

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Alan White (Whitey Big Al Spider) - Transcript of interview

**Date of interview: 13th January 2004**

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1275>

### Tape 1

00:42 **We'll start with your childhood and where you grew up. Where were you born?**

Ah, originally in Melbourne, in Carlton in the Royal Women's Hospital, probably ninety percent of the population were I suppose, back in the fifties. So I guess I'm one of the, what do they call, the Baby Boomers. I keep hearing the, these figures about Baby Boomers, you know they're

01:00 ready to retire, the kids have grown up, they've got the house and I'm going, and the super, and I'm going well I ain't got any of that, I must have missed out. What happened there? So born in Melbourne. Early years were in Essendon - my Dad came from Essendon, Mum was from Kew. And then they moved to Geelong and worked in the Shell Refinery for a while. And then the Dandenong North. I'm a Dandenong boy. No offence to Dandenong but ... They do all that Dandenong stuff. So that's where I grew up until I joined the air force at

01:30 seventeen. Um what else? Dad was a pastry cook but eventually ah after he served in New Guinea he came back and I think he did different stints around Melbourne and then ended up at the carpet factory in Dandenong. And then joined the Corps of Commissionaires in Melbourne, which they do errands for the stock exchange or work for large businesses within Melbourne. You often see them walking around in Melbourne and they sort of look like policemen but they're not - they've got a black uniform. So he worked with them until he eventually died. He died in ninety-four,

02:00 sort of war related stuff. Um ...

**What war was your father in?**

Papua New Guinea. Him and his brother actually served at one stage. And there's a story I never knew about until he actually, he died and somebody got up and gave a talk at his funeral. He was doing pastry cooking and his brother, Murray, remembers him walking up in the camp covered in flour and carrying scones and something like that and a couple of bottles of beer or something, some of those funny things I didn't get to hear. We didn't talk a lot about his um

02:30 his time, for a better word. And I didn't when I came back. I just did a lot of sleeping when I came back from Vietnam. You know I had a bout two or three weeks off before I went back to base. So that's something I regret. I probably talk more to my former father-in-law about his time he spent in New Guinea than my own father. But that depends on the person so it's all very individually. My grandfather on my mother's side he served in World War I. He served in France as an engineer, a

03:00 sapper, towards the end. I actually got onto the war memorial sites and looked up when he arrived and when he left and the old script writing on the record, the really old scroll you know with a black pen stuff. And he was Scottish. They moved out here eighteen hundred I think with a family of nine or something. He was a little short bloke and he was a funny bugger, he um ... They had a house in Kew and it had a long passageway and if Mum brought someone home, if she was seeing blokes I think, he often walk down with a little

03:30 little potty, you know those ceramic potties. There's Dad walking down and this ceramic potty out the back somewhere. He was a funny bugger, yeah, but he um, he was a World War I man so um and Dad was World War II and my uncles served there and I joined the air force at seventeen so ... Primary school then Catholic school for a couple of years and then went to a State school. It's funny I felt liberated which is really weird. It's um

04:00 pretty strict at the Catholic schools so going to a State school there's like a lot more freedom and um in grade five and six one seemed to become aware of girls all of a sudden. It was a really weird time. I then went to the local high school and left school at fifteen and a half. Things were a bit tough in the family so I went and worked at Myer in Chadstone which you know is so changed now to what it was - good old Myer Chadstone and the first shopping mall for Victoria, I think it might have been

04:30 in Australia – it was quite a big deal. And worked there in interior decorating for a couple of years. But I still had my heart set on joining the air force and wanting to get in. And I don't know just something I've always wanted to do since I was a child – you know build model aeroplanes and all that sort of stuff. And maybe watching shows on TV as most kids did then – you know Twelve O'clock High and all that sort of aeroplane stuff. I'm not quite sure where it came from. Maybe it was a past life, I don't know. Um yeah so I joined at seventeen and a half, got accepted. Um ...

05:00 Um ...

**Can I take you back to growing up Geelong. Were you in Geelong for long or ...?**

Oh yes until about age four or five. Don't remember a lot. I do remember one strange incident with the friend next door, he got into his father's car and we, he somehow got it out of gear and we rolled it back down the driveway. And that's the only incident I can remember about Geelong, and nothing else. So memories of childhood are pretty fragmented, there's not a lot

05:30 of um continuity and yet my fiancée can remember a lot of her childhood. She even grew up in Jamaica at one stage, because her Dad was in the British Army, um and she can remember a lot of her childhood. And a lot of people do that and yet I've got just fragments of things will pop up. However having said that because of my field that I work in, with natural therapies, I have to meditation or relaxation, something will float up out of the unconscious – not that I've forgotten it it's just not accessible, maybe I don't need to access it and

06:00 that's another story I guess, mm. So look, Dandenong was sort of the outpost, it was the end of the railway line back in the nineteen -fifties – the rail, the electricity railway line finished at Dandenong. Um and I can remember a big turnstile that the trains would come through and actually turn around and go back to Melbourne. They'd turn around or then go on to Gippsland. And Dandenong had a huge market for years – you know cattle and produce. They still have a market but it's not the same, well obviously it's changed now. But Dandenong Market

06:30 was a big thing. I can remember in the early days even working in yeah Chadstone, when you'd say Dandenong they'd think that was like the sticks, like the end of the railway line. And people associate Dandenong with the Dandenong Ranges and that sort of thing. And you know I can remember often going up to the Dandenong Ranges for picnics up the Fern tree Gully and that sort of thing – but not very often, Dad didn't drive which was really weird, so we didn't have a car. So it was relying on relatives or neighbours if they'd could take us out or

07:00 public transport which was you know going into Melbourne. And it's funny now people um, I mean you still see young people getting around, but there's this um community awareness of not being safe for your kids to a degree. Yet I can remember nine, ten or eleven travelling to Melbourne on the train, on my own, getting on the tram, forty-eight or seventy-five, and going down High Street into Kew and getting off and going to stay at my grandmother's for you know a week, a week and a half and wandering around on my own, you know quite ... well it never occurred to me that I may not be safe I guess. Things have changed.

07:30 I mean you still see kids getting around on their own in shopping centres and then you hear about thirteen year olds being picked up at two o'clock in the morning and I mean what're you doing out at that time? But you know things have changed. So Dandenong was yeah, not a lot happening. I used to go for lots of walks with my dog out in the paddocks where they were still building homes, putting up homes. And that's something interesting because the homes, most of them got built out of red gum, you know hardwood and you could smell the timber. And nowadays homes are going up and it's all pine, it's all

08:00 you know harvested stuff, there's no smell for want of a better word. But I can remember walking through the homes and you could smell the hardwood – it was quite amazing – you know while taking the dog for a walk. And having said that I can recall getting chased by the local bully, who um didn't have a liking for me, it was really bizarre. I remember hiding in an old haystack which ... I can sort of visualize it was up off outside where we lived in Glendale. And walking the paddocks and just you know walking around filling in time and he was

08:30 sort of in the area, and running off with a dog and climbing into a haystack and hiding there which is really quite bizarre. So those sort of things just pop up yet there's no continuation of child life. Um ...

