, which is much like a balloon jump because you go straight down of course before your 'chute opens. So it was good, jumping.

Why had you joined this regiment?

12:30 I thought the idea of jumping was great. Change from naval gunnery. No, it was good, we enjoyed it. My brother and I both joined. My brother and I both came out to Australia and joined and both went over to Korea together, although he was in a different company to me.

How do they train you up for this first jump, what do they say to you?

Oh, you do a lot of basic training on the ground. You know, ground

13:00 training, practising to roll, right front, left front, right rear, left rear, backward roll and a forward roll. So you have got to be able to do all those. Then you graduate to jumping out of a mock fuselage from about three or four feet out, and then you go up on a gantry where you jump from about 40 or 50 ft up, but you are on a

13:30 line then onto just like a slide and you just slide down there and do your roll down there when you do your slide. You did a couple of weeks of that before you got onto doing your balloon jumps and things.

Do you remember that first one, the feeling you had as you stepped out?

Yeah, a bit nervous. Bit worrying, you thought, you know, you go down so far and

14:00 when you jump out your head is up, you have got to look at the rigging lines as they come out of your 'chute, and you watch for them and you think, "My God, am I going to get to the end of it?" Then the chute comes out, and beautiful.

Why did you and your brother decide to come to Australia?

The main reason then there was still rationing, there was still food rationing,

14:30 there was still clothing rationing. We discussed it and thought the prospect of staying in England wasn't too bright. My father had died by then, my mother was still living with a man she had been living with for quite a few years, OK, they put up with us, I suppose. Job prospects weren't all that bright

15:00 either, so we decided we would come across to Australia. We came across with the specific intention of joining the army, but I must say the immigration authorities didn't realise that because they had us slotted down to go to the Lorne brown coalfields in Victoria and work there. But when we got to Fremantle, the ship was staying there for about six hours so

15:30 we went into town and had a couple of beers and met up with a World War I engineer, who said, "If you are going to join the army, why don't you join it here, rather than wait until you get to Victoria?" So we said, "That sounds like a good idea, but we'll have to think about it," so we decided to go back to the ship and get our gear off and leave it on the wharf and go back into town and see what we thought about it. Of course, when we got back the ship had gone, so we stayed with this warrant officer there for

16:00 that day and night and joined the Australian Army next day.

Did you ever get your gear back?

Oh yeah, it was still waiting on the wharf for us. It was amazing, these days the wharfies would have it – they would rat the lot. But it was still sitting on the wharf waiting for us. So we were quite happy to get there.

Why had you chosen Australia?

Well we had a look around, and the choices,

16:30 as far as we were concerned, were Australia or Canada. And we thought we might go across, because we were trained parachutists, we might perhaps be able to get the fire fighting in Canada, and be fire fighting parachuting. Then we tossed up and we decided, "No, we'll go across to the Australian Army," because we knew the Australian Army at that stage was starting to think about training parachutists and we thought we might be able to get into that; but we

17:00 weren't able to because they had all their instructors teed up by that time. So we ended up down with the 2nd Battalion, and before we knew it the next few months the war had broken out.

So tell us about that initial time in Fremantle, though, what did they say when you went to sign up?

Well the recruiting office was in at the barracks there in Western Australia, they

17:30 were glad to see us, because the Australian Army was very, very under strength in those days, they were only just forming the Australian Regular Army, and they were short of recruits so they welcomed us with open arms. So we stayed in there for a few days until they got enough over, about eight-12 people, and shipped us over to the southern states on the tea and sugar train,

18:00 and that took six days to get across the Nullarbor Plain. They called it the "tea and sugar" because every little fettler's station, which was every few miles along the track, they would stop and offload stores to the fettlers, you know, newspapers, food and drink. And when it came time to have a meal, they had a wooden carriage, the cookhouse, they would pull up, the cooks would get out, start the fire, cook the meal, serve it

18:30 up, clean the dishes and throw it all in, and off we would go. So it took six days to get across the Nullarbor Plain. Amazing! You would pull up, out in the middle of nowhere, no-one around, and all of a sudden there would be piles of Aborigines all round you trying to grab hold of newspapers and hands out for money. Yeah.

What did you think of this, having come straight from England?

It was an eye-opener, an eye-opener. I had

19:00 never seen such a big place as Australia. I mean, especially coming across that Nullarbor Plain, miles and miles of nothing but flat earth, and very, very few bushes, and straight track, the track didn't, not a bend in the track for a couple of hundred miles. The longest straight stretch of railway in the world. Very interesting.

What were you feeling about being there?

Oh, we were just looking forward

19:30 to getting into the Australian Army. I mean we were in, but interested in getting into a regular unit. But this was part of the problem, the two battalions that were in Australia, one Battalion up at Kapooka, and two Battalion at Puckapunyal, were both under strength, they were a peacetime establishment, roughly 200 soldiers in each. 3RAR was in Japan preparing to come home, and there were only about

20:00 300 to 400 at the most there. And of course when they made up their mind they were going to send an infantry battalion across, there were less than 1000 trained infantrymen in Australia, and even if every one of those had volunteered for service, and they didn't all volunteer, there wasn't enough to form one battalion, let alone provide reinforcements. So they then called for people who had seen active service in World War II into what they called

20:30 K-Force, and they opened the recruiting and within a matter of a day or so the whole thing was filled up. So we had a lot of them come to Puckapunyal. Lot of old diggers there, some of them had been corporals and sergeants in World War II and there they were, private soldiers. So no, it was great, getting across to 3RAR, when they were trying to form another two support companies, rifle companies.

21:00 Support company contained your specialists, like machine gunners, Vickers machine gunners, three-inch; Assault Pioneer platoon, who did laying mines, demolition and things like that; and the anti-tank platoon. So it was great, the battalion was trying to form, and I would say at least 50%

21:30 knew people in the battalion coming from Victoria and NSW, so we hardly knew anybody. And, it was amazing that, when we got across to Korea, Charlie Green, who was our new CO [Commanding Officer] appointed to take us across to Korea, had us shaken down and into a good fighting force within a matter of few short weeks in Korea.

Tell us

22:00 **what happened with your position. You came over thinking maybe a parachutist?**

Yeah, OK, we hoped to do that and we got an interview with the fellow who was running that, but he didn't want a bar of us at that stage because he had all his instructors teed up. And he wasn't interested in qualified parachutists; he was more interested in getting people who wanted to do parachuting and hadn't done it before and train them, because they were just

22:30 forming up the Air Force Training School, because they had army trainees who had gone across to the UK and learnt to become PJI's, Parachute Jumping Instructors. We weren't parachute jumping instructors so we weren't of any use to them.

But doesn't it seem strange that they would rather someone without training?

Well, yes, but going through the parachute training school would have been a waste of time

23:00 for us because we had done it. What they were interested in was having a full course of non-parachutists so they could teach them, and it was going to be several months before they were qualified and came out, and then put the next group through, so they weren't interested in us.

So where did you and your brother go?

Well, we both went to 2RAR, 2nd Battalion, down in Puckapunyal. We were

23:30 both in A Company initially. A Company at that time had close to100 soldiers, they only had one rifle company where they normally have four. And it was after that. And there was a lot of mucking around going on in the army at that time. There wasn't much in the way of equipment, there wasn't a great deal of instructing going on anywhere. And

24:00 consequently they had us going round picking up rocks, whitewashing rocks. And my brother and I got a bit cheesed with that and demanded to see the commanding officer. We said. "We didn't come 12,000 miles to whitewash rocks. We came to do some soldiering," and he agreed with us and put my brother straight to a rifle company and I went to support company and within a few months I was a corporal. And,

24:30 as I say, they sent me then on the long three-inch mortar course to learn the thing right from the grass roots, including to fire control. And whilst I was doing that the Korean War broke out.

And what exactly would you learn at this mortar course?

Well, everybody who went on the mortar course had done basic mortar handling, so they didn't have to teach you how to put the mortar together,

25:00 assemble, that sort of thing. It was mainly tactics, how the stores packed in the vehicle, moved by vehicle, unpack it when you come into action, setting up a mortar line, checking the alignment of each mortar, and of course you graduated to the actual fire control. We each started off controlling two mortars, just a section of mortars, and you would end up controlling a platoon of six mortars, so

25:30 it gave you the grounding of the thing, and I really learnt the job in Korea.

Was there anything in the training which was relevant to your Korean geography at the time at all?

No, no. At that stage the course wasn't even concerned with the Korea, the Korean War hadn't even started. It was just a basic weapon training course where you learned thoroughly how to use

26:00 the machines, how to put them together, how to fire them, how to move tactically and that sort of stuff. So there was no preparation for going to Korea. The only preparation we had for Korea was that we went across wearing our service dress, which was the Australian Army winter dress. It was a sort of frock coat, I will show you photographs later. And it was a light serge

26:30 thing designed for the Australian winters. It was about as helpful as a hip pocket on a singlet when you got to Korea, when you got to the winter. But that was our wear for the Korean winter. And our sleeping gear for the Korean winter was one army blanket, and a little what they called a cape half-shelter, which was a thing you wrapped round yourself when it rained, and at night you could get with another fellow and

27:00 the two of you would join them together with string and make a low opening tent. And against the Korean winter that was a wonderful protection, too.

How come the Australian Army didn't seem to know about it?

Well, of course at the end of World War II they demobilised thousands of soldiers and all the equipment went into storage, and there was no thought of another war. I mean, after all, we had just

27:30 finished a big war, and Australia, like England, was unprepared for it. So were the Americans unprepared for it. That was proved by the standard of troops they sent into Korea initially; they weren't trained for it and they weren't equipped for it.

How come the army didn't know things like the temperature?

Well, they knew it was cold, but I mean

28:00 Australia had no such thing as warm winter gear. By that stage we hadn't even adopted the British Army battle dress, which is warmer than the SD's, the service dress, so we just went across with that. World War I, World War II rifles, all the mortars and machine guns, as a matter of fact all the mortars we had to change when we got over there, on the sights we had to change range

28:30 scale, because the range scales on them were the wartime ones, which only had a short range. Ammunition and propellants had been improved and the range had been increased, so they had to get new range scales for them, so we had to change all the range scales over as soon as we got to Japan and get ready for the war. And we had the mortar platoon; the machine gun platoon each had eight or nine what they called a

29:00 Bren gun carrier, which is a lightly-tracked, lightly-armoured vehicle. And it was – we had to a put a mortar and the ammunition for that mortar and a crew of four, three mortarmen and section 2IC, in that one vehicle together with the driver, and you were really crowded.

What could you compare that vehicle to?

Well, there's no comparison. I tell you, they were so

29:30 useless that when the winter really struck and the temperature dropped to 20 below zero, all the vehicles had to be started up every hour to stop the radiator blocks and the engine from freezing up, and the carriers had to be moved and the trucks moved backwards and forwards to stop the wheels from freezing to the ground. What they didn't realise was that the steering column, which was a three, four inch steering column, crystallised

30:00 with the cold, and when we got them moving and the poor old driver went to turn the thing, locker track to turn, the steering snapped, so the first week in winter we lost dozens of them where the steering column snapped. So they changed us over to Land Rovers and trailers, what they were Jeeps and trailers. Much better.

Tell us about getting your orders to go to Korea, how did you feel

30:30 **about this?**

Well, they called for volunteers as soon as the Korean War was declared, even before Australian troops had been committed. I mean, the air force and navy had been committed, but the army wasn't. The army called for volunteers. But I suppose if you take it that there are 900, 950 trained infantryman, that's all

31:00 officers, NCOs [non-commissioned officers] and soldiers, so even if everyone had volunteered there wouldn't have been enough to fill a battalion. And, as it was, out of those 950 soldiers, a lot of them were too old to go back to warfare or too unfit, or did not volunteer; there were quite a few that didn't volunteer.

31:30 But, as far as my brother and I were concerned, and as far as everyone else was concerned, you are in the army, you are in for a job, and if they call for volunteers that was it. Didn't give it a second thought.

So you volunteered. So tell us why you volunteered?

Well, I was a trained infantryman, and I knew there was going to be a shortage of infantryman,

32:00 and that was what we had been trained for. I mean, I had had several years' training in the Marines parachute regiment, I was probably better trained than most of the Australians, so naturally we volunteered.

Was there any fear of facing death?

When you are in the infantry, you know somebody's going to die, but you know it's not going to be you. Be someone else.

32:30 So you just don't think about it. Probably if you thought about it too much you wouldn't go. But no, you just don't think about it. You know there are going to be casualties; it's going to be someone else, not you.

So tell us about the feeling you had when you were leaving for Korea.

Well, it was great, we were….

33:00 Volunteers were coming from Victoria and NSW and Qld, they had a lot of K-Force people, they had thousands. Not all were selected to go initially, a lot of them were still undergoing training, but we were among the first group of regular army and K-Force people to go across. And we went across by Qantas, we flew with Qantas to Darwin,

33:30 refuelled, to Manila, refuelled, and then across to Korea. And we – not Korea, into Japan. And we joined the battalion, 3RAR, which had been in the process of returning all their stores and vehicles, preparing to return to Australia, and they brought them all out again and more and had to form another couple of rifle companies and support company, so it was hectic in those first couple of weeks there.

34:00 Apart from getting kitted out again and trying to find out who's who and what's what, I mean the mortar platoon that had been formed there, there were half a dozen of us who knew each other in the whole of the mortar platoon, which is close to 40 people. It was pretty hectic. And the only time we did get out on training, as I say, we went up to

34:30 Haramura and did a couple of days' training there and then the typhoon struck and everybody got soaked, and then General Robertson, who was the commander-in-chief in Japan, decided to withdraw the battalion and they sent a convoy of trucks up, and when they arrived the CO just turned them round, "Send them back," and said, "My soldiers will march back." And it wasn't the most popular decision he made, I can tell you, at that stage.

35:00 It was about a 30-mile march back to Hiro, but it did us the world of good. It really toughened you up a bit.

Why did he decide to do that?

Well, he realised that the battalion had not had time to really get to know each other, they hadn't had time to train, and he thought it a damned good opportunity to toughen them up. Because he knew

35:30 it wasn't going to be easy in Korea. And I mean the K-Force people had just come straight off the street, they had done very limited training; and the people from the regular army, from the 1RAR and 2RAR, they hadn't done a lot of training because in 1949/50, there just wasn't the equipment or the training going on. So he thought he would toughen them up and he did.

36:00 **Was he risking something – was the typhoon still…?**

By the time we left the area the typhoon was virtually over; it was still raining quite heavily but the strong winds had died away, so not it was just an uncomfortable, long march back. But you dried out after five or six hours and the march had dried out, and that wasn't so bad. But no, it toughened you up, and by God you needed that when you got to Korea.

36:30 **What about risks of pneumonia …?**

Oh no, most of us were fit young blokes, most of us. I mean those days you could do it and shrug it off, but I wouldn't care to do it now, I would probably go down with pneumonia.

The ex-World War II blokes, describe some of them for us.

I mean initially that wasn't so bad for them; what was hard for them was

37:00 the hard work that came in for those, especially those who were late 30s, pushing 40, a lot of them found out it was the winter that found them out, because with the wind roaring down from Manchuria and icy cold, I would hate to think what the wind chill factor was, but the temperature was about 27 below zero. Snowing, blowing a

37:30 gale, and the clothing we had then, it just went right through you like a dose of salts. So if they had any aches and pains it found them out. I mean, I get aches and pains these days, and my bones, it just found them out, and frostbite, you couldn't touch any metal with bare hands, so we had to ditch our knives, forks and spoons and use the American

38:00 plastic knives, forks and spoons that came with their ration packs. Because if you stuck a fork to your lips or tongue, it would stick and you would tear the skin off when you moved it. It was cold. And your weapons would freeze up. They even tried using 100% anti-freeze in the radiators of the trucks and that froze up. On the weapons we used to use what they called oil low-cold test, it was

38:30 supposed to be suitable for Antarctic conditions. The oil used to freeze up on the weapons. So you had to sleep with your weapons in your blankets.

What were some of the older blokes from World War II doing joining up, do you think?

Well, I guess a lot of them, if they had been fighting as they had in the Middle East and the Far East, it's hard to come back and suddenly

39:00 you get switched off like that. So they were so glad, and a lot of them were in dead-end jobs, I guess, and they were so glad to get back to the comradeship you get in the army and the thought of seeing more action, I guess. Bit like cigarette smoking, a bit of a habit.

Tape 3

00:35 **So tell me about that.**

Well, we embarked on a ship from Japan on a US Liberty Ship called the Aiken Victory and the battalion got on there, and it was roughly an eight or nine hour journey to Pusan at that stage. South Korea only held a small portion of

01:00 the area around the Port of Pusan; the South Koreans and what was left of their army and Americans and the two British battalions were also over there by that stage, too. And we disembarked at Pusan and they had a big army band and dignitaries to meet us. The thing you noticed immediately when you got up on deck of the ship was the smell, terrible stench, because they had

01:30 thousands and thousands, tens of thousands of refugees poured into Pusan, and it was probably four or five times its normal population there with no sewerage and no running water, and the streets, everything just became an open sewer, an open toilet, and the smell was terrible. But luckily we didn't stay in Pusan long, they shipped us out by truck very, very quickly.

What was that boat trip like from Japan to

02:00 **Pusan?**

Well, mostly it was by night, so everybody tried to get as much sleep as we could. I think we had one meal on the ship that they prepared; from memory I think it was corned beef hash, I still remember that, it wasn't a particularly good meal but it was a meal. Very, very crowded, it was only an old Liberty ship and it had a whole battalion on, so people are virtually hanging out of every nook and cranny. So we had to

02:30 grab whatever space you could and try and get that.

And how would you describe the atmosphere among the battalion on that trip?

On that time, they were very happy, anxious to get to Korea because the war was not going well and so we wanted to try and get there, and so when we got there we joined up with the two British battalions that were there, both of those, the 1st Argyle and Sutherland

03:00 Highlanders and the 1st Battalion Middlesex. They were both grossly under strength, they had both been snatched from doing garrison duties in Hong Kong and just shipped across to give some British representation as an infantry force, whilst they recruited and trained a whole infantry brigade of three infantry battalions in the UK [United Kingdom] and ship them across. That would take

03:30 anything up to eight-nine weeks before that could occur. They had called up a lot of the reserves who had experience, of course. So for the time being we had the two under-strength British battalions and three Battalion, and formed – what was at the time 27th British Infantry Brigade became 27th British Commonwealth Infantry Brigade. And shortly after we got there we went

04:00 on exercises, clearing out any pockets of resistance of guerillas left behind from the retreating North Korean army. Because at that stage the Americans had landed at Inchon and captured the port of Inchon and captured Seoul, recaptured Seoul, so the North Korean army was in full retreat. But they did leave pockets behind to delay the armies so a couple of weeks we spent

04:30 engaging those, locating ammunition dumps and things like that. And that gave us our initial experience of Korea.

And how did you – can you sort of walk me through a typical action when you were clearing out those little pockets of resistance?

Well, they were pretty brief, I didn't have a great deal to do with that because, being in the mortar platoon, we were there to provide them with

05:00 mortar support. The rifle companies and the mortar platoons were getting that experience, but it was like this, walking tactically through the thing in sections all spread out, not bunched like you see the Americans on the TV [television] movies. And they would run up to someone and someone would fire on them, so they would go in and try and kill them or wound them or capture them. But that was very

05:30 minor, just for a couple of weeks, it was only later, within a couple of weeks, when we found we were in the thick of it.

And where were you based during those first few weeks?

Well, it wasn't a base, we were just living – we weren't living in buildings, we were just living out in the open around an area we initially called the Plum Pudding Hills. Why they got that name I don't know, but that's what they called them. But that was the area where we were trying to clear out the guerrillas and things like that. That only took a couple of

06:00 weeks, and then the brigade got moved by truck and train up to Seoul, and it was around about that time they made the decision to move into North Korea. MacArthur, he decided he would reunite the whole country under the South Koreans, and we started and we found that the 27th Commonwealth Brigade became the spearhead for this particular branch of the

06:30 8th Army heading into the North. Initially, as we moved up to the North Korean capital of Pyongyang, we got to a place with a brief little bit of fighting called Suwon. And at Suwon there was a major road junction – when I say major road junction, they were all dirt roads, but roads ran

07:00 into Suwon from north, south, east and west. And the North Koreans were flowing into Suwon from the east and the west and from the south, and this was getting on to night, and they were getting mixed up with us, and they thought we were Russians. They thought the Russian army had come to rescue them. They were dissuaded it wasn't, there were a few brief firefights. We were fairly fortunate,

07:30 the battalion 2IC had an interpreter with him and they had a loudspeaker, and they used the loudspeaker to address the North Koreans who were gathered in our immediate area and told them they were surrounded, and if they didn't lay down their arms within two minutes we would start firing on them. And they laid down their arms, we quickly surrounded them, put vehicles with headlights on and stood guard over them all night. In the morning,

08:00 when they counted them, we had captured 1,982 North Koreans, the largest group ever captured by any of the United Nations forces.

And how many of you were there?

About 800 of us. Well, in actual fact, round then there was a little over 200, because the rest of the battalion were all spread out occupying defensive positions. So that was our first action, and bloodless.

And what would you say – I mean

08:30 **how did the North Koreans behave?**

Well, they were – of course you have to appreciate that the North Koreans were demoralised, they had almost thrown the South Koreans out of Korea; next thing they are retreating. There were no supplies reaching them, no ammunition, no food, so a lot of them were starving, they hadn't eaten for days. And when they had this force allegedly surrounding them,

09:00 "Oh, my God, we're gone," so they surrendered, we were lucky. So it was only shortly after that that we first struck our first major – semi-major, minor really – action. But the Americans had dropped a force of paratroopers way behind the lines, 187 Regimental Airborne team, a regimental combat team was equivalent to the

09:30 British Australian Brigade, that was three infantry battalions. Three battalions of paratroopers dropped at a place called Pakchon and then they were too late to do what they were supposed to do, which was stop the North Korean army retreat till the rest of them caught up, found there was none and starting moving south. But unfortunately they ran into a North Korean regiment, three battalions that were dug in, and they had quite a severe fight,

10:00 they got broken up, the Americans, and didn't know where they were. And so the United Nations decided they had to rescue them, and the only troops that were anywhere near were 3rd Battalion, so we got the task of rescuing them.

How were you told this news?

Well, we were told that the Americans had dropped, they were in that area and it was our job to go forth and rescue them.

And what was your reaction to that?

Well, it was our first chance of action.

10:30 What happened was that it was a place called Yongju where the action took place, it was one of our rifle companies, C Company, that actually performed the action. They went into this area, this apple orchard, and they were fortunate that the North Koreans were just forming up to put in an attack on one of the battalions of the

11:00 Americans that were there, and we caught them in infilade, in other words we caught them in flank and the firefight broke out and we killed 150-odd North Koreans and captured 250 for eight wounded.

Can you take me through what your role in this was?

Mine was, by that time I had become a fire controller, an MFC [Mortar Fire Controller] attached to C Company, I was with company headquarters,

11:30 my job was to provide mortar fire. But, because they didn't know the location of the Americans, we couldn't use artillery fire or mortar fire, so I just tagged along with them. But that's the unfortunate part, the Americans couldn't tell us where they were, because the maps we had there were Japanese maps, Japanese Imperial Survey of 1927, and they are awful maps, they were totally inaccurate. But anyway, we couldn't

12:00 use our mortars or our artillery so we just had to use our rifles and machine guns.