**Did you have brothers and sisters?**

Yeah I've got a brother who's just turned fifty this year and a sister who's mid-thirties I think. So Mum and Dad had her late. So I was fifteen at high school. Everyone was excited – Mum's having a big and it's like oh that's a bit weird isn't it? You know

09:00 a bit strange. All the girls thought it was good, I thought it was a bit, a bit weird. Um but yeah it was a late one. And actually she got told no more kids because she had varicose veins and a bad thrombosis so it would have killed her practically. So ah Sharon was the baby so it was two boys. So yeah I was at high school when she had her. So I had a bit of practise at baby walking and nappy changing stuff – I got broken in pretty early there. Um, yeah my brother lives ...

09:30 well they both live out ... well the whole family now lives out Berwick way. My brother drives truck and

um my sister works for the City of Cassie. She's got a couple of boys. Ah and my brothers got two boys. Um was previously married, he's got two girls from the previous marriage. So they've produced all the grandchildren, I'm still running solo, for want of a better word, it didn't happen.

**So you and your brother did you kick around together?**

Ah not a lot. Well he was ... We're only ah ...

10:00 He's fifty, I'm ... He's fifty so it's four years difference so we didn't sort of mix a lot. I remember that we both went to the Catholic school together. Um and again the bully stuff was happening so I sort of protected him a little bit. And we got confronted a couple of times on the way home - I got confronted because I was protecting him. Oh excuse me. And um that sort of changed when we went to a State school and we sort of, oh I wouldn't say drifted apart, but we were doing our own thing, you know I went onto high school and ah ... We didn't get on sometimes,

10:30 you know with brother rivalry maybe, he's was a little bit wilder I think, you know. I've heard lately, my sister told me, they went off, he ran off from home or ... I don't know whether I should be saying this sort of stuff. He might see it and not remember, I don't want to remember it. So yeah there was a bit of the brother stuff and I think that was just while we were young and all that sort of thing.

**Was the bullying because you were Catholic and went to the Catholic school. Is that the reason for it, that you were ...?**

Oh look, I don't know, I don't know I think just maybe just growing up and

11:00 the tension in the family and you know one, the elder brother and all that sort of thing and ...

**I was talking about other people. Do you remember there being a tension between the Catholic kids and the ...?**

Oh sorry, I wasn't listening. Um, no the kids actually, the ones who were giving us the hard time actually went to the Catholic school as well, they were just um bullies. And I ... It's funny yeah you remember things or you think you remember things as a child, I think there was even favouritism in the class

11:30 by one of the nuns on this other bloke as well. And I mean that didn't worry me, I thought it was strange at the time for my child mind. I don't know we just didn't get on. And I think people you meet in life you just don't click for whatever reason and we just didn't get on. And that sort of settled down and I think he stayed or they stayed and I eventually went to the State school and then made new friends and I we were closer to home and that sort of dissipated a bit. It wasn't until high school that I ran into trouble again with a bully again, for want of a better word.

12:00 Um, but it didn't happen as often. No high school was good, it was all right. I enjoyed high school but I didn't, if that makes sense. I just had trouble with Maths, English it was not a struggle but made classes but it could have been better. So I've caught up years on I've gone back and did Leaver's Certificate and Year Twelve and then did a year of uni so I've been ... not a late starter but sort of been behind the eight ball and sort of had to catch up. And I mean a lot of people

12:30 do that. And done night school and all that sort of thing to um always better myself, I always want more information, I need another piece of paper, I need to get this more information. A couple of my friends say I'm mental, haven't you got enough pieces of paper on the wall? You just to do it. What, how much knowledge do you need? Which is an interesting comment. You know never enough, another book, another class. But I'm starting to you know cut down, it's quality rather than quantity.

13:00 Having said that I'm about to start a ten month course on grief and loss counselling so ... But I'm looking forward to it, really looking forward to it. I had a year off last year from study so you know I got accepted in, it's pretty full on. I got the manual just before Christmas and there's half a dozen books I have to buy and um you know it's every week so it's going to be pretty full on, but I'm looking forward to it, it's going to be good. But that's not childhood is it?

**I'm curious about um your primary school years**

13:30 **and the nuns. You said it was a strict school and you felt relieved going to a State school. Do you remember the nuns you taught you?**

Ah particularly two. One of them was tall, had, did not have a good attitude, always just seemed very angry and very strict and not a cheerful one. I remember one other one who was okay. There were a couple of lay teachers there we got on well with. But the nuns, you know the full habit stuff and when you see shows and documentaries now ... and of course it's individual, you get teachers like this nowadays, and you

14:00 you know you sort of wonder if it's really a healthy environment for a person to grow up in. Even with priests, you know the Catholic Church and the way that they're so strict, it's not normal. And yet if you look at how Buddhists operate it doesn't affect them so you wonder if it's the doctrine behind it that interferes. But yeah the nuns ... Look I got on well with them. They didn't get on well with my brother, they just seemed to be able to agitate him a bit and it got to a point where Mum decided to pull us out - he was having a hard time and then she just pulled us both out. And I was quite happy to

14:30 go. I think I was about grade four or five. I think I spent two years at the State school.

### **So your mum was a Catholic?**

Ah no it was a mixed marriage of the old days. So yes that didn't, that wasn't ... It was a bit of a sticking point but that sort of settled down - Dad was Catholic, Mum was Presbyterian. So um people used to ask me in the past oh what religion and I'd go oh I've been done twice, Presbyterian and Catholic, I can go in either door it doesn't matter. I've done the whole Catholic ritual and I've been baptised Presbyterian. Don't ask me

- 15:00 me how that got done but it did. Yeah I got ... Oh well I couldn't find the paperwork for the Catholic stuff. You know where you get your godfather and you're given a name, I can remember doing all that, and the holy communion breakfast and I've got a baptism certificate for Presbyterian - so I've been done twice, I can go in either door. And all the Catholics are over there behind the brick wall. So it was, look, it was okay. I, I can remember religious teachings
- 15:30 and I couldn't get my head around that stuff, it just ... it didn't seem like a fairytale but it was all surreal, for want of a better word, yeah it just didn't sit right with me - I don't know why. And now years later I can understand why, I mean I've looked and read and broadened my mind. I mean it's more like a fairy tale some of that stuff. And Francis McNap who's the Director of the Care Institute and also one of the top leaders of the Uniting Church he's got a couple of books
- 16:00 about that sort of stuff, you know and he says if you believe x, y and z then you believe anything. You know getting people to rethink the whole doctrine of teaching. Um and I think there's even some other Catholic, prominent Catholic ah people in America who have sort of taken that approach sort of thing, yeah.