So can you walk me through from the beginning, from your point of view, what happened?

Well, OK When the battalion got orders to go and help them, they were only very brief orders, because

12:30 speed is the essence of the thing. The CO just virtually designated who was going to be the leading company, where battalion headquarters would follow, where the other rifle companies would follow, etc. And it just happened that C Company had been the point company. And C Company was, as I say, going forward, moving tactically, starting moving through the apple orchard.

How did they move?

In open formation.

13:00 You don't bunch up like the Americans, you often see – of course, for the American films they have got to get it in so they are all in the camera, but they formed with advancing in line, extended line so that you are not presenting an easy target to people. So the company moved tactically, with a platoon would be leading that company, followed by the headquarters,

13:30 followed by the other two platoons. And that's what happened, they came in, found that there was enemy there and the company commander of C Company decided he would put in a very quick attack. The CO immediately issued his orders what he wanted done, and actually, while he was issuing his orders, his battalion headquarters group came under attack too. So they were under fire and Charlie Green just continued giving his orders under fire while his

14:00 headquarters people took care of the opposition.

Were you near him at the time?

I was a little bit further forward, I was with the C Company at the time. And I can't remember which actual number platoon goes through, but the CC designated the number of the lead point platoon. They located the stuff and as soon as they found it they started to put in an attack. So they put in a company attack with two platoons side-by-side and

14:30 one in reserve and, as I say, they killed over 150 and captured 250-something, total of eight people wounded in that, Australians.

What were your main memories of that?

Well, it was pretty quiet as far as I was concerned, because I was back with headquarters and we were not involved with the actual fighting. They had two platoons up there doing that, so we were just having a bit of a grandstand

15:00 view, watching it.

What did you see?

We couldn't actually fire ourselves because you had two platoons out in front of you, so you don't go shooting between shoulders and that sort of thing. So that was a fairly quiet one. Later on we got some of the heavier actions, when we got further north. All-in-all quiet.

Do you remember any of the people that were wounded?

No, because

15:30 as a mortar fire controller, I might be with C Company that day, the next day I possibly be with A Company, or D Company. I was chopped and changed; every time there was an action I went as a fire controller with a different rifle company.

So explain to me a bit more about the job of the mortar fire controller?

OK With the mortar fire controller, he is there to provide either offensive or defensive mortar fire from fringe mortars. Now, fringe mortar is a

16:00 smooth bore weapon, and they are not pinpoint accurate, so when you have to bring fire down you test and adjust each mortar individually. Now what happens, if you – let's say we are in a captured position and the company commander turns round to you and says, "I have had a look round," and says to you, "I want a defensive fire task there

16:30 in that re-entrant, over on the right there, that looks like the most likely point of attack, I will have that as an emergency fire control thing," so I would then, if time and ammunition permitted me, I would then fire my mortars out a little bit further than that, adjust the belts of fire so the mortar belts of fire are parallel and bring them back on to the target; and then I would go and switch to the next target.

Does that

17:00 **not let your enemy know where you have lined up your mortars to?**

If they are around, yes, it could. But you don't necessarily do that every time. In actual fact we did that

only twice when I was there. But normally you just get down and lay down fire and adjust the fire out so you don't hit your own troops and gradually bring it

17:30 back.

And what sort of equipment do you use to adjust, how are you…?

OK Well, I was what they called in those days a mobile fire control, which meant you have got a large radio on your back, and you have got two feet so you are mobile. Now they call them a mortar fire controller. So I had a radio set on my back and I had communication directly back to my mortar section

18:00 and to the mortar platoon headquarters, and they would relay fire orders to each of the three sections that are on the mortar line. So I would tell them the range, what I wanted, whether it was charge one or charge two in the mortar platoon – charge one was the shorter one, things up to about 750 yards, and charge two above that – so I tell them the charge, range and direction.

18:30 So I have got mortar one on the ground as a ranging mortar, then I could fire each of those two mortars to fire three rounds, so I could adjust the belts of fire to bring parallel with one another so I can adjust them up or down or closer or what have you. Then, when you have done that, that's it, until you start getting the angry stuff.

And how does the job change then?

19:00 **Well, the only thing changes then, instead of having section fire, which is each mortar firing three rounds, or mortar fire which both mortars fire having ranged, might have rapid mortar fire which fire as fast as they can put them down the barrel. But you would only do say five rounds of rapid fire, from each mortar, bring that down and see what effect that had on the thing, and if necessary adjust the fire again. If it is an attack coming**

19:30 **in and moving up a hill, then you have got to drop your range and move direction and try and bring it on them as they are going, moving.**

And in terms of a terrain like Korea, where it is so hilly, how do you see – how can you pinpoint where your mortars have…?

With difficulty, especially with the maps we had in the first place. I don't know whether you know much about maps, but there are two types of map: there is a contour map,

20:00 which you can look at and see the shape of the hills and the contours; or another map which is just lines on it, giving an indication of the height, and those are the ones we started off with. And they were inaccurate maps anyway, so they were very difficult to use, so you just put it out to – the thing is, you had to know where your mortar platoon was. You had a map where your own map reference was, hoping it was accurate on the map,

20:30 so you had to add the range from the mortar platoon to yourself, from yourself to the target, and that was the opening range plus 100 or so, that you make sure that you are not going to hit your own troops.

And how do you gauge where it has landed?

Well, with the mortar you have what is called a field of fire beaten zone. A mortar will not fire

21:00 every time in the same spot, it has a beaten zone which is long and narrow so you will have more rounds dropping short of the target and beyond the target than go left and right. So you just have to put your rounds where you can see them; if you can't see them you can hear them. And you have to judge for yourself, "Is it just beyond that hill, or is it somewhere in front that I can't see?" So you have to make the decision

21:30 then. But luckily we didn't have a great deal of problems with that. Thankfully the Americans quickly got some decent maps going, which made it much easier.

How far away are you from the firing line?

Oh, well, you could be 1000 yards, because the mortar those days had a range of 2800 metres or yards, so I had about 1800 yards to play with.

22:00 So, you know, if your mortar's about 1000 behind, you have got that in front to play with. It could be anywhere in relation to that. Not all rifle companies are going to be at the same range because you occupy different hills, because you are going to be at a different angle to the mortar platoon and a different range each company, and as they were normally only three companies actually on dominant features and with a fourth one in

22:30 reserve somewhere, you only have three mortar fire controllers, one from each of the sections.

And in terms of what must be really chaotic in the middle of a battle, how do you ensure that the rifle companies aren't getting too close to …?

You know, you are right with the company you are with. So, you know, you are with the company headquarters, you might even go forward to be with the leading platoon to make sure you know where

things are,

23:00 and sometimes that is necessary. And you just have to use your eyes and binoculars, because we have binoculars, try and make sure none of your friendly troops in the area are going to fire on you.

And how do you know, I guess – I don't know whether "dig in" is the right word, the mortar firing lines, how do they set up?

Well, when the mortar has a base plate, when they come in, the first thing a person

23:30 does a base plate flag goes down, metal stake with a numbered flag and he takes a compass bearing, the compass bearing is taken from the known position of the mortar platoon to the known position of the target. And they are laid on that target and all six mortars are laid out in a line and they are all go behind each one with a compass and make sure each one is pointing in the correct direction,

24:00 and you go from there.

And how far away from each other are they?

Oh, they could be five or 10 metres. You don't want your mortars too scattered because you need to be able to concentrate mortar fire, so they are only about five to 10 metres apart.

And what is the ideal sort of in terms of terrain, ideal place to put your mortar?

Well, you put your mortars down in a re-entrance, somewhere they are shielded from the enemy, in other words, a

24:30 little valley behind the hills, and your rifle company would be up on the hill and the mortar platoon would be down in the little valley. And the mortar is a high-angled weapon, so the bomb should clear the hills, no trouble.

And in terms of – I know a little bit about mortars but not enough – how many people does it take to fire them and how do they…?

There is a crew of three on each mortar, andn umber one is the layer, number two is the trainer, who moves it and slips the bomb

25:00 down the barrel, and the no. three who prepares the ammunition and passes it forward to the number two.

And then they communicate with you…?

All controlled by radio or by telephone. If you are in a static line then they lay a telephone line and you do it by telephone because that is more secure than the radio, of course, providing your line doesn't get cut, and they often do.

What happens then?

The linesmen go out and repair it.

Is there

25:30 **ever a situation where the three – the crews of people at the mortar firing lines make a decision themselves if they are cut off?**

Oh yeah, they did that at Kapyong. When I called for fire at Kapyong I couldn't get it because the mortar platoon was surrounded by Chinese, they were fighting for their own lives. So we had no mortar fire no artillery fire, not for the first 12-18 hours.

26:00 **So in that situation what do you do?**

Pray. We just stayed and fought. I became a rifleman in that particular battle and that was it.

I might get you to take me through chronologically the events leading up to that battle and your experiences?

OK Well, I think I told you earlier in

26:30 January, the United Nations forces which had withdrawn about 200 miles started moving forward. They had a change of command for the 8th Army because the commanding general for the 8th Army, Walker, had been killed in a vehicle accident and he was replaced by, anyway I forget his name. He was fairly aggressive, and he decided we would start clearing and capturing some of the

27:00 lost ground. So we started moving forward, the whole of the 8th Army across the front started moving forward, and we were tasked to clear up the Kapyong Valley. We had never been in the Kapyong Valley before that. 27 Brigade were clearing the lines, hills on either side and that was one of the things that 27 Brigade did that the Americans didn't do. The Americans would just clear up the roads. We had a company on each

27:30 side of the road clearing the hills, and we would clear the hills before we would move on the road.

And what sorts of things would you find in the hills?

Chinamen. Chinamen and North Koreans. They tried to stick to the hills, to defensive positions, slow you down, delay you. But we cleared the hills, that's why we never got trapped like the Americans did on a couple of occasions.

What's the Kapyong Valley

28:00 **like?**

Well the Valley itself is flat, but there are hills and mountains on either side of it. As I say, before Kapyong in mid-April, we were clearing the last of the features, three Battalion were clearing the last of our features, which were two hills codenamed "Sardine" and "Salmon." They are only names allotted to features.

Why were they Sardine and Salmon?

28:30 Well they just give it a name, there's no name anywhere on the map, it might have a hill number, but they just, for the purpose of the exercise, for the action, they say that's "Salmon" and that's "Sardine," and that's what they called them. Anyway, I was with A Company, who were clearing Sardine: we captured Sardine, Salmon, and the next day, no Sardine; and the next day C Company captured that

29:00 without any opposition; on the second day we had – actually, the British had tried to capture Sardine, put in three attacks and got beaten back each time.

What was on Sardine?

A lot of Chinamen.

And how were they…?

They were dug in.

And how do you capture an area that's dug in?

Well, the brigade commander told Middlesex to get out of it and let the Australians do it. And the battalion

29:30 just said to Benny O'Dowd, who was the CC [Company Commander] at that time, "Don't you dare come back without it." So we put in a couple of platoon attacks, and we didn't do what the British did and the Americans were supposed to do, and that's attack the hill front-on. We attacked it from the side and took them by surprise, and I think from memory we had about four killed and eight wounded capturing that.

And did you use mortar fire in …?

30:00 Yes, I was the mortar fire controller for that, for Sardine.

How would you set up, what kind of…?

Well, I was travelling with the Company HQ [headquarters] and the relieving platoon ran into a problem and the CC said to me, had a look through his glasses and he could see where the enemy was, and he said, "OK, I want mortar fire on that hill." So I ranged my mortars and starting firing and, surprising, while I was doing that I heard a voice say, "What's up, Corporal,

30:30 what's happening?" and I turned round and there was the CO, Lieutenant Colonel Charlie Green behind me. And I said, "Oh, we just ran into a problem, enemy are on that hill and I am just tackling that." "OK, good, carry on."

What were your impressions of Charlie Green?

Oh, marvellous fellow. A fellow that had come, he commanded, that was his third command, he commanded a CMF [Citizen's Military Force] battalion, he commanded a 2/11th Battalion in New Guinea and he was the youngest lieutenant colonel in the

31:00 World War II, youngest Australian lieutenant colonel, at age 24 when he was appointed Battalion Commander. He got the DSO [Distinguished Service Order] for his actions in New Guinea and he had a marvellous ability to read ground. He could look at ground for about a minute and he would have his plan up in his head. And that's what happened. And anyway we cleared that.

Just more questions about mortar fire.

31:30 **I am just interested if you have got the hill and you are firing onto the hill and the riflemen are going to try and take it, how do you communicate with them so they know?**

They let you know, they just say, "Stop firing," or "Lift the fire."

But what if they are really far away from you?

Well they – this is the great difference from the Chinese and the Americans and the Brits and other nations.

32:00 We had radio communication down to battalion level, to company level and to platoon level. So the platoon commander has a radio and the company commander can get on and tell them to stop. So they do that, no problem. But you can view, I mean you are viewing your fire all the time. I have my binoculars there, I could see what was happening, I could see where the troops were coming. And I just put a fairly

32:30 heavy barrage on in the last couple of minutes, and lift the fire and put it down behind the feature, so if they start running back, hopefully they would run into that. The Chinese, not our people.

You had me for a second there.

No, the Chinese. If the Chinese withdraw and they have got to withdraw over the back, so you hopefully get those. Anyway, we had to stop firing shortly after that, anyway.

33:00 **So you had taken Salmon and Sardine?**

By then, the 6th Republic of Korea, 6ROK Division, took over from us and relieved us on the hill. We weren't terribly impressed by them, because in the company who took over the area where A Company and I was, he immediately got out his guitar and started playing his guitar, this young South Korean

34:00 lieutenant. Anyway, we withdrew then and went back into Corps Reserve, which is about 30 miles back down the Valley. That was our first respite from the fighting for about seven weeks.

And how was the battalion's morale at the time?

Oh, morale was excellent, I was excellent. By that time everybody was fighting fit, we had had the worst of the winter; well, it was April so the winter was virtually over. And no, it was quite good. Back into Reserve, we cooked food for a change and an occasional bottle of beer. Couldn't have been better. Actually we were in the throes of organising Anzac Day celebrations with the Turks, because the Turks had just arrived in Korea, and we were going to have a bit of a beer fight with them, get-together. But that never came off.

Was there much

34:30 **discussion about the fact that it was going to be celebrated with the Turks?**

Not a great deal, but you know the officers had already discussed this thing and thought it would be a very good idea, and we knew it was going to be on but we didn't know exactly when and where. But anyway, it didn't eventuate, because on the 22nd of April the Chinese launched their "phased offensive," as they called it, and they attacked all across the

35:00 United Nations front with 27 infantry divisions.

At this stage how aware were you that the Chinese, you mentioned before that it was Chinese you were clearing out of the hills, but when was the awareness that Chinese…?

Right. Well, the Chinese came in late October, early November 1950. When the Chinese had said to the

35:30 United Nations, through the Indian Ambassador, said, "If the United Nations troops cross the border, we will not stand idly by," this is the Chinese, "we will not allow them to occupy North Korea," MacArthur ignored it. And the Chinese moved something like 20,000-odd Chinese,

36:00 moving them by night, across the bridges into North Korea, and hiding them by day, and the Americans hadn't even got a clue that they were in Korea. When they first came in and started fighting and attacked the Americans and South Koreans, who by that stage were leading the advance, there were a few Chinese who were captured, but MacArthur refused to believe that the Chinese were actually

36:30 in Korea. They just thought, "They must just be advisers with them, same as we have got advisers," because the Americans had an adviser, an officer with each of the infantry formations of the South Koreans. And they thought the Chinese weren't coming in and they ignored it. And the Chinese, of course, just attacked the men on mass. That's when their 2nd Division ran into great trouble.

What sort of news were you hearing about this sort of thing, about the Chinese being…?

37:00 **Well, there were rumours that came in but nothing much, at that stage, just sporadic clashes, that's all. But when the Americans started to advance into North Korea, getting up close, you know, 40 or 50 kilometres from the border, that's when the Chinese attacked. They attacked a couple of the South Korean divisions, which collapsed. They attacked the US 2nd Infantry Division,**

37:30 **which promptly turned tail and tried to get out, and they had this huge vehicle of convoy, troops, tanks trying to get out and they ran into a Chinese division that got in behind them and ambushed them. And they occupied the high ground, and all they did was knock out the first couple of vehicles and the last vehicles and then got stuck into the Chinese. And amazingly no NCOs, or officers,**

38:00 **rallied the troops and tried to take them up the hills. And as a result the 2nd Division suffered 40-60% casualties, mainly captures. There was something like about 6-7,000 captured, they just surrendered. So the 2nd Infantry Division did not get a good name with us, and that's of course when we came in, we were one of the**

38:30 **leading units up there. We were about 60 kilometres from the Chinese border then, at a place called Chongju.**

You were on corps leave?

No, this was before we went back in to Corps Reserve. This was when the first big bug-out started, when the Chinese first came in. The Americans, when the 2nd Division first collapsed, a couple of ROK divisions collapsed and they just bugged out.

39:00 And the Americans unfortunately have never been taught how to conduct a fighting withdrawal. Why I don't know, but they claim their army is too big to learn these "minor" tactics. Whereas we are taught that if you are withdrawing you have a rifle company stand in that position to fight, the other one moves back a mile or two, digs in, and another one moves back again, so you have still got that one up there, and another one moves back, goes back behind the other two

39:30 companies, two platoons, two companies, and you fight all the way back.

And how did the Americans do it?

They would run as quickly as they can. It's an amazing thing, in the advances we were never short of transport, they could always supply us transport for the advance. When the withdrawal started there were never trucks available. So we walked out most of the way.

Tape 4

00:36 **Take us through – Broken Bridge?**

Well, the Battle of Broken Bridge was our second major battle. After the Apple Orchard we advanced and

01:00 there was this bridge across the Taen Yong River, and it had a span that had been blown, presumably by the North Koreans and the span was down, and the battalion had advanced and Charlie Green had (UNCLEAR), he knew the North Koreans were dug in on the other side of the river and he knew he must go across and occupy the

01:30 ground there and deny its use to the enemy. So he initially put a rifle company, one Rifle Company, across the broken bridge, and they had to climb over the broken spans and make some makeshift ladders to get up on to the thing, because the river itself is too deep to cross itself, and there was no ford anywhere near where they could cross in the shallow area, so they had to cross at that point.

02:00 So they made these makeshift ladders and got over there. And they got over to the other side of the river, a few hundred metres, and occupied the lower ground there, and the North Koreans sent down a tank, an infantry force there. And in actual fact they were doing a reconnaissance, they hadn't really properly dug in at that stage. And I think, from memory, it was B Company and I wasn't with B Company at that time,

02:30 I think it was B Company that got across. Anyway, there was this motorcycle sidecar came down with the tanks and had a North Korean lieutenant colonel in the thing, and they pulled alongside, almost alongside the Australian troops. And a friend of mine who lives up a bit north, Jack Goldsmith, actually shot and killed the colonel. And the North Koreans retreated, and they actually captured a map. And

03:00 they were doing a reconnaissance to put a North Korean regiment in on that area to block us. So anyway, they put another company across, so they had two companies holding that, and an American – Chinese did send another tank down and the tank was roaming around there firing but not, they couldn't see, they were too close to B Company to actually spot them, but they were right amongst B Company.

03:30 So they had this tank, and it was dark by now, and they tried to use the new 3.5" rocket launchers, the bazookas that had been issued, and none of them could fire. Unfortunately – they didn't know that – but the Americans, when they had these things in storage, packed the mechanism up with what they called cosmoline, it's a thick grease, and the firing mechanism was covered with this thick grease so there was no electrical contact so they couldn't fire the darn things.

04:00 So the tanks got away at that stage. But the next day we consolidated in the position. We were shelled with the tanks and artillery and mortars, but not terribly accurate. But we did have casualties, and I am going from memory here, I think from the two companies I think we had a total of 12 killed and about

18-odd wounded, but killed quite a lot of North Koreans and Chinese.

04:30 **How had they been able to cross the bridge without being kind of ambushed or…?**

Well, the North Koreans and the Chinese didn't have anyone close to the bridge. They were only firing from a range of 400 or 500 meters. And, surprisingly, they are not all that good shots. OK, we suffered about eight killed and wounded, but it would have been a hell of a lot more had they been really good rifle shots.

05:00 **And what about you, where were you seeing, where were you positioned?**

I was with another company, I was with Reserve Company at that stage so I wasn't involved that much in the Battle of Broken Bridge. I was involved later. After the Battle of Broken Bridge, we moved – I am just trying to think, I think I was with C Company again then. When we had the first battle at Pakchon, that was only a fairly minor

05:30 skirmish, we only had a few casualties, I think, about four killed and a couple wounded, cleared the town of Pakchon and pushed on. And then we went on and advanced as far as a place called Chongju, which is a fairly largish town, still only mud huts and a few brick places, of course, but the roads were the same, just dirt roads, and that was as far north as we got. We sort of

06:00 consolidated there and dug in as a defensive position while the US 24th Infantry Division went on and continued the advance towards the Yalu River, which was the border between North Korea and Manchuria. They took about six-eight hours to go through us and pass us. And hours later they came through and passed us and it was all quiet, and

06:30 we were still sitting there waiting, and apparently the Battalion HQ got a 'phone or radio message saying what on earth were we doing there, we were the furthest north of any of the United Nations forces. People forgot to tell us that we were supposed to withdraw. So we conducted a fighting withdrawal, back into a place called Pakchon, which we had captured before, and the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders were committed to clear

07:00 the hills on the left of the road as you are going back, and the right as you are coming up, which the Chinese had occupied. And they cleared the first line of hills, and the Chinese counter-attacked and threw them off and they got pinned down on the hills, and 3RAR was asked to go and help them. So we went in, with a total of three rifle companies, across the river, and threw the Chinese back

07:30 without a terrible amount of fighting at that time, by that time it was getting dark, dug in as best we could on the hills, and the Chinese counter-attacked that night. And that was when our new CO got everything wrong and ordered the withdrawal. In actual fact, the brigade commander – when the battalion commander found his headquarters was being mortared, he asked for approval from

08:00 Brigade to move his HQ, and apparently the brigade commander told him, "Yes you can move your Battalion HQ, but the rifle companies must remain where they are." After he had moved his Battalion HQ, he then ordered the rifle companies to withdraw. He didn't tell brigade commander he was going to do this, he just ordered them, and unfortunately he ordered it at the time when the Chinese were counter-attacking." So unfortunately

08:30 Pakchon proved an expensive operation for us, something like 16 killed and 50 or 60 wounded, all because the battalion commander ordered the withdrawal while the fighting was going on. Mostly it was one company, A Company, that got the casualties.

Why did he do this?

Well, he was inexperienced as a battalion commander. He had commanded a rifle company

09:00 in New Guinea during World War II, but only held it for a couple of weeks and was removed because he wasn't satisfactory as a company commander. He was then a staff officer for the remainder of World War II. When peace was declared he was appointed battalion commander of three RAR and he had never ever had experience of commanding a battalion in action. When Australian troops were committed to Korea,

09:30 Charlie Green was appointed the battalion commander and he was stood down. The current commander, I won't mention his name, but he was stood down as the battalion commander and appointed as a liaison officer in Korea with the Americans. After Charlie Green was killed up at Chongju, then the commander-general of the Australians, General Robertson,

10:00 appointed this colonel who had been commanding back as the commander. Normally it would be the battalion 2IC that takes over. But he appointed this fellow back in charge of the battalion, and he stuffed up. He ordered them to withdraw under fire, which you never do.

Why not?

You don't withdraw if you have got Chinese up to your front trench and you are almost hand-to-hand fighting, you don't withdraw. Actually there were three companies out there.

10:30 The company commander of A Company had been wounded, and a newly-arrived lieutenant had to take over as company commander; when the battalion commander told him to move back, he did. He thought well, he was the battalion commander, after all. The other two company commanders up there suddenly had trouble with their radio communication and couldn't hear anything coming from HQ, so they stayed put. But,

11:00 as I say, we had a lot more casualties than we would have had.

How does a man like this get through the cracks, get to command?

Time. He had been a major in New Guinea, he became a lieutenant colonel, staff officer, in New Guinea. They appointed him to the battalion as battalion commander but he had no experience, and they weren't expecting a

11:30 war, so he was there when they decided to commit the Australian troops to Korea. They looked round in the Australian forces and they only had three people who had experience at battalion command in action. One of them was Charlie Green, one was Frank Hassett and I can't remember the name of the other one now, and the other two, their commanding generals refused to release them unless there was a satisfactory

12:00 replacement. Charlie Green had been put in to attend the staff college, he was on the staff college as a student so he was available and, as it turned out, he was the best choice for it at that stage.

And so tell us also, on the way up, pushing through towards the Yalu River, what had you seen of North Korean kind of life?

Well, the peasants were

12:30 hungry, starving. You would be surprised the number of North Koreans that became refugees and fled from the North into the South, because the North is a totalitarian Communist state, as it was then, and the only people to get well fed were the armed forces and the politicians. The rest take pot luck. But I will say this: the North Korean soldiers

13:00 weren't all that crash hot, but when they did stand they would stand and fight and they would die. But they were bloody cruel, too, they were torturing any bloody prisoners they caught, torture and kill them. Chinese of course were very experienced, having gone through the civil war in China for several years. They were good fighters, well trained, but, as I say, their great downfall was they didn't have

13:30 communication, which was one of the reasons we got saved at Kapyong. Anyway, the Chinese, when they came in, of course they certainly pushed the United Nations back a couple of miles. And it was only when we started to advance again that we started to coming up against the Chinese in bulk nearly every time.

What was it like, after these kind of

14:00 **victories and pushing forward, to …?**

Well, it was interesting, actually. We, the 27th British Commonwealth Brigade, took I think it was six to seven days to clear the road between the South Korean border and outside Pyongyang. And it was just outside of Pyongyang, a few miles short, that the 27th Brigade got shunted off up a side road so the Americans – 1st Calvary Division, I think it was

14:30 at that time, when we were under the command of – the 1st Cavalry Division could go through and recapture Seoul, the South Korean capital, because they had all their cameras there. But, unfortunately for them – you know they got there first that time, they didn't get there first in Pyongyang, the South Koreans got first into that. But anyway, that's what happened to us, we got shunted to one side after six days of fighting, and the Americans captured it without a shot being fired,

15:00 virtually.

How did you feel about that?

Pissed off. Especially when you have taken casualties and cleared the road fighting for six days, and then get shunted off a side road so other people could take the glory. But anyway, that's war.

What about also what you said before, about the Americans going past you and not telling you?

Yeah, that was amazing. We would have thought,

15:30 anyway someone would have thought, lean out of the truck and say, "Hey, don't look too far behind us." I think we were fairly fortunate, at that stage, although we had been left up there; the Chinese were completely committed to foot, they had no transport to move their troops, they had to go by foot. There was so much area, so many areas to occupy, they were occupying areas and they didn't come down onto us, luckily. As it was,

16:00 when they did come down they came round behind us. By the time we started withdrawing back to

Pakchon they were in behind us by then, but after the Battle at Pakchon we cleared the road and cleared the roadblocks and were able to withdraw.

Tell us about the withdrawal. I mean, what tactics did you use?

We always conducted a fighting withdrawal, so once we had thrown the Chinese off the hill and recaptured it we repulsed a couple of counter-attacks. And then the

16:30 Chinese once again just disappeared. So we started doing withdrawal, as we always did, a couple of fighting patrols – fighting withdrawals, you withdraw battalion by battalion, and company by company, and platoon by platoon. That's just organised, everything's controlled, and if there is no opposition it just goes like an exercise. You just move back, occupy your position, wait for the others to come back before you, hold the enemy up, and

17:00 then when they are ready and all settled in, they let you know. And you do a fighting withdrawal back to the next position.

So it's kind of first move back….?

Leapfrogging. You have got four rifle companies, so the first company will go back and it might go back, say, a couple of miles; and the next company will go back, and it might go back three miles beyond that; and the third company will go back two or three miles beyond them; and each of them would occupy the position while the remaining company holds the enemy at

17:30 bay. They hold the enemy at bay and hope they can break contact cleanly and move back behind the others. Doesn't always happen that way. At that time it happened that we were able to hold them at bay. They came back and they leapfrogged back, time and again, just moving down the road, not running; in actual fact we didn't have any transport, anyway, so we had to walk most of the way; and we just withdrew. And eventually

18:00 the Americans were able to find trucks and they unloaded some of our trucks which were carrying stores and unloaded stores off those, and used those as troop carriers to move us back. Once they made a big break, of course, it was fairly easy, no problem.

And tell us also, had you seen much of the North Korean defence and set-up when you pushed through to the North?

They were dug in a few places,

18:30 they just, like we do, dig a slit trench, a firing pit that you are able to fire from and get a certain amount of protection from incoming fire. But, you know, they didn't have – I think the Chinese were especially good at digging, they could dig in quick as a flash, providing the ground wasn't frozen. If the ground wasn't frozen they could get down

19:00 six feet and they would dig bunkers and things like that, and they would go – some of the places on the hills, they had three layers, three stories down, you know, immune from bombs, rockets and artillery mortar fire.

So when you started to withdraw quickly in the trucks, what were you being told?

Just that we were – what the Americans

19:30 called a "bug-out," we just knew that we were going back. We knew eventually they would stop it, had to, but it took days, and we would go back and occupy a position for about a day; but the Chinese couldn't move quickly enough to keep up with us, so it was a fairly safe move. Why the Americans hadn't – maybe the train wasn't suitable. We were quite a long, long way away before we actually started digging in and holding it.

20:00 **And where was that?**

We were at a place called Chongju. I don't remember all the names of the places, but Chongju was where we ended up after the big withdrawal. The Americans' big bug-out. From there we did patrolling out to "friendly" the units, and to make sure the enemy didn't get too close to you. So a lot of patrolling. Americans didn't seem to like that,

20:30 you know; we always patrol. If you patrol aggressively, you don't get enemy surprising you.

And so tell us about what happened next, and when would you face the Chinese again?

Well, we struck the Chinese on a couple of times on our move north. We struck the Chinese when we were clearing the line of the Kapyong Valley, on those features I mentioned earlier, Sardine and Salmon.

21:00 By that time we had moved some 20 or 30 miles up the Kapyong Valley and, as I say, at that stage we were halted and the Americans' 6th Republic of Korea, 6th ROK Division took over, and we went back to Corps Reserve. We were at a place called Charaday, which was a few miles north of the little village of Kapyong. In those days it was just a sort of mud village.

21:30 **And how had those few months in between Kapyong battle and withdrawing from the North, what had been going on for those few months?**

Well, from that period, from January up until mid-April, it was a gradual 8th Army gradually moving forward, you know, battalions advancing and gradually moving forward and doing it gradually, not

22:00 quickly, and clearing the area. You dug in, you held it, another unit took over, advanced, did the same thing, so it was slow, just move up slowly, bit at a time, until we got to the Kapyong Valley, as I say 27th Brigade, we had to clear the line of the Kapyong Valley, which we did, and that took us about six days. We had main fights, we were on Sardine. Then of course

22:30 we went back to Reserve, about 30 miles back.

And of course this period was the winter period?

Well, the winter period mainly – the winter period starts late October until about, hazard a guess now, about mid-February to the last of the real severe weather; and you know that was hard, as I say, trying to sleep with one thin blanket and a cape half-shelter

23:00 over you. That was hard, but we – there was a period, as I say, the first weeks during the advance when we didn't strike much opposition until we started to get up to the end of the Kapyong Valley, when we struck them, when they were dug in on those features. As I say, really it was an A Company operation to clear Sardine, and they had a C Company operation to clear Salmon. And then

23:30 we went back into Reserve. Just having a wash, you know, you got to appreciate – we hadn't had a shower or a anything for nearly seven weeks, so it was a chance to have a shower, get clean clothing and start eating decent food again. First time we had cooked meals for about seven or eight weeks.

What had you been living on?

American C-rations. They give

24:00 you a 24-hour ration pack which contains three meals, tinned meals, a packet of cigarettes, packet of toilet paper, tin opener, plastic knife, fork and spoon. Three meals. Something like a small 50 gram can of something like ham and lima beans or pork and lima beans, something like that, as the main meal. Few biscuits, little bit of jam

24:30 and that's a 24-hour ration pack, and you could work yourself three meals out of that. At other times, when we went off the American rations, on to British rations, we sometimes went onto 5- and 10-man packs. As far as I was concerned, for an MFC, they were a disaster. Because if you got warmed for an operation and I got allocated as a MFC with a company,

25:00 my mortar section would get issued with a 5- or 10-man ration pack and we would split that up between us. If I was fortunate I might get a tin of potatoes to last me for a whole day. The rest of the section of course would take all the goodies, naturally, because there are eight or nine of them, got a feed of that, and I am the only one with that. So I would go off with a tin of spuds for 24 hours. So I hated those 5- or 10-man packs.

25:30 I was glad when we got back to combat rations, the individual rations.

How does this affect your ability to exist and fight?

Well, we kept pretty fit of course because we were up and down hills all the time. I mean, if you are on the normal American combat 24-hour rations, they were reasonable. When we first went into Korea we started off in the first few weeks on corned beef and biscuits

26:00 which, three meals a day, just corned beef and biscuits, for two or three weeks it gets a bit boring. So we were very happy at the end of that three week period to get onto the American combat rations. And, as I say, we had those for probably most of the time we were in Korea, until they started to bring in the British ration packs, which were crap.

Tell us about how some of the men reacted to

26:30 **the conditions of the cold.**

Well, as I mentioned first, we went over there with our service dress, the little frock coat, serge uniform – suitable for Melbourne winter, totally inadequate for Korean winter. When the temperature got down to 27 below – zero, as it did with the bitterly cold winds blowing down from Manchuria, then it really affected everybody.

27:00 Trying to sleep at night on frozen ground with one thin blanket and this rubberised sheet, groundsheet over you, not the best. As I say, the old fellows – I mean, I was only 23, but the older fellows, they really felt it, it affected their bones, backs and everything, people went down with frostbite, we had heavy casualties during that winter with

27:30 frostbite. You know, everything you touched, it was terrible. Yes, everything was frozen. If you got a tin of rations, then the best thing you could do was kick a dent in the can if you could, throw it on the fire

and when the dent pops out, hook it out of the fire and open it as quick as you can. Then you were just as likely to find that the outside is burnt

28:00 to a cinder and the rest was still frozen solid in the middle. So the winters weren't particularly good.

How do men cope with these conditions?

With difficulty. You have got to think, too, that the soldier's not only got to live through that during the day, he has got to stand sentry duty. I mean, we were always emphatic, you must have sentries on at night, you can't have

28:30 everybody going to sleep. Unfortunately, the Americans didn't do that all the time. I could tell you an instance there we came across that we proved it. We always used to have one or two people in each section awake; they would be an hour on or two hours on and then wake up the next fellow; and he would stay awake for his lot of time, and then wake someone else up. So you have always got someone awake to alert, so they can hear if someone is approaching, hopefully,

29:00 and at least you have got someone there who has got a weapon to fire.

Tell us about this American?

Well, the Americans sent out an infantry company, a reconnaissance, to try and locate the Chinese. I am just trying to think when this was, it must have been November, late October or November, and anyway they lost all contact with them and 3RAR were sent out to try and locate it. I will never forget it

29:30 because the unit we were trying to locate was a unit called Task Force Crosby, it was named after the commanding officer, I think he was either a Lieutenant Colonel or a Major Crosby. Anyway, we found them after a few hours. They had gone out on reconnaissance and they pulled up alongside this road and it was getting on for nightfall, so they just sat themselves down and got out their little tents and sleeping bags, and never sent out any sentries.

30:00 Unfortunately, they didn't realise that, on the hill, a couple of hundred yards away, a North Korean battalion was dug in and they spotted them of course when they came, and they waited until the middle of the night and came down and got stuck into the Yanks. When we came onto this task force, most of them were dead in their sleeping bags, frozen solid. I have got photographs of some of them dead there, some of them got out of their sleeping bags. And of course the Chinese

30:30 stripped off the boots off every one of them, because it was good decent footwear the Americans had. But every one of them was dead. And I helped load the trucks up, you know, five-tonne trucks, throwing them up like a slab of beef, frozen stiff. Failure to put out a sentry. Ridiculous. So that was the end of Task Force Crombez. They had even lost the little Chaffee tank, a light tank; and their company commander, he was dead,

31:00 sitting up against the wheel of his jeep, he was frozen stiff. Funny thing, when they get hit like that blood only flows for a couple of seconds. And there's hardly any blood on them, because the blood froze as soon as it started coming out. So we had a fellow that had been an experienced tank driver back in Australia cleaned the blood and snot out of the little Chaffee Tank, cleaned the bodies out

31:30 and cleaned the blood up, and we were going to use that the next day for the next counter-attack, but unfortunately the Americans came along and took it back off us; we didn't get it.

What's it like to find a scene like this?

Sobering. I mean, you might complain about being up in the middle of the night, freezing cold, being a sentry, but you realise the value of it when you see people who don't put out sentries,

32:00 what can happen to them. I must have helped load 20 or 30 on one truck again.

What's it like handling bodies that are so lifeless?

By that time I had been in England and I had helped load casualties from the flying bombs and things like that, so I wasn't a stranger to death.

32:30 Maybe you could call me an insensitive bastard, but I was – you know, I could take looking at it; a lot of people couldn't. But you got to expect to see dead bodies. But it's even worse when they are your own, and that happened many times.

Would the men talk about this

33:00 **situation?**

You would just think, "Well, how bloody stupid could the Americans be, to be in enemy territory and not even put a damned sentry up." That's what makes me laugh. My wife likes watching MASH [TV comedy based on Korean War]; I think what a totally inadequate thing it is, it gives you no idea, you would think the whole of the Korean war was like that and it wasn't. Got particularly

33:30 vicious.

What's wrong with MASH particularly?

Have you ever watched MASH? All this bloomin' field hospital – I mean, they do have those mobile surgical hospitals, but I am sure these officers commanding are not so ill-disciplined and things like that. And the officers, they have got no discipline whatsoever. You have got to keep

34:00 discipline in an infantry battalion. Whilst you are not spit-and-polished, calling every one "sir" and saluting everyone, I mean you call them "boss" or "skipper," but you still respect the officers, you still respect the senior NCOs and warrant officers, you have got to.

You have mentioned a few times about the American tactics; overall, what did you think of the Americans?

I hope this doesn't go to America. Frankly, I thought they were pretty weak.

34:30 I think they used lots and lots of firepower, often conducting what they call "reconnaissance by fire," by firing on somewhere where they think the enemy might be when it's not necessary. I don't think they have got – they are too much straight up the guts instead of doing a correct reconnaissance and looking round and evaluating which is the best way to get onto the feature without suffering too many casualties.

35:00 And that is what the Australian Army is trained to do, and that is what we do and they don't. Typically would be – you have heard of the Battle of Maryang San? – the Australians did brilliantly, but that's another story, because they used fire and movement and flanking attacks and beat the Chinese. Anyway, as I say, that's another story.

35:30 **And why did the Americans use these, do you think?**

It's hard to say. When I was in Vietnam I had a talk with quite a few – I was in a group of 30 Australians into Korea, into Vietnam with a training team and we had quite a few high- ranking generals that spoke to us and talked to us about various things, and we asked them some things like that. "Why don't you teach your

36:00 soldiers," you know, "the fire and movement and fighting withdrawal?" And their answer was that their army is too big to get down to minor tactics like that, "We don't teach that." They teach the broad overall picture and that's it. I don't know whether they teach fighting withdrawals now, but they ought to have learnt their lesson by now, but I would hope they would. But they certainly in Korea

36:30 never knew how to conduct a fighting withdrawal. Consequently they paid with their casualties. Their idea was just to try and bash through a roadblock. You can't do that, you have got to outflank it and fight it and clear the hills. I guess 27 Brigade was the first to show them how it was done by clearing the hills. But they never learnt the lesson.

So take us through

37:00 **Kapyong Battle?**

All right, well you recall that after we cleared Salmon and Sardine, we went back into Reserve. We were in Reserve maybe three or four days, I can't remember, and we got an order, "Ready to move in an hour." And off went the platoon commanders and the battalion commander to do a reconnaissance

37:30 of the area we were to occupy. And whilst they were away we got the order to move. And of course no company commanders were around to give the orders to all the soldiers, so the only information we were passed on was, "You are moving forward to occupy a position overnight, as a contingency, and you will be coming back into Brigade tomorrow morning." And as a result of that

38:00 we weren't issued with any ration packs, we weren't issued with any extra ammunition, we just went forward, occupied the position and tried – of the rifle companies – the battalion for a start had to occupy an area that was more suitable for two battalions. Now, if you get one battalion that is occupying the position for two battalions it means you spread out. There are gaps between the rifle companies, there are gaps between the platoons that

38:30 normally you would never have. So we were occupying a two-battalion position, the gap between us and B Company on the ground was something like three or 400 metres between us; and D Company on the higher ridge line, on hill 504, that was something like 800 metres. Well, Reserve Company was something like a few hundred meters behind us, but we were spread out.

39:00 Our evening meal came up, what we termed the "hot box" meal – they cooked the meal, put it in hot containers, and send them out the various rifle companies. We had that at about 4.30, five o'clock in the evening, and by the time we got our gear away, refugees and South Koreans were all starting to pour back down the road between us and B Company, so we knew it wasn't going to be too long before we had company.

39:30 What first happened, we had a tank company, A Company, the 2/72nd US Heavy Tank Company, was attached, allegedly under control. "Under control": that term means the battalion commander is the one that controls them, and he says where the tanks go. The Americans apparently had a different idea and

the company commander, who was a lieutenant,

40:00 put a platoon of four tanks in front of B Company, about two or 300 metres in front of B Company, with no infantry protection for those tanks, and those tanks were the first ones that got engaged by the Chinese. That would have been, I think, about eight or 8.30 at night, the Chinese came down, swarmed all over the tanks, the tank commanders could only see by operating from an open turret, three of the four tank commanders were wounded, and the

40:30 platoon commander was killed. So they very smartly started up their engines, chopped back through the companies, somewhere back to battalion headquarters.

Tape 5

00:36 **So you just started talking about Kapyong and you had just finished to the part where the tanks….?**

Oh yeah, where the American tanks got attached and withdrew. And of course when they withdrew they cut all the telephone lines that had been laid to A, C and D Company – D Company being on the other side of the road, they didn't cut

01:00 theirs. But at that time, as the command radio net had not been switched on, we could only go by relaying messages by telephone. Anyway, about 20 minutes after the tanks were hit, they then hit B Company and they then attacked them for half to ¾ of an hour. But because B Company were on lower ground and a gentle slope, B Company were able to beat the

01:30 attack off pretty quickly because they could see them, even though it was dark, they could see them much earlier than we could up on our hill. Probably round about nine, 9.30 they started attacking A Company, and they concentrated their attack on that for the rest of the night. Now, the problem was A Company was on a very, very steep ridge, on the approach up to the ridge on a very

02:00 steep slope, something like [Hill] 410, consequently you could only see the Chinese when they got 5-10 metres from you, that's when their head and shoulders appeared over the ridge, so you only had a few minutes to fire as rapidly as you possibly could. And that's what happened, we fired like anything, knocked over quite a lot of them, and they retreated down the hill again. And this is where their drawback hit them with the lack of communications.

02:30 Now, because they hadn't got radio communications, they couldn't move around and get another point of attack without doing a complete reconnaissance, so they kept coming up exactly the same approach nearly all that night, and nearly every time they came up we knocked them down. Come the morning we were down to four or five rounds of rifle ammunition per man; we normally carry a minimum of 50.