**Um**

- 16:30 **so did you, did you go to Mass, did you go to Catholic Mass?**

Ah yes went to Catholic Mass occasionally. What else did we do? Ah ... I remember my Dad's aunty, an old aunty who was actually a spinster walking down on occasion, and asking if she could come and stay with us, and she was a funny old stick, you know walk straight, walk with your hands behind your back and la-da-da-da that sort of stuff - she was a funny old, funny old stick. Going to Mass with her. We used to go sort of regularly or

- 17:00 irregularly. I don't remember going a lot but I remember going occasionally. Certainly while you were at school there was Mass during the week and all that sort of stuff - depending on the time of the year, for Easter and that sort of thing. I remember doing the whole Catholic Communion and getting your name and I think it's your ... well they don't call them godfathers, whatever they call them. I remember the neighbour coming in and doing all that. So did that whole communion and getting your first communion stuff. I think it was just something you did, just went along for the ride. But once we went to State school that just all
- 17:30 Dissipated, I didn't go back, I didn't go to church anymore, um just felt no need to basically.

### **What about your father, did he go to church?**

Ah not a lot, occasionally. Um, Dad had a drinking problem so that was in the family for a while. And he came good, he eventually joined AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] which I'm quite proud of him. He became the Secretary and that got him back on the straight and narrow. No he didn't. I don't remember us going ... I certainly don't remember us going together. He may have when we did the communion stuff

- 18:00 but no didn't go to church often, well not that I can recall. And certainly Mum didn't, I don't remember Mum going at all because she was Presbyterian and you know just didn't see the need to. Ah teenage years, I think I got involved ... oh I got involved with the local Presbyterian Youth Club, which was good. I mean there wasn't a lot of Catholic, oh not just Catholic, there wasn't a lot of church stuff, there was just organised things for youth of our day to do. So a get together with the other locals and ah ... I can even remember driving down in someone's car, you know
- 18:30 fifteen or half sixteen going to Frankston, you know and the Dandenong/Frankston friction, you know the, a bit like they have nowadays. You know and coming back one night in the car and the car nearly losing control in the dirt. We hadn't been drinking or anything it was just we were going to quick and got into gravel and sliding about and I'm sitting there hanging on for life, all of sixteen. Um ...

### **Tell me about that the Dandenong/Frankston ...?**

Oh I think there was a bit of friction between the, the youths at the time. I mean it still happens in different places. I just think ... you know we went down a couple of times,

- 19:00 mobs of them and mobs of us but I don't remember, again I don't remember much just the car sliding in the dirt and you know the time spent at the Youth Club a couple of times just playing games and stuff. Just don't have a lot of recall for that sort of thing, I don't know why, it's just bits and pieces pop up and as we're talking things start coming up. But I guess you know your mind can only accumulate so much at a time, you don't go around remembering that stuff all the time. Ah but most of the time while I was
- 19:30 working I spent it at home, going for walks. I don't know what else I did with my time for two and half

years nearly. Worked the occasional Saturday. Working for Myer we were involved with the Myer Ringwood store being set up at Eastland in the early days, and also Northland when it got up and running. So you know that was whole big buzz, work the whole weekend and a taxi would come and pick you up and take you to work, you know it was like oh this is fantastic, you know at sixteen and a half getting picked up by a taxi and all that sort of stuff and working.

20:00 **So why did you leave school at sixteen and a half?**

Oh, we needed money in the house. Dad was working but not enough and um things were tight. Considering it was, I suppose, the boom times, we're talking about the mid-sixties, I mean things were supposed to be up but Dad wasn't in it a lot I guess because of his troubles with drinking and all that sort of thing.

**Did he have a business in Dandenong?**

No, no I was just doing odd jobs or working for the carpet factory as a storeman.

**So he wasn't working in the catering industry?**

20:30 No. Which is interesting, he let all that go, yet for years he used to make scones on Sunday. Strange isn't it, we let things slide in our lives. Maybe that was his past, who knows. I can't sit here and make judgements about that. So Mum rang Myer and got me a job. Went down to the interview and started off as a storeman down there. Um that was my education, working at Myer, working with adults. Um and people my age and older, for want

21:00 of a better word. Um, I worked for what was called the Accessories Department which covered things like all the perfumes, women's accessories, handbags, stationery, gifts and stuff. Also we used to pack ... In those days people would buy goods that were fragile and um I learnt how to pack it in what was called wood wool which is fine shaved ...

**Can you give me a little bit more about**

21:30 **um your father. You went to, the move from Geelong to Dandenong why was that, why did the family make that move?**

Don't know, I really don't know. Um I don't know what sort of job he had at Geelong - he was working at the refinery, Shell Refinery. Um, I don't know to be honest. I could ask Mum. Yeah I couldn't certainly find out. I don't know. It's funny I occasionally talk to her about things and things will come up and she'll tell me things which I never knew about. Um but maybe it was a monetary thing.

22:00 I don't really know. They moved to Dandenong, out at North Dandenong and um I presume he started work at the carpet factories there, there's the Westminster and Dandenong Carpet, oh they've been there for years on the corner of the Princes Highway and Gladstone Road, a big carpet factory. But I think one of them got burnt down a few years back and that's all gone but they were huge carpet factories. I remember going down there as a kid on Saturday mornings and he was cleaning up and huge rolls of carpet and he'd be running around with a little trolley thing and all that sort of stuff. Um

22:30 and we lived there and Mum moved out um ... 1994 he died so I think she moved out about 1996 and eventually went into a retirement place. And she was happy to leave, she'd enough of the place. Um too many memories and that sort of stuff. And I've never been back. I don't have real ... Look family life's family life but you know there's no real fond memories of that place, I don't particularly like Dandenong's energy, for want of a better word, and certainly not where I was living. I mean I might drive past one day have a look

23:00 but it doesn't grab me. I'd rather go back to Kew. I went back into Kew years ago to see my grandmother's place and actually went inside and a couple of boarders ... It's funny how you have a memory of um a place years ago, everything seems better, for want of a better word. Um there's a little balcony in the front and I thought that was quite big off the ground but it was only quite short. And they had a huge date palm in the backyard but it was sort of a side backyard with a funny shaped block. But they'd done it up. It was interesting

23:30 to see that. But I have no compunction to go back to Dandenong to see the old home, it just doesn't ... There's nothing there, not fond memories basically. It was pretty ... It was Housing Commission so you know there was a mixture of people in the place. Um I mean people have to rent what they have to rent but yeah not fond memories from that aspect so I don't need to go back really, that's past stuff I don't need to revisit. You know we had some good neighbours but you know there were others who were a bit of a hassle. So ah

24:00 yeah. So we, I, we just needed money in the house and I went to work and I was earning I don't know twenty, twenty-two dollars, a whole twenty-two dollars a week. And I'd walk down to pick up the bus in Heatherton, Princes Highway every morning and get the bus into Chadstone and um pick up stuff off the floor in the morning. They'd get goods delivered and they'd go to the departments and they'd sort out what they want and stuff would be packed away underneath, ah what used to be a car park, there used to be

24:30 underground compactors full of all the storage stuff. And um some of the blokes used to have a bit of a play around down there, for want of a better word, and muck around with the new girls and all that sort

of stuff – it was a bit of an education, it was interesting. But it was um ... yeah I did a lot of growing up there, I learnt a lot. Ah and then I got involved with the interior-decorating department. So we did windows in store displays, theme displays ... I had a bit of a flair for it I suppose.

- 25:00 Yeah it was great. You know you could help out the ??? for one and they started giving you a little area to dress in the store somewhere and you'd go to the sign writers to get your tickets done and you'd go to the department and get what you needed. And we had mannequins and um you hang signs up, you hang up ticket displays in the store. Yeah it was great I really love it, it was fantastic. I even thought when I came back out of the air force I'd go back into it and I got some books and went no don't want to. I have an interest in it but
- 25:30 I moved on, yeah been doing other things. But it was good, I enjoyed that, it was a great time. Um, the blokes all dressed well so you know you had to lift your game a bit, you know it was always collar and tie. Ah and I remember walking out the store each night, so if you had a bag you had to get it sealed and authorised so you weren't knocking stuff off basically. And there'd be managers stand at the door. And they'd check your dress on the way out. And I remember being told, Alan your sideburns are getting a bit long. You know they were sort of starting to creep down ... I wasn't even ... I was hardly
- 26:00 shaving, and they crept down ... Your sideburns are getting a bit long. Um, I learnt to play pool or snooker there. They had a member ... Actually there was a show on TV last night about dynasties and they were talking about the whole Myer foundation. And yeah we had three huge snooker tables and that's how I learned to play snooker. A couple of the older, older blokes that new how to play and the indoor bowls there as well. So if it was wet and rainy and you couldn't get outside, it was too cold, go down and play snooker, or table tennis on your
- 26:30 lunch break – that was good. It was good, it was interesting. And you know you got ... There was a couple of older women in the ah vestibule department so you got to know how to interact with women. It was an education, it was interesting. So when I joined the air force I hadn't come straight from school. Um I think I had a little bit of an edge to a degree. I sort of ... I wasn't street wise but I'd grown up a bit in those two and a half years, being with adults of all ages and different personalities and that sort of stuff
- 27:00 so when I went over to Edinburgh where the recruitment was done ... Oh and that's right I forgot about that, I was involved in the Air Training Corps so I think thirteen and a half, fourteen I joined the Air Training Corps which is now called Australian Air Cadets I think, that was part of the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] . Because a lot of those blokes I think in the Second World War would join the Air Training Corps and then they'd be recruited off into the RAAF. So that was a Friday night um parades down at the old Caulfield Technical School, which is now part of Monash Uni. So
- 27:30 we'd get into our uniform and get the ah, and get the train down and the boots. And in winter they used to have these fantastic navy blue, the old air force coats, really thick, beautiful coats. Go down into parades and you'd have your class on aircraft recognition and field stuff and yeah it was great, I loved it. But once you started working it got difficult to sort of keep that up and you had to leave at eighteen anyway, you had to sort of step out of that so I think I left about sixteen and a half, seventeen.
- 28:00 Excuse me. Yeah it was great, I enjoyed it. So it reinforced that air force stuff. And I remember joining the air force and then when we arrived at Edinburgh we had a weekend, we arrived on the weekend so there wasn't much happening, and we were all lined up and the corporal said oh who's been in the cadets or air cadets? And silly me put my hand up and he said right you come out here and take them down to the, down to the mess and march them down to the mess. So oh right. Well I sort of knew how to do that because we'd practised stuff and parade
- 28:30 drills and all that sort of stuff, and drill competitions between flights so I knew how to basically do it, I think I must have done it okay. And I remember working in the sergeant's mess that weekend peeling onions. I went to bed and the onions just stunk, oh my hands just smelt of onion, it was horrible, absolutely horrible. So that was my induction to kitchen mess work, my first weekend in the RAAF. But after that it was good.

### **So with the Air Training Corps was that**

- 29:00 **regimented, were you trained in drills and ...?**

Drills. I remember going to, we went to a RAAF base at East Sale, RAAF base at East Sale for a camp which was two weeks in the school holidays. It was freezing cold, absolutely freezing cold down there. Slept in the big old barracks and ah my first flight was in an old DC3 Dakota – fantastic. So I was getting my flight stuff, that was my first flight, yeah we went up. And they had, they used for navigation training, they had a bubble in the

- 29:30 roof and you could sort of get up and step and look around as well. Um, we all went down in a steam train and you know spend doing drill and sort of semi-air force stuff. But again don't remember a lot about it which is really weird. Learnt how to fire a rifle. They had .303 but they had what's called a .22 bore down the middle so you didn't get that kick. Ah so we got to do rifle shoots on the range. Yeah so it was all regimented , it was all very military stuff, um I just
- 30:00 accepted that, that was part of the deal, it didn't worry me. And as I suppose Myer was fairly regimented too – you know this is what you did, you did what you were told, you know your hair had to

be this certain length and all that, you know. And that's right the sharpies were around at that time in the sixties, so it was the sharpies and the, someone will remember this, um the bodgies or something like that. So they'd often have rock bands doing things at the Mall and Myer would be promoting it and often we'd be involved in setting them up and getting them off and, and of course

30:30 I had reasonably sharp hair, oh get off the stage sharpie and all that sort of stuff. So that was, that was quite interesting - so it was the sharpies and the mods or whatever they were - so it was the long haired and the short hair. So if you had anything short you were a sharpie, so but that was just something you did with Myer, that was the way you operated. But Myer was interesting you know because as I said earlier the blokes all dressed very sharply, you know very smart, you know collar and tie, dressed well, um ... Oh I remember we had a Greek bloke start to work with us and there's no difference to a Greek and

31:00 he was a really lovely bloke but he didn't have any underarm deodorant and it like ... it got on the nose after a while. So we all had our own little desks, it was like um against the wall and sloping like a draftsman's desk you'd put your stuff on so I left some, one of the women got some deodorant and roll-on and left it there in full view to give him a hint. But it was done all very politely, he wasn't sort of you know dragged up and told you will have a shower or anything, they sort of left it there and he got the idea, not very subtle.

31:30 But it was good, yeah I really enjoyed it. Yeah it was different people and um first encounter with, with gays, for want of a better the word - the boss was. I thought there was something, but nobody said anything, yet all the Melbourne team were batting for the other side as they say nowadays. But the blokes I was with weren't. You know we had blokes who played in a rock bands, one played blues, and had a guitar and a harmonica, he used to play that at work occasionally. The other bloke was in a

32:00 rock band and um, yeah it was a great time. Yeah I keep saying it was an education and it was for me those two and a half years. And I think it made stepping into the air force easier for me. Because I remember I'd been there three or four weeks and a new lot would come through and blokes were going home and you had two or three weeks to make your mind up, and they got homesick and they were leaving. We said, oh you wusses, you can't hack it but you know that's how things are so it was good. Went to Adelaide in summer, very hot, very hot.

32:30 Because I joined in February 1960, February of 1968, and spent um April, May over Easter. I remember coming home for Easter and flying home because it was only a whole eighty dollars return air, you know airfare compared to what it is nowadays and I saved up the money and jumped on an Electra or a Viscount and flew home from Adelaide to Melbourne for the Easter. It was fantastic, I'm living the life, this is great. You know I was in flying again so it was fantastic, home in an hour and a half

33:00 rather than travelling overnight in the Overlander or something like that, so it was good.