03:00 So we were in dire straights. One platoon, which was lower, closer to the road than the rest of the company, it almost got overrun during the night and had so many casualties, only had about 10 men left standing, that they withdrew into the Company H

and the Company HQ and the remnants of the rifle platoon moved a little bit further up the hill

03:30 **and settled in there. So we had no firing positions dug because we had moved again. So they kept hitting us all the rest of the night. When daylight came and we had a look down, the – we put in a counter-attack. 3 Platoon, which was the platoon furthest up the hill, was ordered to go and attack them. They went down, and cleaned the ridge off out of the Chinese and forced them off the slope.**

04:00 **When they did that they found a survivor from 1 Platoon still there. What had happened, he had been wounded in the early fighting, and when the rest of the platoon withdrew they didn't notice him, they couldn't find him in the dark. But what did happen when the counter-attack did happen, the Chinese pulled him in under cover, so that he wouldn't get hit again, which was remarkable. Consequently, he didn't get hit anymore. But the rest of the Chinese that were pulled down**

04:30 **off the hill, they were right down on the bottom of the slope. And it was like a shooting gallery for a while because they were trying to move from little bit of cover to cover to try and get protection from us, and we were using them as a shooting gallery for a couple of minutes until this Benny O'Dowd said to stop it because we were almost out of ammunition. The Chinese withdrew then and started attacking D Company which was up on 504, which is the high feature.**

05:00 **And we got left in peace for a while then. Then Benny O'Dowd got a call on the radio and was asked if we could stay for another night, in the same position. And he said, "Well, we are out of ammunition almost. We have got no food, and unless reinforcements come, we cannot hold." So they then said, "There is an American regimental combat team, that's three infantry battalions, will be coming up,"**

05:30 **to come up alongside us and reinforce us. So it looks as though we were going to stay for another night. However, after about three hours they said the unit was no longer available and Benny O'Dowd was asked to extract the company if he thought he could get them out safely, try and get them out. So Benny O'Dowd formed a small tactical HQ of himself and**

06:00 **I became his radio operator, and he handed the command of A Company to the Company 2IC, and he organised the withdrawal and sent B Company first, which had withdrawn from the lower ground in the meantime and gone in behind us, ordered them to go back down the ridge line and clear the ridge. Because we knew it was no use trying to go back down the road because the Chinese had a roadblock on the road. They had a**

06:30 **long, strong infantry force there on the road. So B Company set off, and an hour or so later they got down to the – where the river crossing was, a little ford, and said it was unoccupied so they occupied that, and we started leapfrogging the companies back one at a time. D Company, which was in contact with the enemy at that time, had to wait quite a while until they had finished**

07:00 **beating the attack off and the Chinese withdrew slightly again before they could come back. But by that time the artillery were able to fire the mortars weren't, because they were withdrawn during the night with the rest of the Battalion H**

See what had happened, after dark, the company commander and the intelligence officer withdrew and went back to the Middlesex Regiment where they were, apparently, to retain control of the battalion, which they weren't

07:30 **able to do anyway. And the support company and the rest of the Battalion HQ, including the Regimental Aid Post and the wounded, came out during the night and left the four rifle companies up forward. The Chinese were all round us mostly at night. We gradually fought our way out, and about 10 o'clock that night the last of us got down to the ford without further casualties.**

08:00 **But it was the single biggest casualties for the Australians for the whole of the war. We had 33 killed that night, two New Zealanders were also killed with A Company, and I think it was 59 wounded and three were taken prisoner of war. It was unfortunate, but we had to leave our dead behind, which we don't like doing, but there was no way we could carry them out, we had no stretchers. We had a few POWs,**

08:30 **Chinese that we had caught or B Company had caught, but they were used to carry out the wounded, so consequently we had to leave the dead. They weren't recovered until several days later. But it stopped the Chinese, almost stopped them dead. They followed us right the way down the ridge line, but went across the river in the wrong place. And they then attacked the Canadians,**

09:00 **the 2nd Battalion of Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry that had only just arrived in Korea. And they fought them for about 10-12 hours, and they had I think it was 10 killed and 12 wounded, I think, so only one rifle company, everyone else was involved in the battle. So by the time they finished that the Chinese had run to a complete halt. So, consequently, Seoul was saved, it didn't get recaptured, and that was the**

09:30 **whole aim of the spring offensive was to recapture Seoul. We weren't the only ones fighting; I mean, further over there was 29 British Brigade, the Gloucesters were almost wiped out. They had about 400 or 500 of theirs captured so the battalion was decimated, so it was pretty sharp.**

And you mentioned earlier where the mortars couldn't fire

10:00 **because they were surrounded: can you described what happened?**

That was me calling for support, that was A Company when they started attacking us around about nine o'clock at night, although the mortars hadn't been bedded in or fired to establish fields of fire, because it was virtually dark by the time we got up there. At least I plotted defensive tasks, I knew we could bring them down, it just meant that I had to bring them

10:30 down further out and then walk the fire back in. Then, when I called for it, they said, "Sorry, we are under attack ourselves," and my mortar platoon was under attack which was very unusual because 1000 yards behind the front line normally.... But the RAP[Regimental Aid Post] was under fire, the Battalion HQ, the mortar platoon, and the RAP and sniper section got decimated almost, defending the H

11:00 **So. And the Kiwis [New Zealanders], they only had three Kiwis with us, an officer and two privates, and the officer and one private were killed. They were only killed a few yards away from where I was. It was virtually hand-to-hand quite a lot of the night, five to 10 metres, and the Chinese, there were so many of them, they just came up ran straight past you and disappeared back over the hill. God knows where they went. Presumably**

11:30 **they either doubled back and joined their mates or they went on down to Battalion H**

And whereabouts were you…?

I was with Company H

And we were attacked, well, after one Platoon withdrew, the HQ and the remnants of 1 Platoon virtually became a rifle platoon again. So I just acted as a rifleman for the rest of the night.

And what do you do as a rifleman, do you just set up…?

Kill them. Shoot them.

12:00 That's all you could do.

And how was it defended and where were you positioned and that sort of thing?

With the rifle company?

The Battalion H

Oh, the Battalion H

Oh, no, I was with Company HQ which was forward. A Company was one of the rifle companies, and A Company was the one that suffered 50% of casualties, it was the company that was attacked most. And I

12:30 **was with that, with HQ, and in actual fact the HQ Company and the remnants of 1 Platoon virtually became another rifle platoon. So we were – as I say, we were down to the last three or four rounds by the time we finished.**

What thoughts were going through your head during the night, I guess what were your main feelings during the night?

Well, you knew, having been with the battalion by then

13:00 seven or eight weeks or more, since September, you knew that you could rely on people. If a fellow was in a pit five or 10 metres away, left or right, you knew they would stick until they were killed, wounded or replaced. You had to trust your life to them, as they did you. If you all decided to stick together then you stayed. And that's what the

13:30 American tank company was so surprised by, they said, surprised with 3RAR, if they got attacked they stayed, they stayed and held it. The Americans didn't; they usually bugged out. Anyway, we stayed, and the casualties for the Chinese – it's only a guesstimate because no-one could cover the whole lot – including those killed by artillery fire and what have you, could have been well over 2,000.

14:00 The bodies that were scattered in front of A Company, horrendous.

And what was, you sort of hear a lot about the way the Chinese used bugles and whistles, what was that about?

Oh, yeah, they used those at Kapyong. And that was why they had to use them, they were the only means of communications, they had no radios. So they couldn't get onto a rifle company and say, "Send another platoon round on the

14:30 right flank and attack up there." And how could they control a group of men? And they were probably mixed up, you know several hundred men, and they were trying to move them around in the dark without radio or something to control them, so they used whistles and bugles. And that's why the only way they could keep control of them was by forming them up in the same place they had formed up to 20 minutes before, that they had put in the first attack. Follow-up the same thing, go up the same way.

15:00 And as people were being knocked down and killed, the people following picked up the weapons and they just kept coming and coming and coming. As I say, I have never seen so many Chinamen in all my life.

What was it like to hear those noises of the…?

Well, it was a bit nerve-racking I suppose, because you knew when the whistles and bugles were going, and then after the whistles and the bugles they would go silent, and you know they were forming up and were going to come up.

15:30 And it would be nice and quiet until they got 10 metres from you, and when they are still out of sight of you they start hurling their stick grenades over, and they throw the grenades over to try and get your heads down, and when the grenades go off you put your head up almost straight away, because you know damned well they are going to follow behind it. So when they come up you shoot them.

Did you feel frightened?

Let me tell you, it was my 24th birthday on the 24th of April,

16:00 which was the second day of Kapyong, and I didn't think I would see another one. Actually, without trying to go into heroics, two days afterwards – as a fire controller I used to carry a set of binoculars. Early in the peace I captured or found a Chinese binocular case. They didn't issue us with cases, they were frightened we might put them away and not use them. So I had my binoculars in there,

16:30 and I couldn't use them in the dark and I wasn't using them for fire control anyway so they remained there. Two days later, I think it was the 26th April, I took them out to clean them, and I pulled them out and there was just little bits and pieces hanging on the strap. I hadn't realised I'd got a round of bullets through the case some time during the battle. How, I don't know when, but I did. Luck of the draw. Luck of the draw.

What keeps you going,

17:00 **say, on the night of the 24th?**

Well, the thing that keeps you going is that you know the other people are going to keep going. We went nearly two days without food and without sleep. Once the battle started no-one got to sleep, so you just keep going. I know when we came back we got in behind the Middlesex, I just laid across the furrows of the field. I didn't even feel the furrows of the field, I just went and

17:30 had about eight to 10 hours sleep, straight off, no worries. That's why we didn't get a meal until some time fairly late on Anzac Day, because we slept.

So tell me about that Anzac Day.

Well that, the Anzac Day we were going to have, or the one we did have?

The one you did have.

We were back behind the lines, so we just spent it cleaning our weapons, cleaning our gear and getting ready for the next go.

18:00 **What did you think of the Anzacs or Anzac Day on that day?**

I was glad to see it. I can tell you that I was very glad to see it.

Did you talk about it much, the fact that it was Anzac Day?

Never really crossed my mind, that, about Anzac Day. My birthday, "Oh yeah, I am 24, probably the last one," because there we are.

Did you ever celebrate that birthday?

Oh, I

18:30 celebrate it every year.

That year?

Well, every year we hold a Kapyong Service, because we got the US Presidential Distinguished Unit Citation for that action, for stopping the Chinese. So we have that ceremony every year, whether it be up here in Brisbane or in Townsville, or sometimes I go down to

19:00 Holsworthy where the battalion celebrate it. Actually, I am going down to it next year to it. I talk to some of the soldiers and give them a bit of a lecture what the Battle of Kapyong was like, not like the history books record it, because the history books are wrong.

In what way did they get it wrong?

The history books all do not highlight the failures of what went wrong. We were lucky to survive.

19:30 There are a number of things that should have occurred and didn't.

Like?

For example, when Charlie Green was the CO, he appointed a company commander of HQ Company as battle commander, and the battle commander, together with the RSM, was to organise the layout and defence of Battalion H

That wasn't done at Kapyong. No-one was really dug in and prepared for defence at Battalion H

20:00 **Also Charlie Green's standing orders, every time you moved onto a new position, whether it was advance or withdrawal, the first thing that happened was the battalion command net, the radio net, every radio set in the battalion on that net came on the air, communications were established, and if they were going to lay a line, a telephone line went out, and when the telephone lines were in and all units were in contact, then the radio net was closed down.**

20:30 **At Kapyong the radio net was never opened until the battle started. When it did, they found that command net could not contact most of the companies, they could only contact B**

Company, because the battalion commander, when he had taken over, had withdrawn one of the anti-tank platoon trucks that towed the anti-tank guns and converted it into a caravan – and a caravan contained a map room,

21:00 **sleeping quarters for the CO and his radios. Well, it went up into a re-entrant – and a re-entrant is a sort of a little valley in between the features. By driving up into that re-entrant he was out of radio communication with three of the other companies, and they didn't know it until the battle started. So that was wrong.**

Was this the same CO from Pak…?

No, he'd been sacked. He'd been sacked. He got sacked as soon as the brigadier heard that he had moved the

21:30 rifle company without his permission, he sacked him on the spot.

What did this sort of – obviously the battalion had been upset about Charlie Green's death, and then there's sort of confusion in leadership and…?

Well, as I said, the fellow who had been commander in Japan was immediately told to take over, and he was the one who stuffed up at the second battle of Pakchon, and he was sacked immediately after that. And the 2IC took over then, and he got the job as the temporary lieutenant

22:00 colonel. But the radios weren't opened – not only that; every body thought, "We are only going to be over there overnight so issue combat rations? Why issue rations this afternoon and take them back tomorrow morning? Why issue extra ammunition? Why take any mines or barbed wire or anything for forward defensive positions? We are only going to be there for seven or eight hours, and then coming home." So no-one used the old noggin [common sense].

22:30 And then, once the battle had started and the battle had been raging for seven or eight hours, no ammunition supply came forward. Now, normally the company 2IC will get on to the radio or telephone and say, "Look, we need ammunition urgently." But they were busy fighting a battle, so they didn't contact them. But the ammunition people back there should have said, "That battle has been going for seven or eight hours. Someone's got to be out of ammunition." They should have sent ammunition forward. They did send some forward with some tanks when the

23:00 CO came in daylight on the 24th, but the ammunition they brought for A Company was all Vickers machine gun ammunition, which is in belts designed for a range of 3000 metres. And you put that in a rifle and it belts the hell out of your shoulder, and in fact eight or 10 rounds out of that in a rifle, you can throw the rifle away because it is far too powerful for it. So we couldn't use that ammunition. So that's the sort of thing that

23:30 goes on, but you don't find that in the book anywhere. But never mind, it happened.

You mentioned Benny Dowd.

Ben O'Dowd.

Ben O'Dowd. Was – you were his radio operator?

Yeah, well, he was a commander, he was the senior rifle company commander, he was the only major at the moment, the others were captains, so he was the one who was told to take charge of it.

24:00 And mine was virtually the only other radio operating, apart from his company net which you had to leave a radio with that; I therefore was nominated his radio operator for attack headquarters. So he and I covered a lot of ground, going up and reccying [reconnoitering] positions for another company and moving forward again, back and forward and back and forward, very tiring.

And what was he like?

Good. He's a member of our

24:30 association. He's a friend of mine now. Of course I was only a corporal – sergeant then, acting sergeant. No, he and I are good friends. But everyone who was at Kapyong, we are all good friends.

And what sort of, when you said you covered a lot of ground, what sort of places were you doing recces on there?

Well, we were going back down the ridge line to select the area and then moving forward and meet the company as it was on its way back and tell them where to go.

25:00 Then heading back and to see if they settled in all right before we moved further back down the ridge line. So we covered a fair bit of ground. Actually, it was quite funny, because one time we came across B Company who had these prisoners with them, and they were carrying weapons and things, and Benny O'Dowd said, "What the hell are you carrying weapons for?" "You don't expect the bloody wounded to carry them, do you?"

25:30 But they carried out our weapons and they carried out the wounded. As I say, the dead we just had to

leave behind.

And you said you went back a few days later?

Yeah, we didn't go back, but the ground was recaptured several days later and we were able to recover the bodies then.

What about the Chinese bodies?

We didn't have time to bury them, there were hundreds of them. God.

26:00 Actually I didn't know until later, I was reading the other – this is nothing to do with me – I was reading another article about Korea when they were going along during the winter, must have been the second winter, and they saw all these mounds, like snowmen, hundreds of them. "Who's got time to make snowmen?" and pushed one, and it was a Chinese body frozen stiff. And these were several hundred Chinese

26:30 lined up waiting for an attack during a cold winter night and just frozen to death. Just frozen to death. Yeah, so they estimate the Chinese could have lost close to one million men. But a total of about four million died, civilians from both sides. Koreans, both North and South. Yeah, a lot of people have said to

27:00 me, "What did you think of the South Koreans?" And I had to have a good think about that. At first I thought they were a lot of gutless wimps, run at the first thing, but what I realised afterwards, when North Korea invaded the South, the South Korean army was only equipped with rifles and machine guns. They weren't allowed artillery or tanks, the Americans wouldn't let them, because they were frightened they were going to invade North Korea. Consequently,

27:30 when the North Koreans attacked, they were overrun and the army was almost decimated. So What did they do? They had to find an army, so they went to every town and village and had a press gang, "Everyone over the age of 15 to 50, you are now in the army, here's a uniform, here's a weapon." And on a couple of occasions when I was there I had young South Korean soldiers come up with a rifle, grand American rifle, couldn't speak English and I couldn't speak Korean.

28:00 Virtually, "How the hell do you load this thing?" They didn't know how to load it, let alone aim and fire, so when they got attacked it was no wonder they turned and ran. If you haven't got a weapon you can use what the hell do you do? So I was very sorry for the South Koreans then.

I guess what were your thoughts on what the war was about?

28:30 We know what the war was about, it was to prevent the whole of Korea becoming Communist. If the whole of Korea had become Communist, at that stage they had the domino theory, if one country falls to communism the next country is going to be the same, you know, the domino effect. And so they – they were very fortunate – you probably don't realise this, but they have the [United Nations] Security Council

29:00 and some of the nations have the powers of veto, Russia, America, England. Well, when the Korean war broke out, the Russians a couple of days before had been trying to get China membership and the rest of the committee refused to allow them, so the Russians stormed out in protest and went back to Moscow. While they were away the invasion took place. They immediately reassembled the Security [Council]

29:30 and voted to repel it. Had the Russians been there it would have been vetoed and they perhaps wouldn't have been able to do anything. So we were lucky the Russians packed a pooey [took offence] and went home.

And what was your – what did communism mean to you at 23, 24?

Well, I don't know. I have been opposed to the idea of communism.

30:00 I don't think – in theory communism is wonderful, everybody works to produce what they can, and everybody shares it, but under communism they don't share it; the only people who get the goodies are those at the top. And coming down from the top is the armed forces, in the Russians' case the KGB [secret intelligence service], the army, the navy and the air force; they get the rest, the poor civilians. I mean Stalin is

30:30 alleged to have caused the death of some 20 million of his own people. Stalin had one of the bureau [Politburo] disagree with him at a meeting and he pulled out his pistol and shot him. People were very wary of Stalin. Not a man to cross.

And what did this mean to you when you were there, or when you …?

Well,

31:00 I saw the effects of communism. Shortly after we got there they took us to visit a school, a police yard, and at the police yard there were men, women and children buried up to their necks and everyone shot through the head. When the North Koreans took over the capital, Seoul, or any large community, the first thing they did was rout out all the intellectuals,

31:30 doctors, lawyers, politicians, and shoot them. They shot thousands in Seoul when they took it over, and in every town and village they took over they shot the head man. That sort of stuff. And what happened when the South Koreans went back? They did the same thing, they did the same thing, pulled out all the Communists and a lot of non-Communists. I don't know whether you saw that feature article recently,

32:00 'Korea, the unfinished war'? One of those sessions dealt with both Communists' and the South Koreans' dealings with the people. And the American fellow said, who was attached to one of the South Korean units, he was so disgusted he just ended up walking away, because they were shooting people out of hand. And they weren't all Communists. Just an opportunity to get rid of a

32:30 neighbour you didn't like, bang. Both sides were like that initially, but. And of course the Koreans were renowned during World War II as the worst possible POW [prisoner of war] guards you could get for brutality. Whether they were North or South I don't know, but they were Koreans. So yeah. So no, I am not favourable to communism, no way, never have been, never will be.

33:00 **Just a few more questions about when you arrived behind the, was it the Middlesex lines on the 25th, and you said that you just collapsed?**

Collapsed, I was exhausted. Most of the people just, you know, we had been without sleep for two days and food for two days, you were just completely exhausted. There was no way in the world, if they had said, "You are going to have to stop there,"

33:30 we would have been flat out trying to do it.

So what's the sort of, I don't know if this is the right word, debriefing or something that goes on after a conflict like this?

Wasn't much at all, not much at all. No. We didn't even know if people had been taken POW initially, and so we lost three people as POWs there, one of whom was later awarded the George Cross for

34:00 bravery whilst he was a POW. Slim Madden, yeah. That was the highest award that Australia got in the Korean War. Nice fellow, Slim, he was a radio linesman too. Yeah. Yeah, it's a sobering, I lost a lot of good mates in three Battalion there.

Tell me a bit more about how three Battalion, like we've talked about how you could trust everyone

34:30 **and how you got along….**

Well, it was not only three Battalion, every – I mean a rifle company has got to be prepared to stand and fight, and you can only stand and fight if you know the people alongside you can do the same thing. I am not saying there couldn't have been one case of cowardice in the battalion, it's possible, I wouldn't know. But certainly at Kapyong they just stayed,

35:00 they fought and they died. And that was the thing you knew, that you would stay, they'd stay and that was it. You had implicit trust in each other, you had to have.

And are there any particular mates that particularly stand out to you that you lost?

Yeah, I lost a good mate of mine from the machine gun platoon. Yeah.

35:30 Lenny Lanoi, who was a Chinese/Australian fellow, I have got a photograph of him there somewhere. I lost him, later on I lost a fellow up on 410, I lost quite a few.

Is there any sort of ritual or anything you used to dealing with someone who was close to you?

Look,

36:00 when you are in action like that you don't have time to stop and think about it then. Later, yes, you do. But what can you do? He's gone. So you just retain fond memories of them, that's it. You know you are not going to see them again. It's hard when you have got to leave them behind. I mean, we always made a point

36:30 of carrying all our bodies out. But Kapyong, we weren't – it wasn't possible. Not enough stretchers, not enough people. I mean, A Company was down to close to 50% of its strength, we lost, what was it, 18 killed that night? 18 killed and about 20 or 30 wounded, out of the 33 and 59. Yeah.

37:00 **And so, as A Company, was there any sort of service or talk about how many were lost?**

No, you just – well, A Company, one Platoon was the one that had the most losses because they were the ones on the lowest slope, because they took the brunt of it. But all the rest of the company were involved later on as they

37:30 moved the attack further up. But we were fortunate the critical feature was the high hill, because if that had been captured, they could just come down and wipe the rest of us off. But we were very fortunate that they failed to reinforce the Chinese that captured 1 Platoon area, and failed to attack from that area. And later in the

38:00 fighting, a Chinese machine gun got set up between us and 2 Platoon further on, firing on us, and there was only one man that could see that and that was one of the Kiwis, and he was able to pick out where the machine gun was. And he killed three machine gunners, one fell and another one took his place and he knocked over another one. And they sent down a patrol from 2 Platoon

38:30 to clear that out, they came down and cleared that out and lost another man killed doing that. But we were lucky because at the machine gun they were blowing whistles and trying to attract attention, and the Chinese didn't take any notice of them luckily, because they didn't reinforce it. But they could have split the battalion in half, that was the trouble, because we were so spread because the ground we had to cover, but we had

39:00 gaps between the companies and the platoons that we would not normally allow. Normally when you occupy a position you might have two rifle sections on the front slope and a third section on the rear slope. We couldn't do that because there was such a narrow ridge line, they were all on the front slope. So they could have come down behind us too, but they didn't.

And you mentioned that you didn't have barbed wire and things like that with you,

39:30 **so how did you dig in?**

Well, you couldn't really dig in because, this being a mountain ridge, there was only one or two inches of mountain soil on top of the rock, so all we could do was try and grab rocks and try and build up what they called a sanger [makeshift shelter] out of rocks, but not everyone did that. I mean I was with Company HQ and I didn't do anything defensive because after all we were only going to be there overnight.

40:00 And in any case when the fight really got going we moved a further 10 or 15 metres further up the hill and we were fighting for the rest of the night so there was no time to dig in. They just sort of got on the slope and when the attack came in you just sort of knelt up, so you could see them properly, and fire away at them and hope like hell.

40:28 End of tape

Tape 6

00:36 **When you went back over this scene, describe what the battle scene looked like after, when you came back over?**

After the Battle of Kapyong? Well, the forward slopes of A Company, there were lots and lots of bodies there, we didn't count them, but there were lots and lots. There were quite a few more down in the

01:00 valley too where we had been sniping them once they had withdrawn from their position. Quite a few were on B Company's forward slopes when they were down on the lower ground. And of course D Company had killed quite a few. About the only rifle company that didn't really get into the action was Reserve Company, C Company, but every rifle company other than C Company had a slash at the Chinese.

01:30 Well, there were probably anything from, a rough guess, around about five-600 around the slopes at Kapyong. Actually, it was forward of Kapyong; Kapyong village is quite a few miles back down. But I now notice that they have changed the name from Kapyong to Gap Yong – anyway, that's immaterial. But the artillery would have killed quite a lot, because artillery was able to fire, once daylight

02:00 came on the 24th, over to get our weapons zeroed in, because our artillery had gone forward early on, before the 20th, to support the South Koreans, and when they got attacked and withdrew on the 22nd, it was dark when they came back and they claim they were unable to fire because the weapons were not set in properly on the ground,

02:30 and they were frightened of injuring or killing any Australians. Other people more expert than me in artillery reckoned they could have just fired out ahead and then just brought it back in, but they didn't. But the next day they were able to fire good support, mainly in support of D Company, and they killed quite a lot on the slopes there. So the Chinese 60th Division, as it was,

03:00 lost quite a lot of men. I don't think anyone has been able to count the casualties, but a rough estimate they say 1000 or more, perhaps 2000. Who knows? There were heaps of them.

How do you feel, looking at this scene at the time?

Glad. Glad they were where they were and not still bloody alive to come back at us again. Might be a callous way of looking at it, but

03:30 war is war, or better to say war is hell.