**Um I'm interested um in more about the culture of Myer at the time. It's fascinating what you're saying you know about this and that period of time. So for example what, they had rock bands playing ...?**

Oh they occasionally had rock bands playing in the Mall.

**What ones?**

Oh look I suppose I should know but I can't remember who they were, we just help them set up a couple of times with a portable stage and backdrop and um

33:30 all the girls would be there and it might be a Saturday morning or Friday afternoon or something and um I just remember getting them off out the back and rushing them away from the girls that wanted to sort of get their autographs. And we were getting abused as we were getting them out the back, down the ... In between the shops there'd be um exits and we'd take them out the back, around the back into a waiting car and the girls were chasing us and abusing us because we were sharpies and they were long haired and ... Oh well when I say abusing, oh sharpies ...! you know all that sort of stuff. Because all the rock bands

34:00 obviously had long hair you know so and um yeah but it was just one of those things we did, just got involved and that was good. But we also would do themes for different times like Christmas or Easter or something like that. So you'd spend a couple of weeks preparing a whole them in the store in one section sort of thing, or working weekends preparing it. Excuse me. We had um I remember in the women's lingerie we made a huge Tiffany lamp and of course the ceilings were quite high. And it was all metal and it was covered in taffeta and there was a way of putting the taffeta,

34:30 gluing the taffeta on and then you'd have to peg it all down and wait until it was dry and then do the next thing and all this sort of stuff. And there was a way of, um they had the very low platforms you'd put mannequins on so we used to, we used taffeta to dress it and you'd staple it and you'd staple the middle and then turn it over and then staple out and then pull it as you went a long. So there was a way of getting that tight fit. And then you'd have to pull it all out so there was a way ... You know we'd either just go and get things out of the department or you know a section to use for the display.

35:00 So there was a degree of autonomy in the work you did at you know sixteen and a half or seventeen. So you were expected to organise your tickets, get them ready for your display, hang them in a particular

way, get material, you know prepare it, dress the mannequins, um there was a couple of ladies involved and they were involved in dressing them and that sort of stuff and um ... I can remember getting quite cheeky because you get quite confident working in that sort of arena.

35:30 And um it could be crowded some mornings in the store and you'd push this little hand trolley around getting stuff off and on and I'd say excuse me, excuse me I need to just get through and somebody said oh what have you done? I said nothing yet, like don't hassle me you smart arse. Those funny things you know. Yeah you get quite confident. And we had huge ladders we'd carry around the store, mostly wooden. I think we had one aluminium one, it was a light as anything. But these huge wooden ladders and you'd get quite

36:00 cocky and step on the escalator and go up and you'd have it sitting on your shoulder in a way that it would just sit there propped. So you'd see people look across and see this ladder going up the escalator and didn't quite see the person holding it. Those sort of things you'd do just to um sort of stir the possum a bit. Um, run up and ...

**It must have felt like it was your store.**

Well you did, you did, yeah that's a way of putting it. Yeah we were a small little tight group. There was about um three seniors and two juniors so there was five or six of us. So yeah

36:30 we had the run of the store basically. Setting it up, move around the back of the store get goods. They had a night watchman. He actually would come in and spend all night in the store and ah he had the keys to unlock the main doors and that sort of stuff. And you didn't know where he was so if you were feeling hungry and you felt like having a chocolate out of the lolly department you had to make sure he wasn't around. I can still see him walking, it was a bit ... yeah a bloke in his fifties and he kept his eye on things so you had to be pretty quick to get a Kit-Kat or something like that

37:00 because they'd just cover it, it wasn't locked down or anything, they just cover them over, so you could help yourself so to speak. But um ...

**So you were working after hours?**

I'd work after hours yeah like you'd work your normal nine to five-thirty but if there was a promotion coming up you might work a couple of nights that week. And they'd send you home in a taxi because buses finish at six o'clock and Chadstone ... the closest one was Oakley Station, so it was a bit of a walk Yeah, they'd send you home and pay for the taxi. So that was overtime and that was you know lots of extra money and I think

37:30 I made forty-eight dollars clear one week and it was oh my God look at all this money, you know forty-eight bucks. And I was paying board, I was getting it free. I mean that was the point of me working, to pay board, to bring extra money ... And when I joined the air force I had money still going home, each fortnight to Mum's account and that continued until I left, ah which was four years later when I was discharged. So I had money, there was still money going home, even though I wasn't at home.

38:00 So yeah Myer was an interesting time. Ah and then they built Eastlands so we helped setting that up. I remember crawling around the roof - I don't know what for but I was crawling on the roof. I think they were hanging some stuff up through the roof and I had to tie up the nuts to hold it, the down drops and that sort of stuff. And Eastlands as well and that was doing displays and getting it ready for the store. And I've actually been to Eastlands and in one of the centre's management they've got the early shots of it being built. So that's, yeah that brings back memories

38:30 of that time too. And again you know travelling by taxi was just fantastic, quite an amazing time. It was a different era. And then you go and see Chadstone and it's like oh my God you need a day to walk around the place, it's huge.

**Well like you say Chadstone was the first of a kind of mega shopping complex.**

Yeah, it was.

**So was there some prestige attached to working at Myers out there or the fact that it was this new ...?**

Just this whole new complex, yeah. I mean if I wasn't working I was at home, so I wasn't exactly mixing with a lot of

39:00 people, except for the Youth Club occasionally. But I think yeah if you worked for Myer it was like you're working for Myer you're not working for one of the little stores down the road. Um there was all the individual shops. I don't recall any other major store. There might have been a hardware shop down the other end. I remember I used to play little tricks on the newcomers and they sent this other bloke Greg, who was a German, and I remember running into him years ago in Albury-Wodonga. He hadn't changed, still the ginger hair and was working for Carlton United. He was a bit of a ... he thought he was ... he was

39:30 a bit up himself. And when they found out he wasn't paying board, the other blokes, they gave him heaps. And here he was working and living at home but he wasn't paying board. At that time you were supposed to pay board, everyone paid board if you stayed at home, you know. And then sent down for a can of banana oil from the paint shop, because they had a huge maintenance complex at that time, it

looked after everything for the Myer, not so much for Myer but also for the whole complex, and we used to get in big paint stuff and you know. So we sent down for a gallon of banana

40:00 oil. And he went trotting off to get this can of banana oil - there's no such thing. That was one way of sort of taking him down a peg. So we used to do funny things like that occasionally yeah.

**What about the ... I mean Myer is famous for its Christmas window. Were you involved in a setting up ...?**

Um no and I can't remember if we had Christmas when I was at Chadstone. We may have but I don't recall which is really weird. Certainly Myer Melbourne was famous and I mean the blokes were really quite phenomenal with that.