Must be a gruesome scene.

It's not funny, although the digger has a capacity to make it so. I recall going up – or coming back on that slope, where somebody had got one of the Chinese bodies and propped him up against a rock and put a cigarette in his mouth, and then wrote a quick, "Anyone got a match?"

04:00 Digger humour, it's pretty crude at times.

Do you have any other examples of humour?

No, not really, that is one that comes to mind. But the Chinese, can't fault them for their bravery because they kept coming. I think it

04:30 might be a bit off-putting myself. I have not been in that position where you have had so many bloody casualties amongst your own troops, not in the hundreds. You might perhaps get used to having a few killed, but not hundreds. And they would have been experiencing hundreds.

What did you think of the Chinese as fighters?

Good. Good. They had the capacity, because they had no transport,

05:00 they had the capacity to cover 30 or 40 miles in a night and turn up on a totally different front, and they would live on a handful of rice. I mean the rations weren't really keeping up with them, but they carried a sort of little sock with rice that they used to boil some of that up and that was it. Yeah. And the other thing with the North Koreans, you could sometimes pick up where they were because they ate a lot of garlic,

05:30 and you could smell, you know, when they sweat, you could smell the garlic and you'd know you were somewhere pretty close to them when you were out on patrols; you would start looking around a little more carefully, perhaps.

What did you do to avoid them picking up on you guys?

Well, we tried never to use shaving soap, aftershave lotion, anything like that you just don't use it because

06:00 it smells, and the smell lingers for hours afterwards. So you don't use it. I guess we had smells. After all, if your body is unwashed for a few weeks, you are going to obviously smell to high heaven, but – I mean you get used to it, you don't notice it; whether they did I don't know. I never met one who was able to give me an answer. I dare say we smelt to high heaven.

That's quite a

06:30 **different kind of sensory kind of thing, being on patrol or being out, isn't it. Describe that for us, how are your senses heightened?**

Well, you know you are going out into – well, neutral ground, it's enemy ground, all the ground in front of you is enemy ground. So you just move cautiously, you don't bunch up, you don't talk, all your movements are controlled by hand signals.

07:00 And everybody knows the hand signals, you know, "enemy," "stop," "move on," "come on," "move out that way." So you used hand signals to demonstrate what you required. And consequently you don't talk. The Americans, they go out and they chatter, chatter like anything. I think a good example of that, later in Korea, they got – the Australians were using

07:30 tracker dogs who were able to detect the enemy before they reached them. And they detached this tracker dog and its handler to an American patrol. They went out on the patrol and the dog alerted them, but the Americans took no notice, just went on, and they ran into an ambush. Quite a lot of them got killed and so did the dog and his handler. They just don't pay

08:00 attention.

Did you use dogs with...?

No, we had no dogs. The only animals we noticed over there was the wild pigs. They used to come in and eat the bodies. You'd often find after a battle you'd hear a bit of noise out there, and come the morning you would see the wild pigs are still at them or have been at them during the night, eating the bodies.

08:30 Quite a lot of that went on. We actually starting eating wild pig until we found that out. We stopped eating wild pig.

Do you eat pig now?

Oh yeah, I eat pork, I know they don't feed on dead bodies. We cut it out over there. No.

09:00 But anyway.

I was asking about the senses, your hearing, your smell: describe for us what happens on a patrol.

Well in those days my sense of hearing and smell were quite good. But I have lost a lot of my hearing, we all got deafened over there when we were shelled. My hearing was good in those days and you could pick up noises easily. And

09:30 smell things. You could see small signs of movement, just a bush move or something like that. So your senses are really tuned. Luckily, most of the, or the patrols I was on, we never got surprised. Other patrols unfortunately weren't as cautious and found themselves with a few casualties.

10:00 **Were there any close calls when you were on patrols?**

Not so much when we were on patrol. I had several close calls, but they were in a company or a platoon attack or defence. I forget. Yeah, on Sardine I used to wear my slouch hat every time, and I ended up with a bullet through the rim of it one

10:30 time there on Sardine. That was as close as I got, that and my binoculars. Came the time when I was due to go out – and we never knew when we were to be relieved, they just, as they said to me, "Sergeant, look at that truck down there, it's leaving in five minutes and if you are not on the truck in five minutes, you could be here for another three months." I was on that truck quick as a flash. I had had enough by then,

11:00 13 months. I had had a few close calls, lost a lot mates and I thought, "That's enough, I have done enough."

What goes through your mind when you look at a bullet hole through your slouch hat?

Well, I didn't feel that. It's funny, often you don't feel it. You feel it if you get hit, I was very fortunate, I never actually got hit, but

11:30 some people say a rifle bullet is like having a truck drive into you and others have gone through and never even really felt it. So it depends.

Does it make you think of any, I don't know, bigger thoughts of faith or…?

No, I think you go into an attack and you know there's a

12:00 possibility you could get hit. When you come out, you say, "That's another one down, another one gone," and you are still alive, still on your feet, so wait for the next one, you know.

What stops you losing your nerve?

Well, as I said earlier, the thing that stops you is you know that if you are likely to show signs of weakness the others are

12:30 going to do it, and it can be a cumulative effect so you don't do it. You know that your mate's not going to do it so you are not going to do it. I guess the greatest thing is not the fear, it's the fear of being seen to be afraid.

And you were telling us quite detailed information about Kapyong, what did you think of the command of this battle overall?

13:00 I thought we were very fortunate. The command of the rifle companies themselves, the rifle company commanders and the platoon commanders, section commanders, corporals in charge of, nominally in charge of 10 men, I think they all did extremely well. I think the decision making at a higher level could have been improved. As I say, there were a few

13:30 things that happened that shouldn't have happened, and things that should have happened didn't happen, and normally you got experienced enough officers who'd do the right thing. The battalion commander at that time, he performed exceedingly well on several earlier actions, but that one I thought, myself, I thought he slipped up a bit.

14:00 Others may not have thought that. I guess you are going to get a different aspect. I mean you can have two blokes fighting the same fight, and pitch 10-15 metres apart, and they give you a totally different version of the battle. Hard to say.

You mentioned some other areas of poor…?

Yeah, I thought poor administration. I think it doesn't matter whether you are going to be out for three hours, four hours, eight hours or two

14:30 days. We had been eating cooked rations. There was no guarantee that the next lot of cooked rations are going to get through, so they should have issued combat rations. OK, as far as going into defensive position, doesn't matter if you are going to be there for six-eight hours, put the things up; if the next day you have got to pull them all down and return them, so what? In that case they should have been issued,

15:00 mines, more grenades, more ammunition to fight a defensive battle, and we didn't have it.

And there was another case, maybe not with Kapyong, but mentioned off-camera about there being another commander rumoured to be drunk. Where was this?

This was the second battle at Pakchon. It was after Charlie Green, he was hit – we had been

15:30 fighting for virtually three days, and Charlie Green had been without sleep for almost three days. We'd only just put a tent up for him, and he had only just got in and laid down, and the enemy fired about eight or nine shells over, most of which hit the forward rifle companies without causing casualties. The one shell came over the ridge lines, struck a tree near his tent and he got shrapnel in the guts, taken away to hospital and died a couple of days later.

16:00 As I say, they put the previous battalion commander in command, and I think he was so afraid of his own imperfections that he just got himself on the grog, he apparently had a bottle of whiskey with him and got himself half-drunk and then withdrew the company, and when they asked him where the company was supposed to go, he said, "Oh, down there about 1000 yards." "Where?" "About 1000 yards down there." Well, you don't move

16:30 companies without having a place for them to go and a task for them to do, you just don't do it. And you don't ever withdraw a company in the middle of a counter-attack. So things went wrong.

There was also mention off-camera about a North Korean hut?

Oh yeah, yeah. Earlier, the North Koreans, well, all Koreans, North and South,

17:00 in those days used to live in mud huts, mud and thatch. And they have mud floors, and when they are laying the floors they form tunnels under the floor for each room –well, they usually only have about two rooms in a hut, the kitchen area and the living area. And they have a little fireplace outside and they light a small fire, and the heat travels in through these tunnels and warms the hut up a little, because it gets awfully cold in the winter.

17:30 And it had been raining for three or four days and we were all soaking wet, the rifle companies were out in the hills, we weren't doing anything of great deal. I was still a member of the mortar platoon, not as a fire controller then, with the mortar platoon. And a couple of us, three of us I think, went into this hut out of the rain, put our blankets on the ground and put a big fire in the thing and lit the fire up and went to

18:00 sleep. And in the middle of the night there was a smell of burning and the blankets were smouldering, the floor was just about red hot, the blankets were almost alight, but the worst thing about that, apart from the burning, scorching the blankets, we all ended up with body lice. The Koreans were bound with it in those days. They are peasants, no facilities. I mean their toilet is

18:30 usually an outside hut, and they would go to the outside hut and they start off in the middle and they do their business in the middle and go round and round and pile higher and higher, and in the summer when they go to plant their crops they use their manure for the fields, they dig their manure out and that goes on to the fields. And because of their lack of hygiene they end up with body lice, so we ended up with body lice, and it was another three or four weeks before we could get another change of

19:00 clothing and a shower, we had to carry bloody body lice. God, it would drive you mad, scratch, scratch, scratch all the time. We didn't bother to send our clothing to the laundry, we just put them on a fire and burnt them. I think you were also mentioning, off-camera, about hill 410. That took place before the Battle of Kapyong,

19:30 actually. And it's a battle that became known as the "slippery dip" or the "slippery slide." We were tasked to capture a line of hills and the battalion captured this line of hills without a fight and stayed up on overnight, and we were to launch an attack at daylight tomorrow morning on the hills in front of us, and one of them was hill 410.

20:00 And it was designed originally to be a one-company attack, and A Company was designated to be the thing, and I was with the MFC, with D Company. Well, A Company went off, started off at the ridge line and they got across the field without any casualties and, as they got across the ridge line, which you had to crawl on hands and knees – it was so steep and slippery with snow and ice you couldn't stand – and they ran into

20:30 casualties, got quite a few casualties and got pinned down and asked for assistance. And D Company was tasked to go up this other ridge line, there were several ridge lines they could approach, and we went up this second ridge line crawling up on hands and knees, and then we got caught in machine gun across from our right, too. And the group in the HQ Company – we had two Americans with us, an officer and a

21:00 signaller, fire controller for their 4.2-inch mortars – well, they sent a burst of machine gun fire and I had the officer, the signaller was on my right and the officer was on my left, we got caught with this burst of machine gun fire. And I didn't get hit but the two Americans did: the American signaller had his handset up to his face, talking on his radio, and he got shot through the handpiece; and the officer got

21:30 shot in the buttocks a couple of yards over from me. Anyway, when I crawled over across to the Americans, I said, “Where were you hit?” He said, “I don’t know, but it hurts here.” It went right through his jaw, it shattered his jaw. Anyway, we went up the hill and eventually got up the hill after a bit of fighting and we got up there, and I was a little bit slow, I had this bloody radio set on my back too, and I

22:00 arrived about a couple of minutes after the rest of the Company HQ got up there. And a soldier introduced himself to me, and he said, “G’day, my name’s Ian Hamilton, I am the company runner,” and I said, “G’day, I am Ron Perkins, I am the three” mortar fire controller.” He said, “Good. Whatever you do, keep your head down, there’s a sniper over there, just over the ridge line.” I said, “OK, I will keep that in mind.” Then somebody called, “Company runner!” “Yes, sir,” stood up and got shot straight through the back of his head.

22:30 Blew – you could see it blew out the back of his, blew his khaki hat out and blew half his brains out. Hit the deck, bang. Acting Company Sergeant Major Des said to me, “Ron, go up and see how Ian is.” I said, “He’s dead.” He said, “No, go up and have a look.” I said, “He’s had half his bloody brains blown out!” “No, no, you go up and have a look.” “If you want to have a look, Des, you go and have a bloody look, there’s no way I am going to stick my head up over the top.”

23:00 Anyway me and another soldier carried poor Ian Hamilton out. I had only met him less than two minutes and bang, he’s gone. So Norm Peel and I, another soldier, carried him down the hill and loaded him on the jeep and sent the body back. We lost A and B Company, we lost a total of about 12 killed and about 30 wounded, taking that hill. In

23:30 retrospect, I look at it now, after I became commissioned, you would look at the tactics and see that it shouldn’t have bee a one-company attack, it should have been a two-company attack right from the word go. Might have saved a few casualties, but who knows. War being what it is you can never tell, decided too late to be a two-company attack.

What runs through your mind when you see someone die in front of you?

“Shit.” But you know, yeah,

24:00 you knew, you just knew he was dead before he hit the ground because of the amount of the back of his head that had been blown off, there was no way in the world that he’s going to survive. No. I have never forgotten his name, and he only mentioned it to me once. And I will never forget his name. A nice young soldier. Especially after he had said, “Keep your head down, there’s a sniper over there,” and then he stood up because somebody

24:30 called for the company runner.

Do you remember that image in your head?

Yeah, yeah.

Does it come back to you often?

It comes back to me occasionally, even after all this time. I mean, I don’t think I suffer from this, what is it? Oh, some syndrome they call it.

Post-traumatic.

Post-traumatic stress syndrome, I don’t think I suffer from that, but some things

25:00 stick in your mind forever. But, like everybody, you go on doing your job.

What about times of fun?

Oh yeah, we had a few of those. I can recall that before the Battle of Kapyong we were back for a few days, they organised various company sporting events. I remember one time they even put a

25:30 stage up and we had Dame Nellie Melba came up. No, no, it wasn’t Nellie Melba, it was another famous Australian opera singer, and she came up and gave us one concert. And I remember Danny Kaye came up to have a look around, and he came right up and said, “Where are the enemy?” “Oh, about 100 yards over there,” and he took off,

26:00 gone. He didn’t stick around. Oh, no, there were the good times and the bad times. You do make friends, and they’re lifelong friends, I guess. So I am fortunate in being the President/Secretary of our association, I have a lot to do with various members and quite a few of them are in Brisbane.

What’s the thing that really

26:30 **makes you lifelong friends?**

I think it’s the fact that everybody puts their life on the line for the next fellow. It’s not a matter of bravado, it’s just that you know that your life depends on him and his life depends on you and that’s it. It’s a unique thing, I guess it’s a sort of

27:00 friendship, and I am not deriding civilians, believe me, but the civilian wouldn't really understand unless they have been under the same circumstances. The fact that you do trust them with your life is that you make lifelong friends with them.

Any particular characters stand out for you?

Oh God, yeah, you have got dozens of them. You have got people who – I could show you some photographs of some of them.

27:30 I can remember Bradley, Luke Bradley, he was a CSM [Company Sergeant Major], big tall fellow, about six foot six, red-haired, I used to call him the "red steer." He's dead now, he died, but at Kapyong he was the CSM of B Company, captured the 40 prisoners, and the Chinese prisoners didn't know what to do because the Chinese never tell them what to do if they are captured. And they used to gather around him like bees round a honey-

28:00 pot. I would move and they would be round him and saying, "Which way do I go, what do I do?" Old Blue, he used to smoke his pipe, and, "Follow me." Great fellow. Oh yeah, lot of comedians. Unfortunate fact of life, though, that a lot of them have fallen off the perch.

28:30 **And what kind of comedy can people come up with in this sort of situation?**

Just to make a big joke of everything, you know. It's hard to put words to, everybody tries to make light of it. I mean, if you dwell too much on all the death and destruction, you probably wouldn't want to go on. But, no. No, I mean a lot of them are pretty old.

29:00 Frank Hassett, he's in his 80s now, 85. Benny O'Dowd is about 83 or 84. I say, one stretcher-bearer just died a couple of months ago. He was 92. He was exceptional because he must have been in his late 30s, early 40s when he came to join us. He had been an infantryman in Papua New Guinea and volunteered for the war, but didn't want to kill any more. He was going to be a stretcher-bearer and save lives,

29:30 and he did. He was good, Milton Trotter.

What about the international forces, how did you get along with the other nations?

The Poms and the Scotties, we got along with extremely well, especially the Argyles, we got along very well with them. Ah, yeah, they are much the same, the same army make-up, perhaps our discipline not as so much parade ground as theirs, but we got along very well with

30:00 them. When the Battle of Kapyong happened, the Argyle Sutherlanders were already on ship in Inchon Harbour waiting to go back to Hong Kong, and they tried to get off the ship to come and give us a hand, but they put a guard on of armed military police to stop anybody getting off the ship. They would have come to our help. They were a great mob. I got a few of them are members of our

30:30 association, got two or three of them, I think it is. Yeah.

Did you have any interactions where you swapped things or trade…?

Oh, no, we would say the Kiwis, they would steal the tents right over your head – they did, matter of fact, on one occasion, they took a mess tent where people were sleeping and went off with it. But, you know, friendly rivalry, we got on well with the Kiwis.

31:00 Some of the Americans we got on all right with, once they got used to our ways, I mean we had various American artillery observers attached to us at times or four.two" mortar fire controllers were with us, and they got used to the idea. You know, we used to shave every day, which they didn't want to do initially, but they eventually knuckled down and came good. We didn't have a

31:30 great deal to do with the Turks, because the Turks got pretty badly done over at Kunu-ri when the Chinese came down and we didn't see much of them after that. We did have a bit to do with others, the Cosby's and the King's Own Scottish Borderers and the King's Shropshire Light Infantry, but not as friendly as we were with the Argyles and the Middlesex. The Americans we didn't get on all that well

32:00 with, the American Marines were all right but they were a bit too gung-ho, they were likely to occupy a position and refuse to dig in because Marines don't do that, so they suffer more casualties than they need do. And of course the Americans always seem to take the capacity of going straight up the guts instead of doing a good reconnaissance and deciding which is the least likely to cause casualties. We didn't have much to do with the French, not while I was

32:30 there anyway. The French came along fairly late, the French battalion, they were in towards the end of my tour there. Some of the Marines –well, not Marines, some of the American units, they had transport units which were all black, the officers, and they were good drivers, but by God they were dangerous drivers.

33:00 Sit with those and the speed they go whistling around the corners.

Did you notice divisions between the black and white?

Oh, yeah, there were quite a few. The American negroes were looked down on – I think the attitudes have certainly changed now because the Americans, African/Americans, have more integrated into the

American forces than they were. I mean there they were given all the menial

33:30 tasks, they were just truck drivers and hygiene workers and that sort of stuff. I think they only had, when we were there, only had one black infantry unit, and it was commanded by whites anyway. So, you know....

Was there anything made in the Australian forces of your English background?

Oh, when my brother and I first came over we were "Pommie bastards", but that soon, that was only a matter of a week or

34:00 so and that was dropped down and we were right into being Australians, there was no great problem, we fitted in all right. I mean people would say to me, "Do you back this football..." Well, I mean I don't back any English team. I was Australian from the moment I arrived here, 50-odd years ago. No.

And, what did you think of the New Zealand artillery?

They were good,

34:30 mostly, they were good. They were – you know, they knew they were going to come into the war and they formed this artillery unit and they trained it well, and I think they did a damned good job. I mean at times, it was amazing at times, not this battle, but we did get some American artillery support as well, but later on at the Battle of Maryang San, and

35:00 I left just as it was starting, one time they started, they had relief from the New Zealanders, they had an American 155mm battery, they had an American eight-inch Howitzer battery, and they had corps artillery, they had more guns than you could poke a bloody stick at. The weight of shell fire that came down there, they tell me was tremendous. The Chinese had a lot by that time, too.

Take us through what happened with you

35:30 **after Kapyong and after sleeping.**

I was only in a couple of more minor actions after that. We had a change of platoon commander. Because there had been a turnover with the more senior ranks I became the platoon sergeant, I was still a corporal acting as the platoon sergeant, and I didn't get promoted to sergeant until September which is a month before

36:00 I left there. But I acted as a platoon sergeant for a couple of months. Yeah, couple of months I suppose it was, then I went back to being a section commander with the mortar platoon when a more senior sergeant came in and took over as the replacement platoon sergeant. So I didn't do a great deal more action after that.

36:30 Yeah, we had a few light skirmishes but I wasn't that particularly involved.

And you mentioned catching this truck, what was the feeling like as you got on board?

It was great, you know. I had been over there for 13 months just on. I was tired and I had had enough. And I contracted some sort of a rash at that time and so I had a

37:00 rash all over my face; I was glad to get out and get some medical treatment, for a start. So that was the first thing that happened to me when I got back. I went into the Australian Field Hospital to clear that, but that was just dirty living conditions, just a bit unfortunate that I hadn't got to it a bit earlier.

What was the rash?

Just

37:30 I suppose I picked it up from scratches on the face or something, and dirt got into them. There wasn't a great deal of treatment. Actually, I don't know whether – they have probably taken an interview with Dr Beard, who was our medical officer at Kapyong. While he was over there in the first winter, he became known as "Barbersol Beard", because people would come to him with frostbites and things like that and he would give them a

38:00 tube of American shaving cream, Barbersol, "Here, go and rub that on your hands, that'll fix it." Of course it wasn't so much the shaving cream that fixed it as it was massaging it and getting the circulation going that did it. But he became known as "Barbersol Beard", he was a character.

In what way was he a character?

Well, he was a tall man, he was about six-two, six-three, and at Kapyong they tell me he was in the RAP, which

38:30 is a tent, that was all they had for treating the casualties they had. The Chinese were over the road firing at them and quite a few rounds were going through the tent, but the Chinese, apparently, as soon as they brought the casualties out to put them on to a Red Cross marked stretcher – we had some of the Jeeps had Red Cross on them – as soon as they brought the casualties out to put on the Red Cross stretcher the Chinese stopped firing and didn't start up again until the casualties

39:00 moved away, and then started up again. So they were not all bastards. You only think so at the time.

I guess I will leave it there.

39:18 **End of tape**

Tape 7

00:36 **Just first off, before we leave Korea, just tell me a bit about Reg Saunders.**

Yeah. Well, he was the first Australian commissioned officer, he got commissioned in the Middle East, Second World War, and he volunteered for Korea when they called for K-Force volunteers.

01:00 And he came across to us as a lieutenant originally, ended up as a platoon commander, and he ended up as a company commander, and he was very well liked. And I was quite surprised, not about Reg, but a comment made by an American officer who came up to us after Kapyong and we were just talking. And he said, "You have got a black officer?" "Yes, yes."

01:30 "Who is he in command of?" "The whole company? You mean he's got white men under him?" "Of course he has, he's a bloody good officer, you'd never fault him anywhere, he almost walks on water." And he was a good officer.

What made him a good officer?

He went through the ranks as a private soldier, he started off as a private soldier, and had quite a bit of action in the Middle East and New Guinea, learned the tricks of the trade

02:00 how to become a soldier. He was just a natural born leader. You get people like that who are just natural born leaders, and it doesn't matter how many people they are around, they will eventually come to the front, and he did. He was a very nice fellow, extremely nice fellow and very competent. His company would swear by him. There is no doubt about that. It was rather unfortunate that he went a bit down the drain when he came back to Australia.

02:30 Put in charge of a personnel depot somewhere and got on to the drink. But otherwise he was a damned good fellow. Damned good officer. You get one or two that shine and others that hide their light under a bushel, and so they should keep it under. But, that's the way it is.