40:30 And it's funny I went and had a look at them this year, I missed the last couple, and I don't know it just didn't grab me but I think it was set around Gringshaw, Grideg, that funny evil elf, Christmas elf or something like that. I could be wrong. They were okay but I've seen better I guess, but that's everyone's personal choice. But I don't recall doing Christmas windows at Myer Chadstone. I think that was more Myer Melbourne's domain. We may have been just some Christmassy stuff. We'd put Christmas stuff in the window probably to make it look more Christmassy

41:00 on our display. But we had huge, quite large windows. I mean like the sliding door of this unit here was about the size of the big one, if not longer. And they had back stores so you could walk in behind them and take stuff out and pull the window out and then re-dress the window and all that sort of stuff and ... We had you know displays ... We'd get brown cork blocks you'd use to display shoes or special stands and all that sort of stuff. Or mannequins you'd have to dress and all that sort of ... It was a bit weird because you'd have these mannequins and you're sixteen and a half and you're sort of aware

41:30 of stuff and you're dressing this female mannequin in the window. It was a bit weird. You know you'd get some funny things said to you or a bloke would knock on the window and point at the woman, you know oh she's got a couple of boobs you know. Yeah it was certainly an interesting time. No it was good, I enjoyed it.

## Tape 2

00:35 **So given the culture of the Myer company were you given sorts of opportunities or concessions, did you feel like you were taken care of by the company, in the way you were just describing?**

Oh about the earlier Myer stuff.

01:00 Um well not really. I guess things, the culture had changed over a period of time. I don't recall anything like that. I mean the business about checking the bag when people were leaving, I mean things have changed, I guess if people have the opportunity to take stuff they will, but they never occurred to me to do that. But they looked after us. I mean like sending you home in a taxi. I mean that may happen here still in certain businesses, um but probably not. So they were happy to do that and if you were coming to work in the morning, like Saturday or Sunday morning,

01:30 or working out at, I think it was Eastland, and I got a taxi to pick me up first and then we picked up another bloke who lived in Dandenong South and we went by taxi. Which may not sound much to the people nowadays but the company was looking after us because we couldn't get to work and they needed to have us at work. And if we worked late at night then the taxi would take us home, you know there was no drama about that. Um, I certainly enjoyed the work there and felt that they were looking after us. And they provided you know the room to play snooker and table tennis and stuff so we could

02:00 hang out if we didn't want to go out at lunchtime. So I guess we were taken care of in that respect. Um you know what's funny, I keep saying about Albury Wodonga but I lived in Albury Wodonga for nineteen years and about the middle of the nineties, it might have been ninety-six, Myer set up a store there, a sort of a little shopping complex there, and I was walking through Myer one day and this bloke was walking the other way and we both looked at each other and he had a white shirt and black tie which most of the managers, well they wore, and we both

02:30 recognised each other and neither of us stopped. And I kicked myself. And now if see somebody I stop, and if I make a fool of myself it's fine but I don't walk away going oh I wish I'd spoken to that person. And he was my old boss. He was really lovely. He was the manager of Accessories and really looked after you. You know sort of that person who's um concerned about you and doesn't get cranky. He really knew how to deal with people, he was a person's people sort of thing. And we both looked at each other and I

03:00 could see he thought I know you and I went I definitely know you, and I didn't stop. And that meant he was still working for Myer and that was in the nineties. I know that sounds a bit weird but um it was interesting.

**Was he the boss who was gay?**

No, no, no, no, the boss who was gay was in charge of the display department – big tall Irishman. But a really lovely bloke, but he was ... you could tell there was something a bit different but no-one ... there was no hassle about that, you know what I mean? Like there was no reference made

- 03:30 to it I guess. He was just the way he was, you know, that was just how it was. I think there may have been someone else but I wasn't sure but there was never ever comment made and he did his job and he was fantastic, you know. I remember going to his house, he lived in South Melbourne, on um Albert Road, I went to a party, don't ask me how I got there. Lucky I got the train to Melbourne, I don't know, I remember vaguely going to a party there, it might have been a birthday party or something that he put on and we all got invited, I don't know how I got there. There's just
- 04:00 this little memory that pops in but before and after I've got no idea what happened, and we went there for a party. But he was great, yeah he was fantastic. He supported everyone and he knew his job and we did our job and there was no hassle. You know got on well with all the blokes. And before I actually started with interior decorating we um, I said earlier, we used to send out packages. You know like people would buy glass vases and stuff and needed to have it shipped off or sent home or they couldn't carry it. And there was two blokes employed in
- 04:30 the loading bay who just packed goods – that was there job. Had the shirt and tie and a grey dust coat and all this wood wool and I got shown to pack that stuff. We'd roll it up in tissue paper then we'd put the wood wool and you'd pack it in. And there was a way of taping it and there was a way you tied the string on it – because the Myer truck would take it out. Really delivery service. No charge and nothing ever came back broken, never. I never had ... Well they never had anything come out broken and I certainly, like if it was quiet,
- 05:00 that is what I had to go down and do, pack this stuff up. Even if it's in a box you'd still wrap it in tissue paper, put it in wood wool – nothing came back broken. There's all these little things of extra value and service that stores now make a note about of customer service which I don't see a lot of – it doesn't exist, it's all talk as far as I'm concerned. But Myer certainly had it in those days. Yeah that's how they ... you want stuff delivered, it got delivered, it got packed, nothing came back broken. Um even,
- 05:30 even a way to sweep the floors in Myer in the Accessories where the storeroom was all concrete and before they seal it you'd use, you know if you used the broom you always swept away, you never pulled the broom towards you because you're pulling the dust onto you, you're walking into your own dust, they always pushed the broom away. All these little tricks they you learnt you know so that years later you don't forget. And they'd use wet sawdust, you don't put in dry sawdust because that just ... you'd dampen the sawdust. You'd throw it down,
- 06:00 it goes down because the wetness holds the dust in so that when you sweep up there's no dust coming up and it doesn't get into the stuff in the compactors. All these little tricks you know this storeroom taught me. Strange little things like that. Also with the compactors a couple of them were sealed off because they had all the big boxes of Kit-Kats and stuff. But where there's a will there's a way, and ah we could climb on top of the compactors and help one self occasionally. Sorry about that!
- 06:30 I don't think it affected their profit that much. Um yeah so they were interesting times. So all those little things one learnt how to do things I guess, yeah. I mean it mightn't mean much nowadays but um even how to, how you tie the rope onto a box, you know if you want to do it four times there's a way of making a loop and bringing it around and taking it in and tying it again so it stays tight basically, and that's something I do nowadays. And if I use ...
- 07:00 I do another job with a mate doing picture framing and when I can actually clean up the studio, it's all dusty with debris, I'll use the wet sawdust. No, no he says don't sweep up the dust, and I say no, no dust. I throw the wet sawdust down and there's no dust. So some things you don't forget.