So you were telling Kiernan [interviewer] about this

03:00 **truck that came by and they said, "Quick, you had better hop on or you'll be…."**

Well, that was when I was coming out of Korea, I had just completed about 13 months there. It was rather unfortunate that we were very short of specialists then, because they were taking mortar people out, mortar numbers to man the mortars, people who were fire controllers, and weren't replacing them.

03:30 Consequently it came out of the blue, because I hadn't expected to go out for a while because there were no replacements and, as I say, I had only been a sergeant for a matter of a few weeks. And they just said, "See that truck, sergeant? If you are not on it in five minutes you are going to stay here for another three months." I was gone. I left my gear, I didn't even take all my gear out of the trailer. I just took my rifle and my equipment and hopped on the bus.

What

04:00 **did you leave behind?**

All my sleeping gear, things like that, God knows what else I left. Doesn't matter.

And did you get to say goodbye to…?

No. No. As I said, it was going. We recently had a change of platoon commanders, and the new platoon commander I wasn't all that friendly with. So we

04:30 didn't say goodbye, no. But I missed a lot of them, I was sorry I wasn't able to say goodbye to them. But that's the way the cookie crumbles. Whether I was foolish in believing that they meant it when they said you'd be staying for another three months, I don't know, I just didn't take the chance.

And where did you go to on that bus?

They took us back to Seoul.

05:00 Took us first of all back to the Brigade HQ and they had a sergeants' mess there, and a sergeant I met in – a friend of mine, from 2RAR, Ron Watts, he was actually my section commander when we went to Korea and he was taken out and put with one of the rifle companies as a platoon sergeant, he was going out at the same time. He said, "Well, you have never been in a sergeants' mess before so

05:30 this is your chance." And so we went in to the sergeants' mess, the first time I had been in the sergeants' mess.

What was it like?

Oh, they are only rough tents and that, but the fact that the sergeants have a mess of their own where they normally eat and have a little bar and a drink, it was great to be – I enjoyed sergeants' messes, I enjoyed them for quite a few years after before I got commissioned. So when I got back to Japan

06:00 of course I went straight into the hospital there, in there for a couple of weeks and then I was returned to Australia.

And tell me about the hospital.

Well, it was actually a British Army hospital, I can't remember the name of it. A very strict hospital, the Matron sort of ruled things with a rod of iron. So beds got to be

06:30 made tight every morning, if you are able to get up, you know, the bed has got to be tight as a drum so a coin will bounce on it and that sort of thing. "Don't do this and don't do that, don't flirt with the nurses, don't do this, don't do that."

Was there much flirting with the nurses going on?

Probably a bit, you know. I think most of us were just trying to get back to Australia.

And you were in hospital with your

07:00 **rash?**

Yes, with the rash, and they gave me whatever it was to cure it and it did, started to clear up within a few days. And they discharged me as it started clearing up and I ended up back in Australia, and I went down to the Southern Command Personnel Depot, Royal Park, I think they called it, and I stayed there after I had some leave.

How did you get back to Australia?

07:30 I flew back, yeah, flew back, same as we went up, we flew back. And because we were only coming back in dribs and drabs they didn't bother sending a ship or anything like that, because you might only get four, five or six people going out at any one time, three or four days in between groups perhaps.

What was it like being back? I suppose to start in hospital in relative comfort after having been…?

I suppose it was a

08:00 bit of a let-down, you know, you are able to sleep all night, didn't have to get up and do any sentry duty. I mean, we all used to take a share in the sentry work. But it was good.

Where did you live in Australia, did you have anywhere established?

No, I just lived in whatever army barracks they had. I came out as a single man and I didn't get married until after I got up to

08:30 Queensland. So that was one of the things, they told me that I was going to a National Service battalion and I thought, "Oh, God, there's going to be one out at Puckapunyal." I had had a few months there before and I knew what it was like, I didn't like that, so I just said, "No, I would prefer to go to Queensland." And it wasn't until years later that I found it wasn't a National Service battalion, they were actually going to post me back to 2RAR, which I probably would have accepted.

09:00 So if I had done that I would probably never have met my wife and married her. So there we are. So fortunately I did say I would come up to Queensland.

Did you catch up with your brother at all?

Yeah, he got hospitalised out from Korea early in the piece and I didn't see him again for a couple of years. I eventually caught up with him, yeah. He got married late in life and had a couple of unfortunate

09:30 experiences with women who, you know, whether it was him or her I don't know, but anyway he got married later in life and went over and moved to Western Australia. And his widow is still over there, and we still go over and see her now and again. Yeah. So he died, what, almost 11 years ago. He was almost 67 when he died.

And so you moved to Queensland. And what were you doing in

10:00 **Queensland?**

I was an instructor at Wacol National Service. They had a number of companies, I went to G Company originally as a sergeant instructor section commander, and after a few months I ended up as a platoon

commander. That was strange to me, because there were a couple of fellows there that were Second World War sergeants in the same

10:30 platoon and they got overlooked and I got appointed as platoon commander. I had no idea why they did it, but they did. And yeah, we had a British officer commanding, a real pukka sahib, he and I got on quite well together, but he had an unfortunate habit of, whilst you were on parade ground and drilling the soldiers, of coming up and taking over for a few minutes, and he did it

11:00 to me once too often. He came over and took over the parade from me, and after about the fifth or sixth time in the couple of weeks, I said, "Your parade, sir!" saluted him and walked off and left him with the soldiers for the next 25 minutes. So I didn't stay with his company very much longer, he got me transferred out, he wasn't happy with me.

What were the basic things you were instructing?

On foot drill, weapon training,

11:30 tactics, you know, all sorts of things like that, but mainly drill and weapon training because we would get these young lads march in from the country, some of them couldn't march, couldn't keep – swing their left foot with their left thing and that sort of thing, and so it was quite funny, you would come in with a bunch of weird, tied-up sort of fellows and they would go out and they would be smart as a

12:00 rabbit. They were really good. I made some really good friends from those days. Yeah.

And what's your opinion on national service?

Sorry?

What's your opinion on national service?

I think they did the wrong thing by disbanding it because they made a lot of young Australian lads conscious of the armed forces and what the

12:30 armed forces do, and it gave them a lot of respect for the senior NCOs and officers, attitudes that we don't get today. Young kids look at soldiers and sailors and that type of thing and think they are a bit of dirt, I don't think they have the same ethos these days. Maybe I am wrong, maybe I am old-fashioned, but that's my opinion. I thought it was one of the best things since button-up boots.

13:00 It was good.

And in terms of people coming in from the country, were there any of them that were resistant to this kind of…?

Oh yes, quite a few of them didn't want to. But, as I say, the majority after a week or so they settled down and really put their heart into it, and it really turned them into good citizens, in my view. So, you know, some of them came in rather reluctantly

13:30 and didn't like the idea of authority, but they settled down and turned out to be really good soldiers.

We'll just stop for one second there.

So just on national service, as an instructor, if there are people coming in and being really resistant to being there and discipline, what sort of techniques do you use?

Well, you had to reason with them. There were some people that would sort it out by saying,

14:00 "Well, if you don't like it come and round the back," and they would go round the back and indulge in a bit of fisticuffs, but I didn't believe in that. I think if you can't make a fellow see reason by logic, then you are wasting your time. I always got co-operation from them. As I say, some of them turned out really first-class citizens. I met up with some of them who I had trained when I went up to Rockhampton,

14:30 who were in the same intakes there, and they joined the local CMF, which was compulsory for them anyway, and this particular one, he became a sergeant there. By that time I had done a Vickers machine gun course and I was instructing in Vickers machine guns and I taught him that as well as mortars. Yes, that was very interesting. I had a – what, about three years

15:00 I think with that CMF unit, started off with Mackay and went down to Rockhampton and took charge of the depot down there.

And when did you meet your wife?

Ah, let's see. I had come back, it would have been towards the end of '51 or early 1952. I used to go into town and occasionally I would go to a dance, and I went to a dance in the

15:30 City Hall there in Brisbane and I met her in there, and she was a nurse, a qualified sister, a nursing sister at that time. So we had a few dates and struck it off well and we decided to get married, but we were going to leave it until the following January, which would have been January 1953, and when I applied for leave they said, "No, you can't have it because we have got an intake marching in then. So if

you want to get married you have virtually got to get married in the next couple of weeks."

16:00 So we did. We got married in November, 29th November 1952. I think we had known each other less than six months, but we clicked and we are still together 51 years later. Here we are, so something went right.

And when you had to move around with the army, was it…?

That was a bit hard on the wife and kids, because it meant that

16:30 they had got to uproot and move away from their friends and settle down and try and make new friends, and whereas my job was fairly easy because I was in the army and I would be going to an army posting and probably meeting fellows I had served with in Korea or elsewhere, and it's fairly easy for me, but it's hard for the wife and especially the children, I suppose.

Did you ever talk to your wife about what you had done in Korea, your service there?

No.

Why is that?

17:00 I guess it's one of those things that you don't talk about a great deal. I have spoken more about my experiences in Korea today than I ever have. I just didn't mention that. I mean, I did mention that I served in Korea and that the winters were bad, but you don't mention bad things, never did.

Did she ever ask?

17:30 Oh, she asked but I brushed it aside. I mean you can't bring back those people who are already gone, so I just didn't. Didn't focus on it.

What was it like settling back into the training and that sort of work you were doing after…?

Well, coming back from Korea was

18:00 particularly difficult. I went back to Melbourne during my leave there, because I stayed in the barracks and I used to go into town every day, and there was a pub that all the Korean three Battalion veterans all used to go to this one pub, and I can't remember the name of it now, long gone, but we used to drink there regularly. I do recall one time walking along the street there and a car backfired

18:30 and I dived into the gutter, taking cover. I felt like an absolute idiot. I would never admit to it today, but there you are. We had a lot of good times, a lot of good mates came back there. A lot of them are members of our association, we write to them, talk to them on the 'phone now and again. Yeah, I made a lot of good friends.

19:00 **And did that make it a bit easier?**

Yeah, oh yeah, yeah. There are lot of them I haven't seen since the Korean War. One of them just got found recently in a hospital down south and has been escorted up to Townsville, I got a photograph of him somewhere; anyway, I did write to him to see if he wants to contact me again, but he doesn't, so

19:30 that's the way it goes.

And when you would sort of get together in the pub and that sort of thing, would you talk together about the war?

Well, yes, sometimes, but I guess you could discuss it with people who had undergone those experiences but you wouldn't discuss it with strangers. They just wouldn't understand. I mean it just sounds like a lot of bulldust, doesn't it? So no, we just

20:00 talk amongst ourselves.

And what was your reaction to, I guess, that people have labelled Korea the "Forgotten War" or the "Unfinished War"?

It was largely a forgotten war for us because there were other things going on in the world. And, for example, when casualties started to come through, there were a lot of floods in Victoria and NSW [New South Wales], they made the headlines….

20:30 I mean, the casualty lists were published in the newspapers, so I have been told, the Kapyong casualty list was published over three separate editions. They wouldn't publish it all together because 33 dead and 59 wounded and POWs was a hell of a lot to take in one go. And there was no television so there were no television reporters showing footage of it

21:00 and thrusting it down your neck every day, as it was in Vietnam. And there were only one or two war correspondents over there, so I don't know how much was written about it. But I don't think there was a lot written about it, so generally the public weren't too aware of it. So it became known to us as the "Forgotten War".

So if you were, for example, when you first got back to Melbourne, and you might wear your

uniform or anything around the city, was there ever any

21:30 **reaction?**

No, because in those days there was no antipathy towards the armed forces. Vietnam was a different story, that was unpleasant, but Korea, no, they didn't worry. I mean, you were just soldiers going around just the same as the rest of the soldiers going on leave, whether it be from Puckapunyal or elsewhere, you were just one of the mob.

22:00 **Did it make it harder to settle back in?**

I don't think so, really. I mean once I had got over my leave and over my bout of drinking, which I think we all indulged in, I just settled back into normal work. I was a senior NCO, so I had to supervise working parties, take them away to various places and get the odd jobs done.

22:30 So that was it. And then I got my posting up to Queensland and that kept me busy then from then on.

And what do you remember hearing about sort of the end of the war in Korea when the armistice was signed and…?

Well, actually, I didn't hear a great deal of it, I think I was probably engrossed in other things, I was trying to work my way up the ladder. I probably had my

23:00 head down and bum up and nose to the grindstone just trying to get the job done, and do a good job and earn promotions.

How closely did you still follow what was going on in Korea?

I followed it as closely as I could, but of course in those days you didn't have a great deal of a newsreel on – there was no TV, of course, but there were no newsreels every week in the cinemas as far as I can

23:30 recall, there wasn't all that much in the papers. I don't even remember reading about the Battle of Maryang San, which started the day after I left. So, you know, I don't think there was too much known in Australia at that time of what was going on. So that's why we still call it the "Forgotten War". Politicians still swear they never forget but, yeah,

24:00 but they said that last time, too.

So after you had been at Wacol, you went to…?

I went to Mackay, and that was in 1954. Actually, before that, when I left Wacol they sent me to Enoggera, two Battalion was about to come back from Malaya, and I was a sergeant in charge of all the other ranks on the base

24:30 party, that was the reception party, the detail, so I was with them, I was there with them for a couple of weeks. And then my promotion to O2came through and I was posted up to initially to Mackay, up to the training depot up there with the 42 Infantry Battalion, or I think they called it then, or a bit later,

25:00 the Royal Queensland Regiment. And I was the instructor with a company, one of the rifle companies, doing the training programs for them. And after I had been there for three or four weeks they decided to start sending me down to Rockhampton to do a bit of supervision, and I would go down there for a week and come back, and then go down for another week and come back. And

25:30 eventually they posted me down there permanently to take charge of the depot. They had a few problems down there, they had a CMF sergeants' mess that was losing money and they wanted to try and find out why, so I found out why and stopped it. I had a WO [Warrant Officer] class two CMF resign, walk out, because he was taking grog out of the mess and not paying for it. Anyway, so that mess started making money after that.

26:00 It was great, I enjoyed it down there looking after the depot. I had about three or four other WOs under me, all the other staff there, they had an officer there, but I was actually running the depot. So it was quite an interesting time. And then while I was there they had a regular officer take over as commanding officer, which is

26:30 strange because they had always had a CMF officer run it before, someone who had had experience in World War II, but then we had him take over. And then we got the, and the regular adjutant became the whole staff RAA, and I was there 1954 and went up to there till about the middle of

27:00 1958 when I got transferred down to RMC, Royal Military College, in Duntroon. I became an O2 Instructor down there.

Was this a big sort of – quite a good move?

Yes, it was. It was a rather strange move because I had an officer come up to me and said, "Why are you here?" and I said, "Well, I was posted here." "No, you are not, you are posted to RMC Duntroon." I said, "Am I?"

27:30 “Yes, you were posted down there six weeks ago.” “No-one’s told me.” So I had to get on – well, my wife was pregnant then with our second child, and we only had – the doctor said, “If she doesn’t move same time you are going,” which was in a couple of days’ time, “she will be staying because she won’t be able to fly after that.” So we bundled the family up and went down there. And it was snowing when we got to Canberra. It had been summer up in Rockhampton.

28:00 **How had you never got the news of your posting?**

I don’t know, I never found out. Obviously somebody had received it and just put away and didn’t mention anything and thought, “We will do that tomorrow,” and tomorrow never comes, so they never told me. And apparently I should have been there six weeks before I did. But I arrived there and got off the aircraft and it was snowing, there was no married quarters there for me.

28:30 But I was lucky, there was an Education WO there who said, “Come into my house and stay there for a while.” So I stayed there for a week until they allocated me a married quarter. So it was very good of him. I had about four years there.

And the married quarters, your family lives there as well?

Yep, we had a big old timber house, cold as charity in winter. But right near the

29:00 parade ground, RMC. So I had four years there as a warrant officer instructor.

And what was the difference, can you compare what it was like being an instructor there compared to, say…?

Well, prior to that I had been instructing CMF. This time we were instructing staff corps as to future officers. I mean, you know, people who were in the staff corps then, corps of staff cadets,

29:30 a lot of them are now major generals and I am on first name terms with them. Our Governor, Peter, he was a friend of mine, he was a staff cadet when I was there, and quite a few others like that. No, it was really good because they were the future leaders, but it was hard going, you had to know what you were talking about and put it over, so they used to select their instructors pretty carefully. And, as I say, I had

30:00 four years there.

Did you ever observe, among the people going through, any sort of way that say the people in the second year treated the people in say their first year, any of that sort of initiation?

No, no, no. As the weapons – we were weapons training instructors, they had drill sergeants to look after that, the drill sergeants and the RSM, and they also had an officer, a regular army officer,

30:30 who ran the corps of staff cadets, because he was in charge of it. They were the people who were supposed to look after the thing and make sure that bastardisation didn’t occur, but obviously it did. There have been several scandals after that, but I think it’s sort of natural that people who come in, they do – they go through the thing and they are roused on by the

31:00 senior cadets and made to run around and do this and do that, and when they go up into the senior cadet things they carry on the same functions. And I think it has gone on for years and years, and will still probably go on. It might not be as bad as some of the scandals that have come out, but it must still go on.

And how about the – I guess the difference between national service

31:30 **and other kind of…?**

Difference between chalk and cheese. I mean the national servicemen, they were conscripted and they had to go in whether they liked it or not. And a lot of them ended up liking it and doing a damned good job. But the corps of staff cadets, they were officers and potential officers and they needed to

32:00 impress, they needed to do a good job, especially if they wanted to get posted to the corps of their choice, you know, Signals, Infantry, Engineers or Artillery or what have you. So they had a different attitude, it was all gung-ho, it was 100% go, go, go. No, they were good, I enjoyed it there. I think it is fairly hard. I recall when they used to

32:30 come in, we used to take the weapons training, we used to take the new intake of cadets out on an orientation camp for four weeks, teaching them the basics, how to put up your tent, how to keep yourself clean and how to do this and that. I remember one of the intakes towards the end of my time there, as we marched into the area, it was raining; as soon as we got in

33:00 we pitched our tents up and taught the cadets how do theirs, and said, “Go and do it.” Somebody said it was raining “so we will stay under shelter”, and it rained and it rained and it rained for the whole four weeks. It rained for the whole four weeks and they were soaked. Yeah. So. It was quite interesting.

How long did you spend there?

Four years. We would have probably stayed longer

33:30 and then the Vietnam War came to a head and of course they wanted to start enlisting for the Australian Army Training Team. Called for volunteers and a couple of us from there, we volunteered and we were selected on the first group of training.

What did you know about the situation in Vietnam?

Not a great deal, not a great deal. But we knew it was the

34:00 Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese were involved. They were Communists so that was good enough for us.

And you said that the Australian Army Training Team called for volunteers, what did you know about what the training team was about?

Initially we didn't, we didn't know, but they called for volunteers for a group to go in as advisers. We didn't know what that was really, but they selected a group of about 40, 45, I suppose, for the initial course,

34:30 and we went to Canungra and to South Head. We went down to South Head to the Intelligence Centre first, lectures about the history of Vietnam, the war with the French and the Viet Minh and that sort of thing, and we went up to Canungra to do jungle training and that sort of stuff. And out of the original 40 to 45 they selected 30 to go across from the

35:00 first team and I was selected amongst the first group with my mate from the RMC, so we went across on the first group.

And in those lectures they gave you about Vietnam, it might seem like a strange question, but what sort of, I guess from what perspective was the information?

Oh, sort of I guess mainly it was on the sort of standards of living,

35:30 the religion, their livelihood, how they got their livelihood. Generally to give you a bit of an insight into the local population. So, you know, it was very interesting. And of course we got a lot of secret stuff handed to us that wasn't known to the general public, about the formation of the Viet Cong and the fact that the North Vietnamese were supplying them and paying them,

36:00 and a lot of the soldiers that were down there running the Viet Cong were North Korean regular army people. Later in the thing they moved North Vietnamese regiments and battalions down, too. So it was general indoctrination on what the country was all about, what the war had been like, how the French used to get themselves ambushed through failing to take

36:30 the precautions and that sort of thing.

And was there any sort of assessment of you as a group and that sort of thing?

Well, there must nave been, because you know we were the 30 that was selected, who were considered they had the qualifications to go and do it. And some of the others weren't selected, were retained ready for the next group, and

37:00 some were sent back to their unit, not suitable.

And what was the training at Canungra or the...?

Bit of everything, bit of sniping, jungle tactics, patrolling, that sort of thing.

Were they instructing you or...?

They were. Of course I had done a lot of that anyway, but a lot of people that came weren't all infantry; we had artillery people, intelligence,

37:30 armoured, and they hadn't done that sort of basic stuff, so everybody had to go through it, they had to do it. When we got up there initially you had to start training some of the South Vietnamese, before we got posted out to other units, to teach them how to do it and how to train their people.

And at this stage what were they telling you what the Training Team was and what its function was?

Well, what our function was to be, originally our function was to be

38:00 as instructors, advisers, telling the Vietnamese, advising the Vietnamese how to do this and that, how to do their tactics, how to do their patrolling, how to do ambushes, things that a lot of them had not covered because a lot of the Vietnamese soldiers were just drafted in with very little training. When I went over there we went up to a place called

38:30 Hep Kahn and we were training civil guard and another group at Danang, a few miles away they were teaching the regular army. But we would teach the civil guard how to organise patrols and ambushes and things like that. Each little group taught different subjects.

And at this stage, before you left, say at Canungra, or something, did you ever have

39:00 **any thoughts that the troops would be committed in any other capacity than an adviser?**

At that stage no, and it wasn't until we were well into our tour that we started getting committed to that, although it wasn't official. But, you know, you can't go teaching people things like that, and then letting them go out in to the field without being there to supervise them, that sort of thing, so they gradually let us accompany the units on exercise

39:30 or on operations, or some of us got posted to some of the American Special Forces units for a period.

And in terms of when you left Australia, was there any information given to you about, say, the way the North Vietnamese or the Viet Cong fought and were organised?

Oh yes, their tactics, yes, ambushing and that sort of stuff,

40:00 we knew that. And we knew that generally they were pretty well-organised. But then so were some of the civil guards pretty smart as well, too. One occasion I recall, after we had trained a group, they went back to their local village and they were defending a bridge or something and they got attacked and repelled the attack, and

40:30 when the Viet Cong withdrew, a group of them came out from the village and went down a sort of a side track and raced down the road and ambushed the people that were withdrawing and killed two or three of the people that had been attacking, so they did quite well. So they weren't all stupid.