**Um, so you were seconded to Eastlands or how did, or you were based at Chadstone and ...?**

Based at Chadstone and we were um I guess seconded, but they needed you know things to be getting up and ready, they were

- 07:30 ready to open and their display staff hadn't been hired I guess so we went in and you know set ... I don't know whether there were any windows at Eastlands because it was a fairly new store. I can't remember which is really weird. But certainly the internal displays, you know setting up again the platforms with mannequins or whatever it might have been or displays within the store or hanging stuff out of the ceiling – that was what I was crawling around the ceiling for because they'd hang down like metal rods and stuff, so they had me crawling around
- 08:00 the roof. And there's no much space which is a bit weird, and you know they'd put them up and you'd make sure they were level and you'd just screw the nuts on the whole thing down and just setting up things for them, yeah. And Northland which was a fair trip by taxi from Dandenong, I can tell you that. I wasn't paying, that was great. But that was the store they looked after me. So yeah I was involved in just the display stuff that was all. So once they were up and running we then went back to Chadstone, yeah.

**So Chadstone really was the training ground**

08:30 **for that sort of um ...?**

Oh ... No they trained their own staff. I mean if you worked in Myer Melbourne and you were doing interior decorating you worked for the Myer Melbourne people. We didn't have a lot to do with them at all really. We knew of them but I don't recall them coming to us or me going there. The training was done within the store itself, yeah we didn't have much ... Once they were up and running that was it.

**Were you training people at Eastlands and Northland?**

Hm, can't remember. Don't remember.

09:00 Um, no I don't know to be honest. I guess they would take people or maybe take some people out from Myer Melbourne because they had a bigger staff load there - they may have taken them across there. But I don't recall. Just setting them up that's all I can remember.

**Did you say you were still with the Air Force Corps?**

The Air Training Corps? Yeah I was still there yeah but I eventually resigned because it was getting difficult to get from work there on a Friday night and you know I've got a bit of overtime and yeah. And I guess I,

09:30 I wouldn't say lost interest but I guess that my perception was changing a bit and I don't know it was just difficult to get there and it was easier for me to resign rather than try to hassle. And I think I was seventeen and I was sort of chomping at the bit to get into the air force anyway. So um the recruiting mob was down in Flinders Lane. And um went there and did, sat there and did a test and ... And it's funny another bloke did a test and he was from Wangaratta and we were eventually

10:00 the only two that got in from that day, and eventually I met him at RAAF base Richmond after our training. So he was sort of I think a month behind me or something like that and we eventually ran into each other and we were the only two that got through at that time, so um ... When I got the psych report years later, because I got all my medical papers at one stage, and there were some interesting comments the ah Recruitment Officer had made at the time about my home life and I went oh, oh I didn't know that, did I say that? It was interesting.

10:30 So um ...

**What did you say?**

I knew you were going to say that. Um ...

**Well what was the psychiatrist or psychologist ...?**

It was a psychologist and he said, oh I think it was comments about the home life wasn't really good and he was wanting to get out of it and ah ... How'd he put it? Home life wasn't really good and there were a few hassles around Dad and he was wanting to leave that environment. Oh look I can't remember the psych's

11:00 interview and there it was on black and white. But they were happy to take me so I must have done well enough in the written exam. Um ...

**So what else did they test you on?**

Ah general knowledge stuff. I remember a stage question. There's a diesel train travelling north/south and the wind's blowing east/west which way's the smoke blowing? Ah hang on diesel train? There's not normally any smoke out of a diesel train. I think that was a trick question.

11:30 It's the only one I can remember. I must have got that one right. Oh well let him in. Ah but then I saw some blokes who came in later and I don't know how they got into the services they were really like mm interesting. Oh I'm being unkind. Not strange but you thought geez how did they get through? Maybe they needed blokes at the time, I don't know. I wanted to join as a dog handler initially and they didn't accept me. Because I had the dog ... I always had animals, you know I had

12:00 WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s, cats, dogs. And I wanted to be with the dog handlers and they just didn't accept me and they said oh what about Airfield Defence Guard? And I said what's that? And they said oh well you do airfield security, you don't know you might get sent overseas ... Oh said oh yeah I'll do that, yeah I'll be in that, yeah that's fine. So that's what I ended up doing.

**A dog handler for what?**

The RAAF, yeah they had dogs there.

**So how did they use dogs?**

Oh for airfield security. Um I think they may have had them at Butterworth because we had a RAAF base there and ... They use them even more now,

12:30 the dog handlers are used a lot more now, in the army and the air force, yeah, for patrols and all sorts of things. But mostly it's airfield security and around more secure bases - they were mostly German Shepherds at the time. For some reason I didn't meet the grade, I don't know why, I would have thought

I would have but you know that was fine, that was why I was a defence airfield guard. And it was funny when we were at Edinburgh in recruitment training phase, there was myself and another bloke called Wendt, and we were the only two who were Airfield Defence Guards.

- 13:00 And I remember the corporal who had been one, and they were called I think ADI's, dual instructors, couldn't understand why we wanted to be airfield defence guards. And we went oh this is not looking good, he doesn't think we should be one, bit late now. Well we'll keep going and see what it's all about. So that was good.

**So you didn't want to be a pilot?**

Oh yeah would have loved to have been a pilot but didn't have the marks, I left school at fifteen and a half. You had to have Matriculation and my maths was pretty woeful and ... Oh yeah wanted to fly, mad as anything.

- 13:30 That was a goal I made years ago and I still haven't got there but you know life's not over yet. Oh yeah wanted to be in the air force but never thought of being air crew and no-one said anything about air crew to me either I guess, but I didn't think of it, I just thought of pilot and nothing else. Never thought of being a ... well I wouldn't be able to be in navigation, I can't get my maths right so ... Um yeah there was Loadmasters, there was um on helicopters there was crewmen. Um so yeah I was in the air force, I was happy I guess. So did the recruitment
- 14:00 at Edinburgh and then got sent to Amberley, RAAF base Amberley. And that's when I got homesick. I got there and there was two weeks before the next ADG [Aerodrome Defence Guard] course started so I had two weeks to fill in so I used to put in what was called, they'd put you in a pool, so if um a certain flight or section or repair works needed some extra labourers or whatever you'd go and work there. And I think spent my time working on the RAAF fire brigade or fire engines, the repair section. And it was great, um you know morning
- 14:30 and afternoon tea the blokes would sit there and play cards to I learnt to play Euchre and Five Hundred. Or they'd send me off to the canteen to get their morning tea and it was pretty relaxed. And when I hear blokes talking about the army life, we had it good. You know like even in recruitment time when you have to get up at six o'clock to get up early and get your room ready, clean the room and make your bed, get down for breakfast and ready to start training at seven thirty. Well the army blokes were getting up at four or five o'clock in the morning, they were getting called out in full battle dress ... What! That's ridiculous, you know we were quite civilised,
- 15:00 we had it pretty easy really. When I hear how the army blokes train, it was good, it was quite civilised.

**Okay so just going back to recruitment, what happened ... how long did it take before you were advised you were in? Or did that happen very quickly, when you were told you were accepted?**

Oh it happened ... Ah I probably did the test December, it might have been about mid, early December I think, because I probably would have got notified about January and I was in February, February I started.