Tape 8

00:35 **If you would like to tell us about getting to Vietnam?**

Yes. The first group of us went over by plane to Singapore, and at Singapore we went into the barracks to get issued with gear and weapons to go over there. Although we didn't get the weapons straight away, we got issued with equipment, and then we got flown

01:00 across to Saigon by Pan Am plane. But because Singapore and England, in particular, weren't involved with the Vietnam War, they made us go in civilian clothes, and we dressed in civilian clothes with a big brown paper bag under our arm and got on to the aircraft as civilians and took off and, once the plane was airborne, one by one we

01:30 went down to the toilet with our big paper bag and changed into our uniforms and came back. A lot of Americans on the plane, their eyes popping out of their heads, wondering, "Who are these characters, just going on as civvies and getting off as soldiers?" So the 30 of us went along like that. Across ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] airport and into the American system, where we spent three or four days being lectured to by the

02:00 various American groups, intelligence officers and people like that, telling us all what was happening. Because at that stage the main war effort was the US advisers, and they had US advisers training with most of the armoured units, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, and originally they wanted all of us to go as one group. But no, but we got split up

02:30 and went to various things. We had a couple of SAS people went to the Rangers School, some group went to teach ARVN in Hue itself, and our group of about eight or nine of us went to Hep Khan which is a few kilometres north of that, on the Road Without Joy, I think they used to call it, the Street Without Joy, yep,

03:00 to this little camp where we started off training the ARVN Civil Guard. There was an American group doing the thing but within a matter of days they all shot through except the senior officer, he stayed behind – not that he did much; in actual fact we used to call him "canvas back" because he used to lay on his bed all day nearly every day. But we

03:30 sort of took over the training, reorganised the training program and started teaching them snap firing on the jungle range, where the target just pops up for a few seconds and just disappears, and they had never had anything like that before. They thought it was the greatest thing since button-up boots. We changed their ideas of training quite a bit.

Why hadn't they had that training?

Well, I think that they had been in this

04:00 war for 10 years or something and people just came in, came out. I don't think the Vietnamese army had a great deal in the way of training centres, because a lot of their soldiers didn't get much training at all, from what I could see. Certainly the civil guards that we initially picked up didn't have much training. I mean, they were just in the villages just erecting bamboo fences to try and keep the

04:30 Viet Cong out, perhaps putting up a tower, a watchtower, and that was it. They didn't do much patrolling, and that was one of the things we tried to instil in them, "You have got to get out and patrol

and find out what's happening in your area, because it's no good trying to do that sort of thing when you are already under attack." Yeah, we tried to teach them.

So tell us what your first impressions were as you arrived in

05:00 **Vietnam?**

First impressions, it was a hot humid country, it seemed to rain every afternoon. It was the start of the monsoon season when we got there, hot, humid. A lot of traffic around. A lot of American presence there. Lot of "white mice" around, the Vietnamese National Police, all dressed in white, and we used to call them "white mice".

05:30 They were mainly directing traffic and things like that. And the other thing was the number of little bikes and mopeds and things, seemed to be thousands of them. Traffic in Saigon in those days was horrendous, probably still is.

What year was this?

1962, July 1962 when we got there.

What were you noticing of the presence of the VC [Viet Cong]

06:00 **at that stage?**

What was going in those days was VC raids on the villages, where they would pull out the chief of the village and in front of all the village people, execute him, you know, try and instil a bit of terror into the locals and make them support the VC by food, by information and

06:30 that sort of thing. They waged a pretty strenuous campaign of killing. Men, women or children, it didn't matter to them.

So where were you taken exactly, when you arrived?

We went into, initially in Saigon, we were billeted in with the American compound and we stayed there for a matter of perhaps a week or more,

07:00 going into daily briefings and things like that, and then we got allocated to our training job and off we went. As I say, there were about eight or nine went with me to Hep Khan and we ran the training there after a couple of weeks, when the Americans gradually moved out. One of the things that amazed me was the liking of dogs. The Vietnamese like dogs,

07:30 especially if one got killed, because they would whip it in and it would be in the kitchen pot the next day. We had initially had a pet dog up at Hep Khan and we had it for about six weeks, and then it disappeared. And we said, "Where is the dog?" and we were told, "You ate it." They served it up to us one night and didn't tell us.

What did it taste like?

Nice. Quite all right, no problems.

08:00 I suppose they're short of meat, they can't afford to go buying cattle and stuff like that. Their cattle are water buffalo, and they are beasts of burden and a bit tough if they give them the chop.

So what was it like, the set-up where you were at Hep Kahn?

Well, it was a bit difficult because none of us were Vietnamese speakers; consequently, we had to rely on

08:30 interpreters. You would sometimes have to have an interpreter who could speak English and speak French. Most of the Vietnamese could speak French because the French had occupied the country for years. So you would go through the same interpreters; but sometimes, later when we got, when I served with the Montagnards, sometimes you would need two interpreters, ones who could interpret from English to French and French to the Vietnamese, and Vietnamese to the local language, which in our case was

09:00 the Bru tribe. So the thing you did notice there was that you could talk for about two or three minutes on what you were trying to impart, and by the time it got down to the last interpreter they spoke about four or five words and that was it, so you wondered if the message got through properly or not.

So how would you get around this, how would you teach people?

Had to be very tolerant, because you are only there in an

09:30 advisory capacity, you had no control or command. When you are in those training centres, you are only there in an advisory capacity. It was only later that you got to perhaps command the Vietnamese or the Montagnards unit or sub-unit. But initially you were an adviser, and as such you could pass on the information, they either accepted it or they didn't. That's all you could do.

I mean, you told us a bit about that just then,

10:00 **but tell us exactly what your brief was that you were told by the Australian command?**

Hmm, going back 30 odd years now, but the main thing was that OK, you had to go in, you couldn't be too dogmatic, you had to try and use a bit of tact to get them to accept what you were saying and generally,

10:30 once they had done it and had accepted what you were talking about and they knew what you were talking about, it was easier from then on, they would accept what you were saying easier than from when we first went over. It was interesting all the time, and it was always reckoned that out of everyone you trained, that 10% would be VC anyway.

11:00 So you always did the best you could. You imparted whatever your thing was, weapon training, tactics, signals procedure or whatever, and you just hoped that it sank in. Later on, of course, they got out more to the groups and they started bringing – increasing the size of the Training Team a couple of years down the track and you got them going out

11:30 officially on operations. We never officially went on operations, although we did go on a couple.

So how would you manage to go on a couple if you weren't meant to?

The people who were down training in Hue, they were training regular army units. It was fairly easy for them to go out on operations there because they just

12:00 returned back to the unit with the people and accompanied them on operations, saw what was going on, came back and rejoined the training group and were able to report on it. Where I was at Hep Khan, we all took a turn out being posted to one of the American Special Forces A Teams, and I went up to a Special Forces A Team – I can't remember, I think it was 532

12:30 or something like that, up at a place called Khe Sanh. Khe Sanh later became known as a big US air base later in the war, but when I was there it was just a little old French mud fort. And we had four companies of Vietnamese there, one company of Special Forces, Vietnamese Special Forces, and three companies of Montagnards, who were locally-

13:00 recruited and trained mercenaries. You had to have an interpreter when you were talking to them. But, you know, they were pretty good, they were pretty switched on. Americans had trained them mostly. And I found that some of the things they taught were a little bit hairy, inasmuch that if you did go into any sort of an assault and they had two waves,

13:30 you were likely to find the second wave firing over your head or round the side of you, when going in, holding their fire till they got down there. But no, they were pretty switched on. The tribe was Bru, they were a tribe that lived in the northern part of South Vietnam and over into Laos. So we operated up around the demilitarised zone

14:00 and into, just into Laos. I escorted, unofficially escorted, one group across into Laos when they were taking a couple of agents across to join the locals to try and pick up information about what the Viet Cong were doing. They of course were dressed as Montagnards, with the old Montagnards pack on as a woven pack containing food

14:30 and that sort of stuff, and with a radio concealed in that. Yeah, that was quite interesting. They used to work off two maps there, they used to have one map which was the official version, which showed the true location of the demilitarised zone, and another one Special Forces used to use which showed the demilitarised zone another five or 10 kilometres further over, so if you happened to be in the demilitarised zone, say, "We are not in it yet, look at this map.

15:00 Here we are, here."

What is it about the Montagnards, what are they?

The Montagnards are the hill tribes. The Vietnamese dislike them, the Montagnards, call them the Moi, which means savage, and they treated them as a lot of savages. The Montagnards

15:30 were hill tribes who lived in the hills and they'd clear a bit of a jungle and plant crops to live on and set up their houses, and after a season or so they would find their crops were failing so they would move on and cut another clearing somewhere and start again. And that was their livelihood, they just lived like that. But they were a very friendly people when you got to know them. And the mercenaries,

16:00 most of them were quite brave. A bit disconcerting if you got really hot, because they could then just disappear on you, you would find yourself on your own, as a couple of our people did later in the piece. Generally they were pretty good.

Why would they leave you on your own when it's hot?

Well if it got too hot they are likely to be killed. They weren't too keen on that. So they would slope off and you'd find, the Americans or the Australians

16:30 would look around and find they are on their own. That happened to Ray Simpson at one time when he

was up there and he was earning his VC. I found that even the American Special Forces, most of them were pretty switched on, but the group I was with, I found their officer commanding was away sick, he caught dengue fever, and the 2IC was called the

17:00 executive officer. He wasn't switched on at all, and he took us out on an operation just inside the Demilitarised Zone to find if there were any VC camps in there. And in Duntroon I had been, amongst other things, I had been a map reading and compass instructor, so I was pretty keen on taking along a map and a compass. And I was

17:30 adviser with the rear group who came back and saw me with a map and compass and told me to put it away, "These people know the land like the back of their hands." As soon as he got away of course I got it back out again. I found they were, just what we called "contouring": instead of going up over the hills, which is hard work, they would go round the side, and as they would go round the side they veered a little bit to the left. And this just kept happening. Any way,

18:00 the first night we set up a defensive position, and in the morning I got up and checked my map and I thought I would be a bit of a smart arse, and I went across to the American and I said, "Hallelujah!" And he said, "What's the matter with you?" I said, "Must be the Second Coming of the Lord." He said, "Why?" "Well, now, if you would like to orient your map and set it up you will find the rivers are running upstream." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Well, we are going the wrong way,

18:30 we are 180o out." He said, "Oh, rubbish."" Anyway, we started off and about 10 minutes later we came to a sudden halt. Went down to try and see what was happening, "Oh, just passed the trail of 300 or 400 VC." I had a look round and I saw some lolly papers around. VC don't have lolly papers. "That's our trail that we passed yesterday." "Rubbish."

19:00 It was, and it was in about half an hour after that we ran into an ambush. We lost a couple of Montagnards in that one.

Tell us about the ambush.

I was right at the rear so I didn't have a great deal to do with that, but the leading group – as I say, the Americans were fairly careless with a lot of their patrol work inasmuch as they don't have forward scouts, they just move

19:30 them along. We always used to have a forward scout moving along in front checking the way and checking either side, and they didn't. Anyway, they entered into the ambush and they let a few go in and they triggered the ambush and, as I say, they killed a couple of the Montagnards and wounded some and then disappeared, they just broke it off. It was only a small group, probably only a group of about four or five of them, and they just disappeared. But we had to get them out,

20:00 evacuate the casualties, so they called the operation off to get the casualties out. Unnecessary.

Were you meant to be involved with this work at the time?

I was involved in trying to look after the Montagnards, I was in charge, or the adviser; I mean technically the Americans did not have command of the thing, it

20:30 was always the senior Vietnamese person of the Special Forces Group that was nominally in command of it, although the Vietnamese company commander never went on any operations, he always ended up sick the day before. But I mean it was so obvious what was going on. You see, every time they went on an operation, they would buy up big on the local market, because they had to buy their

21:00 fresh food from the local market. They didn't have ration packs as we did, the Montagnards or the Vietnamese Special Forces all had to buy their stuff from the market, so they would buy up three or four days', depending on the length of the patrol, they would buy up three, four or five days' supplies. Anybody could see what's going to happen, there is going to be an operation go on, because they had all bought up big. So, you know, instead of buying stuff and

21:30 stockpiling it perhaps, or trying to do something like that. They even reckoned that the local district chief, who was a senior Vietnamese person in the area, they reckoned he was VC anyway, and he used to pass the information on what was going on. You couldn't win, half the time. But it was interesting.

And as advisers, were you meant to be operating in the demilitarised zone?

Oh, no,

22:00 definitely not. None of them were, that's why you had your two sets of maps. "No, no, still a couple of kilometres from there yet." "How come?" But no-one wanted to compare a map; they would rather shoot at you. But they were there, and if anyone questioned them, they could always say, "We stayed this side of the demilitarised zone the whole time, there's the map to prove it."

22:30 Anyway that's how they worked.

Apart from the maps, how were you briefed on this idea of....?

Well, we didn't used to get much briefing; the briefing mainly was between the American officer who

devised the operation and the various Montagnards, NCOs and senior officers, and the Special Forces. They might have briefed one or two of the Americans, but they certainly didn't bother briefing me.

23:00 They just said, "Righto, we are off on an operation day after tomorrow, so just going along walking along the DMZ, having a look for the demilitarised zone, and we are going to have a look at that."

What did you think of the Americans' tactics?

To my mind they employed too much of this recon [reconnaissance] by fire. What they used to do, they would go along, some of the units, not

23:30 all but some, if they saw an area that looked suspicious they would conduct reconnaissance by fire. The reconnaissance by fire, you are belting the crap out of it with every weapon you have got, firing the crap out of it and then go along and see if there was anybody there. Of course, by the time you had done that anyone could have heard the firing going on for miles away, and they have either gone from the scene or setting up an ambush. So, you know, it was pretty ridiculous there.

24:00 I mean, our tactics would be totally different. If we were suspicious of a thing we would send a patrol out and check it, find out if there was anything there. Anyway, that was virtually my last bit of posting there, because I ended up, because I was living with the Montagnards in unhygienic conditions there, I ended up with amoebic dysentery, so I

24:30 spent a few weeks in an American hospital while they were trying to find out what it was, losing weight every day and losing blood every day, and I came out from Vietnam close to two weeks earlier than I should have.

Before we get to that, tell us, were you able to talk to the Americans about these kinds of tactics?

Oh yes,

25:00 but their attitude was that "No, we never teach that in our army." They – apparently they consider that their army is so vast that you can't get down and talk nitty gritties to the soldiers teaching at the platoon section level, nine,10 men or 30 men, they don't deal with anything under a battalion. And,

25:30 as I say, as they proved in Vietnam, they never taught a battalion how to do a fighting withdrawal. Their term for it is a "retrograde movement". And their teaching for a retrograde movement is you break contact with the enemy as rapidly as possible, move back four or five miles and then settle down again to dig in again to defend the area. So they never, as far as I know, they have never taught a fighting withdrawal.

And also their

26:00 **reconnaissance with fire, would that catch innocent….?**

Oh yeah, if there happened to be innocent civilians there, of course. I have no doubt lots of innocent got killed in Korea, especially when the Americans were bombing. I think on this show I saw, the four sessions show on the Unfinished War, they openly confessed

26:30 the Americans had issued orders that anyone advancing towards American units you would open fire on them because they might be enemy, and it's better to kill innocent civilians than to let the enemy get amongst you. So I have no doubt lots of bombings were on civilian targets too, lots of civilians got killed in that way, too.

And what effect does this have in a war like Vietnam?

I tell you what, it made the Americans

27:00 not very well-liked, and the Americans are not very well-liked there in Korea even today. Even though they have got a presence there, they are tolerated but they are not really welcome. I find it a bit of an eye-opener that when they find out you are an Australian or a Pom or something like that, you are welcome with open arms.

And when you were teaching some of the locals, like the Montagnards,

27:30 **apart from the communication via a translator, were there other ways you could communicate?**

Only by sign language and that's about all, pretty primitive like that. I mean you could sort of get them by the shoulder and take them and put them in a position here and another position there, or do it on the blackboard and show them positions of how to do ambushes, and that sort of thing. But out with the Special Forces Group there was no

28:00 blackboard, so you just had to try and go through a local interpreter. But training centres you could do it with blackboards or position them. In fact, we formed demonstration platoons there out of the local South Vietnamese soldiers and trained them how to do it, and then we used those with something like different-coloured helmets to indicate their gun group, machine gun group and

28:30 rifle group and put it over that way, and that went over very well, they could see something and the interpreter was telling them what the various colours meant and what groups they were in and what they were doing, it went down well like that.

Going on patrols, was this a danger, this lack of communication?

Well, yes, it was, inasmuch as I remember the

29:00 first patrol I went out with when I was with the Special Forces, we went out and did a reconnaissance of the thing, we set the ambush, and before dark, lo and behold!, the American Vietnamese Patrol Commander came walking through the ambush area, unannounced. I mean, he could have got himself shot. I mean no-one –

29:30 once the ambush is set, anyone comes walking through into the killing zone, and you can see that it's obviously a civilian, it's an enemy. So he was lucky. And I also found the attitude to conducting a night ambush was different, because I stayed awake all night and everybody else around me was just about snoring their heads off. I think I was the only one who stayed awake all night, including the ambush party. So I know I have heard that the patrol was being sent out,

30:00 going out about one kilometre or half a kilometre and putting up and going to sleep, no patrolling at all, so a bit dicey.

And how were the Americans with teaching ideas about blending into the jungle?

Well, that was the great thing; of course, the Americans at that stage had never done any jungle training. And we were the only experienced group in Vietnam that had done any

30:30 jungle training, so their generals were extremely interested in seeing what we were doing and then getting the Americans to start doing some things on that. For example, one of our officers, who came after me, formed a Montagnards force and ended up with about 1000 Montagnards that he commanded, and he was inducted into the tribe as a tribal

31:00 chief and everything, and the Americans said, "Why haven't we got someone like that?" No-one had ever done it before. So they got the fellow who used to be the commander of the Special Forces Group that I was with, the one that had been sick when I got up there, they got him to go there, and they decked him out in tribal gear and made out that he was leading one of the Montagnard groups too.

31:30 But he wasn't, of course, it was just publicity for the American papers. "Because the Australians had done it, we've got to be able to do it." Rubbish. Yeah, Barry Peterson, he organised that one, he did a good job up there.

Well, how was the Americans' interaction with the locals?

Well, it varied, it varied with different people. I mean, some treated the

32:00 South Vietnamese like animals and others treated them well. I guess if you have got 100 different people you would get probably 80 or 90 different ways of doing things with them. Some were very good with the natives, the Montagnards and with the South Vietnamese, and others were very arrogant.

32:30 A lot of the Americans were like that, you know, "Don't do what I do, do what I say." Wrong attitude.

And tell us about your compound set-up, what was that set-up like?

Well, when we were in the training camp there were completely brand new buildings been put in, glass

33:00 windows of course. We only just moved in and we got a typhoon. And the Vietnamese workmen had put the glass in back to front. As you know, when you put the window in, the glass fits into the frame with the putty facing out. They did it the other way, they turned it round, and of course the cyclone winds just blew the glass out, and you're in your quarters, trying to duck the flying glass and trying to protect

33:30 yourself from the wet. But one of the first things we did was we, in our compound, got a wire fence put round our little bit of compound, and we dug trenches, protective trenches; however, that only lasted for a few weeks because once the monsoon rains came the slit trenches filled up with water anyway, because you were on low-lying paddy fields, ground. But the idea was there. Because

34:00 when you went up on operations it was totally different. We were up at this Khe Sanh, this old French fort, the wire was already in, mines were already set in position including Claymore mines. But, believe it or not, at one stage someone got in and turned all the Claymore mines facing backwards, back towards the defenders, but luckily somebody spotted it. So there was still some VC among the

34:30 group that was there, whether they were the Vietnamese Special Forces or the Montagnards we don't know. Someone turned them round.

How did you know about this idea that there was ten per cent or so Viet Cong?

Well, that was the common talk. They always said that you can expect to be training at least ten per cent of VC, and I believe that to be true. They just took all these people from the village, they wouldn't

necessarily check where

35:00 their sympathies lie, they are just members of the village so they are part of the village defence force, so they go off to train. It happens.

Was this taken into account, like limitations or…?

Well, you couldn't really take it into account. I mean you have got to try and teach them so they can stay alive. That's the main thing, teaching them to survive, how to protect them – whatever it is, if it's their local village or

35:30 what have you. So you have got to teach them the right way to do it, and if you happen to be teaching the VC, well, so be it. Just the luck of the draw.

Was there much enthusiasm for learning?

Well, it was always difficult to judge because, you know, they are not terribly expressive faces,

36:00 I mean they are a mixture. Some of them, the Montagnards, or the lowland Vietnamese working in paddy fields and that, some work in the city, so you get all sorts of levels of intelligence, attitude, and it's hard to say whether they are absorbing it or not, you just have to hope they are because, as I say, you go through one or two interpreters and you just got to hope

36:30 that what you are teaching is correct. I think it got on a little bit better later on, when they had the MATT teams, the Mobile Advisory Training Teams, when they had small groups of junior NCOs went out to the various villages and took the villagers out on to the ground and took them out and set up an ambush, and showed them how to do an ambush, showed them how to do all-round defence and that sort of thing, and that went down better

37:00 than what was going on earlier in the piece. We were breaking new ground so we had to work out our way and find out our own tactics on that sort of stuff. On the whole I think we did reasonably well and it improved, obviously it improved as the years went by.

Was there also any political training?

No. We didn't handle any of the political training. We had enough to show them how to handle the

37:30 military and how to stay alive. So we didn't delve into anything political.

I guess what I am aiming towards is how do you make sure they would want to be on your side if you were training them?

You would just have to hope. You couldn't really tell, they may hate your guts, you wouldn't really know, they are not going to come out and tell you. So you just had to hope that they were absorbing it, and I think in the

38:00 main they were. I think in the initial part of the training the trainees learnt quite a bit and they went out and they were able to pass on the knowledge. This was always the hope, that you would train some instructors who would go out and pass on the knowledge. And I think the standard of their patrolling, for example, improved; the standard of setting ambushes improved.

38:30 Then perhaps the standard of VC ambushes improved too as a result, I wouldn't know. All you know is that you have got a group of people to train; you wouldn't know what their ideologies were.

I am interested to know, having been through some of the horrors of the Korean War, what motivated you to join?

Well, the main thing, I was army. Again they were calling for volunteers, it

39:00 was the first chance to get back into seeing a bit of active service that we had had for a while because I had been sick, I caught malaria when I was in Korea and I wasn't allowed to go overseas for a while, and it was perhaps the first opportunity I had of going overseas and perhaps getting back into a bit of active service. By that time I was a warrant officer, the WO got to show a bit of an example,

39:30 so I was among the first group of volunteers.

What about that fear of death, did that enter your mind?

No, never thought about that; if you thought about that you would never volunteer. So no. There was a job to do and I thought it was a unique opportunity for Australia to make its presence felt there. I think it did over the 10 years.

And were you also motivated by

40:00 **any political…?**

No, apart from the fact that it was threatened by Communism, and I have always been implacably opposed to Communism in any way, shape or form. It meant I had to leave my family for 12 months, it

probably didn't go down too well with them, I don't suppose they were over-enthused because I volunteered for that. But they put up with it and stayed put there for 12 months, and I came back and got moved. As soon as I came back I got transferred again.

Tape 9

00:40 **So by the time you had spent 12 months in Vietnam, we talked about the language problems that you had, but was your general rapport…?**

On the whole I think it was pretty good.

01:00 I think both the South Vietnamese that we were instructing and also the Montagnards, when I was with them; I think they were accepting what we were saying. But with the Montagnards it was hard, because we had to go through at least two interpreters mostly. And also we of course only had something to do with the Montagnards once we were on the operation. We weren't there for a

01:30 period of two to three months, we were only there for a few weeks, because I had to rotate people through to get a bit of experience with them. So, consequently, the only contact we had with the Vietnamese, with the Montagnards, was when we started going on patrols, and that's when I found that their map reading, or their ability to read ground, was not up to what the American officer reckoned it was.

02:00 They obviously took the easy way out, no-one checked them, they got away with it so why worry?

And towards the end of that 12 months, what was your opinion on the way the situation was…?

Well, I think my attitude was the same as everyone on the Team, that it wasn't going as well as the Americans were saying that it was going. There were far too many ambushes, there were

02:30 far too many South Vietnamese units getting ambushed and getting casualties. To us it appeared the VC were gaining the upper hand, certainly in the countryside. But despite the war, the Americans were saying everything was sweet in the garden. It wasn't. But they just kept up that attitude, they either didn't want to see the light or failed to really see

03:00 what the trend was. It was a pity, really, because they lost a lot of men over there needlessly. And that's always the sad thing about it: it's bad enough when you lose people through close contact fighting, but to lose them unnecessarily through either foolish tactics or lack of care, that's a bit galling.

03:30 **And in terms of having been in Korea, where it was a civil war involving…?**

I found, from my point of view anyway, that Korea was much more intense as a war, I mean things like at Kapyong and Maryang San, they were hand-to-hand stuff. We didn't really experience that, not during my period of

04:00 time. Late, when they started putting advisers out into the units and taking command of platoons and companies, then it got more, you know, down to the basics of infantry training. And they obviously went through a lot more of the war than I did. I mean ours was just a sort of an introductory effort into the thing.

04:30 If I had been well enough to go back, I might have gone back for more than one tour. But once I had the amoebic dysentery they grounded me four about nine months in Australia, they just wouldn't allow me anywhere.

And in terms of working with the Americans in Korea when it was sort of a part of a joint force, what comparisons would you make when it was almost as if the Americans were in charge of Vietnam?

Well, the thing was in that

05:00 first year, the 27th Commonwealth Brigade was an independent, isolated foreign unit, and therefore it was placed under American command, and you would find that it was under the command of say 1st Cavalry Division or 24th Infantry Division, or whatever happened to be doing the advancing or retreating at the

05:30 time, you would find yourself under there. We found their tactics a bit strange, a bit frightening, some of them. We couldn't convince them really that if you are going to advance you not only clear the roads but you clear the hills on either side. They still persisted for a long time to just go through on the roads and by vehicle very often. I have got photographs there

06:00 of the big bug-out, where you can see Australian troops marching on the side of the road during the withdrawal, and there are hundreds of American vehicles passing us. They just – they are lost without their transport, that was even back there in the 1950s.

And so by being slightly scared by the American tactics in the 1950s, had you seen them

change/mature at all by…?

Not a great deal, not a great deal.

06:30 Because that was the strange thing, when we went over as the first advisers, we were there to try to teach them jungle tactics. Now, the Americans had, at that stage, had never talked jungle tactics to their people. I mean, their Special Forces groups used to come out there, and their Marines who were the first full-time force in the American Special Forces groups

07:00 had to learn the hard way, and they didn't, some of them didn't learn. For example, one of the US Special Forces groups was commanded by an Australian officer, right from the word go, right from when it was inserted. And one of the times the VC attacked the local village chief's area and his guards,

07:30 and the Americans just wanted to go off and be gung-ho and rescue them. And the Australian officer said, "No, you cannot do that, you cannot go charging out down the road, either in daylight or at night, without clearing it, and that takes time," so he refused to go. It turns out that the Viet Cong had set two battalion ambushes; he didn't go into it because he refused to

08:00 budge. He was replaced by an American officer, the same thing happened, the American officer gung-ho with his American advisers and his Special Forces team and went off and got decimated, they ran into the same ambush set-up, exactly the same. Their idea of things, of fighting jungle warfare, was totally different to ours. For example, when their troops used to go out

08:30 on their battalions and things, they would go out and have radios strapped to their helmets playing radios, smoking grass, rifle slung on their shoulder, just wandering through, making a noise, as if to say, "OK, we'll attract the VC to us and we'll fight them." We wouldn't do that. We softly, softly, we would go and find the VC, go and locate them, not just stumble into them but locate them, that was a total

09:00 difference, especially in the casualty rate. But the Americans I suppose reckoned they had enough people in their, they could afford to lose and they lost.

And in – like we've spoken about Communism being a motivator and that sort of thing, but during that year, were there times when you questioned what America and, I guess, Australia were doing?

About the only thing I questioned was about the way the

09:30 Americans were tackling it. I still thought we should be there, I thought it was very similar to Korea, that if they didn't get in there that South Vietnam was going to collapse. As it eventually did. Once the Americans had experienced or started introducing "Vietnamisation", that was the end of it. Vietnamisation meant that they

10:00 leave the South Vietnamese to do all the fighting. The Americans tackled it all the wrong way and they paid for it.

What did the Training Team in your experience have to do with Vietnamisation?

Well, the Training Team stayed there right through to the end, and they were still running it our way. I think you have only got to look at the

10:30 Task Force area in Phuoc Tuy, and the Phuoc Tuy Province before the Australians moved in there was dominated by the VC. When the Task Force moved in there and started the patrolling, they virtually drove the VC mostly out of the Phuoc Tuy Province. Sure, they ventured back in for operations and that, but they weren't able to control the Province as they were before the Task Force went there. So

11:00 as far as I was concerned the Australian tactics were the ones to use, and unfortunately the Americans did not adopt them so they paid for it.

And in your view there, did you experience any of the Vietnamisation?

No, that didn't come along until about eight years later, when the Americans had started – see, one of the great differences between the Korean War and the Vietnam War was

11:30 television. Television came in, you had television coverage. Consequently America was flooded day and night, shots from Vietnam showing all their casualties and things, and the American people got disenchanted with the Vietnam war, they lost their appetite for it. And when they lost their appetite the forces lost their support for it, and the politicians wavered and weakened, and that was the end of the

12:00 game.

And did you sort of realise that when you were in the country, or…?

No, but we did hear that Australia was also getting a lot of adverse coverage on TV, and that showed

12:30 because we had protests against the Vietnam War. And when a lot of our people came back they were spat on, ridiculed, and for Australians to do that to their own armed forces, it was deplorable.

And do you feel that the coverage was

Biased? It certainly was. I think it was biased, I think

13:00 a lot of them sympathised with the Viet Cong, they took them as being the minority trying to save their country from imperialism, instead of us trying to save them from communism. So, you know, yeah, I think television news not only soured the American public but the Australian public, too. As I say, when you get people – I remember when one battalion

13:30 came back and the battalion commander marching in front, and a girl came out and splashed red paint all over his uniform. Yeah. God, these academics. I just wonder what their attitude is now; whether they have changed now that they have matured. At least I hope they have matured. But you know, for them to deride the actions.... After all, we followed the actions our government required us to do and that was it, we did the wishes of our government. They

14:00 didn't have to take it out on the soldiers, the sailors and the airmen; if they liked to, they could have done it at the ballot box. Anyway, I am all bitter and twisted.

Does this, say, when you watch footage that came from the recent war in Iraq, do you have the same feelings of bias against the media?

Well, OK, they have not found the weapons of mass destruction, no, and that was the pretext America and Britain perhaps

14:30 used to get into it. But the fact is that since they were over there they have uncovered mass graves it has been revealed that Saddam Hussein has killed hundreds and thousands of Iranians and Kurds and used chemical weapons on the Kurds and killed some 10,000 or more of them. So of course we should have gone, he's a bloody despot. The only sad thing about it is they haven't killed him yet.

And, I guess, in terms

15:00 **of the First and Second Gulf War and the extreme media coverage, and in relation to what you were just saying of the media coverage of...?**

Well, this is what I was just saying, with the Gulf War, there the Americans had it won, the Iraqis were retreating, they had collapsed. What happened? The politicians said, "OK, call it quits." They shouldn't have done, they should have gone in, they should have occupied Baghdad, they should have cleaned them out. It would have all been peaceful; we wouldn't have this rubbish going on

15:30 now. But certainly I do believe they should be in Iraq, and OK, you are going to get these thugs and terrorists assassinating people; you have just got to stick with it and do something about it. Learn to counter the thugs, that means they have go to put in intelligence to find out what is happening. And they are not, obviously not doing that. Well, we will have to just wait and see what happens,

16:00 but it is sad to see the way it is going.

And back to Vietnam, we'll start off when you began to get ill, what happened to you?

OK. I don't know whether you know what happens with amoebic dysentery, it's not pleasant. You get diarrhoea.

16:30 What happens is the amoeba gets into your bowels and eats through the walls of the bowels, so consequently you go to the toilet and you are passing blood. You have dysentery, which means it is diarrhoea and you are going to the toilet 20 and 30 times day passing blood all the time, you are losing weight. So they evacuated me from Khe Sanh and they kept me at

17:00 Hep Kahn for another couple of weeks, and I was still passing blood, and they decided they should send me down to Danang, the Americans had a hospital in by then; when we first went over they had no hospitals and no doctors there. So they put me in the hospital and taking specimens and trying to find out what was happening, and they couldn't find out what was happening. And, as I say, going to the toilet 20 to 30

17:30 times a day passing blood the whole time, and they thought I had cancer of the bowel. And then someone in their laboratory section in the hospital said, "Hey, hey, what are we doing wrong?" And they said, "What we are doing is sterilising the slide, taking a sample and then putting it under the microscope. Let's try it without sterilising the slide." So they did, they took a slide without sterilising it, and immediately they detected the amoeba: the sterilisation killed the

18:00 amoeba and there was no sign of it, so as they found that, "Ah, you've got amoebic dysentery." The magic cure, the American magic cure, was a series of eight tablets. So I stayed for a further eight days, they gave me a tablet a day and I was cured. So by that time, as I say, I was within two weeks of my due time of leaving, I was down to about seven stone, I had lost three or four stone, I

18:30 was skin and bone. I was of no use, I couldn't do any more, I wasn't well enough to do any more training so they flew me back to Australia. I got back into Sydney; I went to the Southern Command, the Eastern Command Personnel Depot: "When can I get my flight home to Townsville?" "You are not going to

Townsville, you are going to hospital," so they put me in Concord Hospital. "I have been cured."

19:00 "No, you are going through the Australian system of treating dysentery," which took several weeks of retention enemas, where they put fluids into you and you had to keep it inside your body as much as possible to kill the amoeba. That worked, it took several weeks. My wife went to visit me after I arrived there, shortly – drove down from Canberra, because it wasn't all that far, so she drove down from Canberra

19:30 and she went to the hospital and she said asked which ward I was in. So she went to the ward and got into the ward and saw this old fellow coming down the thing and couldn't recognise him, just skin and bone: it was me. It wasn't until I got up a few paces from her that she was able to recognise me. It was amazing! I came back into Sydney, I purchased a huge valve-driven tape recorder then because that's all they had, they didn't have

20:00 transistors then, heavy thing with all my baggage. No-one met me at the airport. I had to ring up the Transport Corps and say that I have got to get to the Personnel Depot, so they sent a vehicle out and they left me to lug all my gear and load it on to the vehicle. The driver didn't bother to get out and help. And I came back here like a pariah dog initially.

20:30 The only decent people there were the customs people. And I had this tape recorder and they said, "Where did you get that?" "I bought that." "No, no, no, you bought that second-hand, didn't you?" I said, "No." "You got it second-hand, didn't you?" "Oh – yes." "In that case there's no tax on it." I didn't have to pay customs duty coming back in.

And was it a shock

21:00 **going from Vietnam straight back to Australia?**

Oh, yes. Well, it was, because I was a sick boy. I went into hospital and stayed there another three or four weeks, and when I came out I found I was posted across to Western Australia then.

And what did you do in Western Australia?

I was posted as Regimental Sergeant Major, I was already one, I had just been promoted in the last few months I was in

21:30 Vietnam, and I was posted to RSM there, so I flew across to WA with the family. Once again we had problems, we had to go into a boarding house initially and built a house, we bought a block of land and built a house. In the meantime I was there I say as the RSM, and I reorganised the files and everything

22:00 because they hadn't had an RSM for quite a while. That was quite interesting. But I was only there about six-eight weeks when they said they were sending me off on an officer's qualifying course up to Kanungra. "Oh." So there I am on what was colloquially known as a "knife and fork" course, but you attend the thing – they reckon they are supposed to teach you all the etiquette – rubbish; they just go through tactics and instructing and things like that. And

22:30 out of the 40 started the course I think there was about 25 that finished. The others got returned to unit as not being suitable. And I got posted back to W.A. as I was a commissioned officer then, I got posted back as a reconnaissance officer. I joined 1SAS company, that was quite interesting. I even went across on a parachute

23:00 course, refresher parachute course, and I got halfway through that and a chappie who had been a senior officer in Duntroon, and he and I had clashed several times in Duntroon, he was on training command and he put his bib in then and said I was too old to do that course and sent me back before I could finish the course. It didn't really matter, because I still went across with

23:30 them to the Philippines to an exercise and enjoyed another half dozen or so parachute jumps over there apart from the few I had done in Vietnam.

How well-established was the SAS when you…?

Well, it was only company size, then; later it converted to – company, say squadron, squadron is a company-sized group – it became a battalion, SAS battalion. I don't what size it is now,

24:00 much larger than it was.

And what was your understanding of what its purpose was?

Well, it's basically what they do now, patrols breaking down into four man patrols and do ambushing and that sort of stuff. Abseiling. Now they have got whole squadrons, one would be a small boat

24:30 squadron, another would be abseiling, mountaineering thing. Another would be weapons and that sort of stuff. It has changed over the years, it is more advanced now than it was in those days.

And in terms of the things they were teaching in those days, how kind of intuitive was it for you, given your experience?

Well, I didn't find it too hard because by then I had over 15 years as an infantryman,

25:00 two wars, so it didn't really worry me, I knew as much as most of them there. I found I knew as much as most of the officers; even though I was the junior officer there I knew as much, I guess, as the troop commanders. But it was interesting.

And what was the exercise you went on to the Philippines?

Exercise Vigtas they called it, it was a

25:30 company, we went over as an SAS company and we joined in with the US Special Forces and we had a mass jump over there. But because this – he was a major then, he was a lieutenant colonel by the time he got me returned from that – they had me on all the registers for doing these jumps and then they suddenly decided I wasn't supposed to be jumping, and they had to scrub me off all the things.

26:00 I don't know whether I have still got the roll that shows that I was a qualified American parachutist, I got awarded the US paratroop para wings. Officially I wasn't supposed to be doing that sort of thing.

How much had the parachuting technology changed since you used to jump in England?

It had changed a lot. When I first learnt parachuting in England, we used to have what they called the ex-chute, which is a

26:30 British designed parachute which is quite manoeuvrable, and you didn't have any reserve chutes then, they just had the one chute. By the time I got back to Australia they were using reserve chutes, so when I jumped in Vietnam and when I jumped in the Philippines we had the reserve chute. I have got a photograph there of me 'chuting up there, in the Philippines. So you have got the main chute on

27:00 the back and a reserve chute on the front, so if one doesn't open you use the other one. I have never had need to do it, I mean I have had problems in the air, what you call thrown rigging lines, when you get couple of the rigging lines going over the top of the canopy and take a bit of the wind out of the thing and you come down a little bit faster. No great drama.

And what was the purpose of this exercise?

27:30 It was a SEATO exercise, South East Asia Treaty Organisation, it was to practise the Philippines army and the Australian Army and the American army integrating as combining forces in fighting insurgents, that was the main interest in the thing. And I think it went down reasonably well.

And how long did you spend at the SAS?

28:00 Oh, I think it was about six-nine months. Because what happened, apart from the fact that I was no longer parachute qualified, there was an old-time captain who was with the Cadet Brigade in W.A. took his, snatched his time, went as a civvie and got a job up with one of the mines, a very

28:30 lucrative job in the mines, and that left the Cadet Brigade without a staff officer. So as a lieutenant I was posted across there as a captain, getting captain's pay, and the first thing I had to do was organise the move of some 3,500 cadets from all over WA at different times into this camp, hire civilian labour. And it was quite funny, I called to the female clerk and said, "OK, bring me the files." "There are no

29:00 files, Captain Breerley had that in his head. He used to do it all in his head, in fact he's been doing it that way for the past 10 years." I had to learn the job very fast. And it was quite funny when I had all these civilian – we had to employ civilian staff like cooks and labourers and this sort of thing, and you would have so many in this kitchen and so many in that kitchen, because you had anything up to 1500 cadets in the camp at a time. And you had

29:30 audit staff, civilian audit staff, and some of the cadets move out and they would say, "You have got to sack two of those cooks." "Why?" "Because you are over-strength there." And you have got to sack this, and I knew you couldn't do that, because if you sack them they will never come back, and you would need them in another week because another group were moving in. So I just had to shuffle them around in different kitchens and try to keep them a couple of paces ahead of the auditors that were going around. I learnt fast.

How

30:00 **closely were you following the Vietnam War?**

Not all that closely because I had – I was flat out trying to learn the job. This captain, he had it down to a fine art, he had everything up in his head, he had been doing it for 10 years, and whatever files had existed had been thrown out. I had to start from scratch, learn how to run a camp up at Northam, how to hire

30:30 labourers, cooks and bottle washers, when to shift them round from kitchen to kitchen, so I was flat out trying to do that without trying to look at anything else. No. It was quite interesting, because my boss, the major in charge of the brigade, had been in Korea, at Kapyong, he had been A Company's 2IC. And he had a thing going there, he had his own little perks, but he didn't do a

31:00 great deal, he just left it to me to run the thing. Apart from meeting him for a drink or two in the camp, that was about all I saw of him. But he was interesting. It led on to other things, because while I was there I got promoted to captain, and then posted across to Launceston as the commanding officer of 34 Cadet Battalion in Launceston. So I was technically battalion commander with about 12 schools

31:30 to look after. Stores, and I found my biggest trouble there: as I marched in, the previous commanding officer had just marched out. His stores records were in a complete and utter mess. There were controlled stores that were missing, you know, radio crystals were a controlled store. You know, you use them to change the frequencies on a – about 20 or 30 of those had disappeared.

32:00 Clothing, heaps and heaps of clothing. So it took me 12 months or more to just gradually sort the thing out and get it back on an even keel, and try and trace where all these controlled stores had gone. I found that when the radios had been sent for repair no record had been made of them being transferred. Anyway, we sorted that out eventually.

And at what point did you leave the army or did your career sort of…?

32:30 Right, well, after I left Tasmania I went up as a staff captain up to North Queensland to Townsville, and I was there as a staff captain for a couple of years, and then I got promoted as a major and took over as a company commander with 2RAR. I originally went there and took over what they called the "Australian component" – in other words, I took charge of the officers and the diggers and the soldiers who were there to form the party

33:00 on the ground sorting out the barracks, organising stores, organising security for the stuff we brought back and writing up the instruction to do that. So I did that, I wrote the instruction, so they then flew me out to Vietnam to go with 2RAR so I could instruct the officers and NCOs on what was expected when they get back, what they could expect. But I ran into a problem, the CO then of the

33:30 2RAR didn't want me to do anything like that, so I just sat there for two weeks I think reading books. He wouldn't let me anywhere near his troops, so I couldn't pass on any information, so they flew me back to Australia. And then when the battalion was on its way back on the Sydney to Australia, they flew me up to Darwin and took me out to the ship on a Customs boat, and I got on the boat, I said, "I have got all the instructions written, here they are."

34:00 Didn't want to know about it.

Why?

Just arrogant. I had experienced him in Korea, he was a bit of a useless officer in Korea, and he was useless there. Anyway, the soldiers came back and, as I feared would happen, I had all these containers for each company so they could put all the gear they had bought, valuable gear, lock it in there while they were going to town and having a beer and all that sort of thing, no

34:30 assistance from any of the battalion NCOs. As a result, the soldiers starting going home, I had buses laid on to take them into town, not one of those buses was used, they all made their way into town and went to the pubs. The soldiers then bought cartons of beer to take onto the train, the Provos [Provosts – Military Police] got onto that, and who got the kick in the bum for it? I was to blame because I was the

35:00 Component Officer, it was my responsibility to have them all briefed and all that, so I got the blame for that. However, you roll with the punches. Actually, when that officer came back – he will be nameless – he decided he wanted to learn how to fly gliders. So out of regimental funds he purchased a glider, and I suppose he was with the battalion for another six to eight weeks,

35:30 the glider got used about three or four times and never ever got used again. So I don't how many thousand dollars they paid out of the regimental fund for that, but it was the soldiers' money. I think he flew the glider about three times.

And I guess when you look at those many years of service, what would you say

36:00 **they have given you or taught you?**

Well, I guess it taught me – going through the army from private soldier, to warrant officer class I to lieutenant to major, it taught me to handle and to interact with the common soldiers. You know, I mean as a company commander, if soldiers did anything wrong, and they come in front of me on a charge, they could spin all the

36:30 tales they like, but I had been there done that and I could tell when they were giving me a load of bull or whether they were telling the truth. I would say, "No, don't give us that," I would give them a fine, a few days CB [confined to barracks], and they would accept it. We got on well. We got on very well. I was accepted, I think, because when I went back to two RAR as a company commander and we went out on exercise, I believe

37:00 I was the only officer who marched back from high range, which is 20 odd miles out, marched back with the battalion and marched into camp with them. All the other officers had gone on ahead by Land Rover or what have you, got themselves washed, showered and shaved and in the pub by the time we got back. So a lot of them thought, "Reasonable sort of a fellow." I mean, I was never easy on them,

37:30 when I first went there, my sergeant major, I was told I didn't have to accept him because I was told he wasn't all that bright, but I said, "No, I will have him." But he tried to run the company at first, but I told him after the first day, "I run the company, you look after the soldiers." We got on fine in the end and I think we had a good company in the end. Before I finish, though, the last few months, I think the last three months

38:00 I got posted out to Singapore. The army survey group from Western Australia were doing an aerial survey, a mapping thing in Sumatra, a map in Sumatra and the islands near Singapore and Malaya because the maps weren't accurate. So I went across there as the administration officer and I used to ensure all the food went across, they got the movies, I

38:30 made sure all the administration, made sure their stay was as pleasant as possible, and on a couple of occasions I went across and ran the camp over there when the OC wanted a bit of a break from it. So I also experienced a bit of Sumatra as well. So, very interesting experience. But when I came back, I was back about a couple of months and I had reached retiring age, and in actual fact the army HQ had wanted to extend my service and there was a possible promotion to lieutenant colonel coming up,

39:00 and oh yeah I would be in that, then we got a change in government and Gough Whitlam came in. That was it, I was then out, I had reached the retiring age on 24th April 1974, so I was discharged on 24th April 1974.

And we're just reaching the end of this tape and the end, is there anything you would like to say to sum up, any sort of final words?

39:30 I guess what I can say is I would go, if I was young enough, I would go with the Australian Army anywhere. As far as I am concerned, it is the best fighting army in the world. They know their job and they do it. No ifs or buts. I wouldn't necessarily volunteer to serve with the American army, or the Poms if it came to that, but the Australian Army I would go with anywhere, any time, if I could.

40:00 Probably that sums it up.

Excellent.

You can't beat the best.

Very good. Thank you very much.

INTERVIEW ENDS