- 15:30 So I think it was late 1967, it might have been November/December. I remember going into town and not telling anyone and getting through and then coming back and eventually getting accepted and then coming back and telling them I was resigning to join the air force. And I think one of the women, Gail, said oh I thought you'd be going in, I had a feeling you wouldn't be staying here. I don't know whether I talked about it or not but um I probably had a months notice. So went down to Spencer Street to what was called the RTO [Railway Transport Officer],
- 16:00 it was the Armed Services Rail Transport Office. Got the ticket, jumped on the train on my own you know, overnight to Adelaide. I think we got picked up by a bus and driven out to Edinburgh, RAAF base Edinburgh which is outside Elizabeth. And the first weekend we arrived within a week, there used to be a bit of air force/civilian stuff going on, and ah a few of the boys had got bashed up, air force blokes. Because in summer we ah had the army slouch hats so you had a chin strap.
- 16:30 So a couple of days in the sun and the sun tan and you've got a bit of a mark so they knew you were in the air force - (a) because you had the short hair and you'd often have this chin strap stuff. And a few of the boys got into a fight so the whole base was ready to march in and everyone got confined to base - they were ready to go in and just take out everybody out in the street. The gates were shut and no leave this weekend - everyone stays on base. Um and I had ... Yeah I got hassled one day in Adelaide after you know the recruitment training you got ... and then you'd have, we used to have Friday night,
- 17:00 Friday afternoons was stand down until Sunday night and you could do what you wanted. I went into Adelaide one weekend just to walk around. And actually my neighbour in Dandenong, his brother lived in Adelaide, I went in and visited him a couple of times. And they used to have a little band and they used to play in the pubs. So we went around the pubs occasionally. But I remember one Saturday morning getting hassled by a couple of blokes - I had the chin strap mark, and I just kept walking. I was outnumbered so ... But that was the sort of ... that was the hassle at the time. And it was
- 17:30 pretty hot Adelaide, you know South Australia gets pretty warm.

**What do you think the reason for their antagonism was?**

Oh us and them. Maybe mentality – you’ve got a job, we haven’t got a job. Ah the military stuff. Ah I really don’t understand that. I don’t know I’ve never ... Maybe it’s the mob stuff, you know you come from one suburb and another suburb’s got mob stuff. I don’t know, I only encountered it there, I didn’t encounter it in Queensland, you know didn’t have any hassles in

18:00 um Ipswich, which was a coal town sort of working industry area and there was an agricultural college somewhere there. So we used to go to the dances on Saturday night in Ipswich and there was no hassles there. A lot of agricultural blokes, you know students were there so it was them and us and the locals, but I never encountered any hassles. I don’t know why, maybe it was just the mentality of the blokes there in the area – a working district and didn’t appreciate the Services. And I mean that’s got to come from somewhere so maybe their parents were talking to them, I don’t know.

18:30 I didn’t encounter a lot of it but just that first week you know no-one goes off base, stay in. It would have been a big punch up. So yeah that was good.

**So can you tell me more about life at Edinburgh, what you were trained in and ...?**

Well again drill, marching, so everyone’s got to follow a, a particular way of moving around, you know you march around in flights, parades, drills, um so we could produce, if you know how to do parades and stuff, so for Anzac Day

19:00 or whatever may be happening they’d take a section out. Not that we did in Edinburgh, it was more in Sydney when I was at RAAF base Richmond we did a lot more. And um rifle shooting, how to carry a rifle, camping, going out to the range to shoot. Ah what else was there? Oh some lessons on nuke and biological warfare stuff. General service life. RAAF service life, RAAF military rules.

19:30 Basic training, yeah. A lot of drill stuff, carrying rifles, runs. Um getting fit. Running in a group. Supporting each other. If someone runs short you’ve got to wait for him or go back and get him – you don’t leave him on his own. Um, just basically getting fit. Which was good. Um, three meals a day. And I can remember that it was also the same area for the recruitment for the WAAFs [Women’s Auxiliary Australian Air Force]. And it was pretty strict then, like they’re over that side of the mess,

20:00 you don’t go over that side of the mess, you don’t even look at them. It was really weird. As there was a old couple of corporals, you know they really enforced it, you didn’t stand around checking them out and talk to them. But you got to meet them after hours. And there was actually a girl who had come from Noble Park which is next to Dandenong North so I got friendly with her and actually her Mum came over for her passing out parade and I remember going back to the parent’s motel and having a drink and ... Yeah got to know a couple of them that way sort of thing. And I remember

20:30 we had our passing out parade and the bloke, one of the blokes played bagpipes so he, and there was him and a drum I think, and we had bagpipes at our passing out parade and it was just, I love them, I just love bagpipes and we had this bagpipe going – it was just amazing. It had been raining that morning so the parade ground was wet and you know the boots were all shiny and the white webbing and ah we looked pretty good actually. Mum, Dad and ... I remember Mum and Dad not coming across. I was pretty disappointed, you know, all they had to do was jump on a train,

21:00 you know stay in a motel, but they didn’t come. You know, well so what, well you know a lot of parents made the effort. But that was just ... that was fine. And then we went out ... Because in Adelaide you couldn’t drink, you had to be twenty-one and I was a whole seventeen and a half. So we went into the local pub didn’t we, into a little back room to celebrate. And we were drinking rum and ... I never ... Oh I had the occasional shandy at home, that was about all, and I was drinking rum and coke that night and sculling ...

21:30 And I remember coming home in a taxi and the bloke said if you’re going to be sick you stick your head out that window. And I did. I didn’t touch rum after that. I felt a bit crook that night. Um and then we train, we got a train to Dand, home to, start again. Got a train to Melbourne, so I dropped in and saw Mum, Mum and Dad. And then that night drove off to Sydney, then stayed in Sydney for a day, then got a train up to Queensland and off to Amberley where we spent ah,

22:00 oh about four or five nights in Amberley.

**So how long was your basic training at Edinburgh?**

Oh February, March, April ... Easter’s April isn’t it? So it must have been about three and a half months, yeah. Because I remember the break in between, well towards the end of it, that was when it was Easter. So you know I saved up my money because like ... What were we getting a fortnight? It was some huge amount like I don’t know a hundred and seventy dollars a fortnight or something. And I thought I was rich, absolutely rich, you know always the money coming in. So I saved up money and flew home for Easter which was great, fantastic.

22:30 You know flew home in the uniform and chatting up the airhostesses. Yeah, life was pretty good then. I loved the air force, I loved the time. In fact years later I remember thinking I’m going, I’ve had enough of civilian life, I’ve had enough of trying to work for myself I’m going back into the service, this is my way out. But it was not to be, mm it’s like a cop out. And some people say you know, it’s regimented, you get told what to do, you don’t have to think, which is probably true in some respects but it depends

on the

23:00 job you do. But you know I ... To me I saw a bigger picture of you're doing something for the community at large. Ah I think at times the services don't get utilised up enough. I think you know ... My soap box is the fires that we encounter, we don't utilise the services enough and when they're brought in they're brought in too late. They don't utilise, to me, they don't utilise the fire dropping capabilities, the army Chinooks and the RAAF 130, first. But that's another story and don't

23:30 get me started on that one. The amount of goodwill that it would build up if they were brought in earlier rather than spending millions of dollars creating this National Fire Fighting System and hiring equipment and hiring helicopters when we've got the equipment sitting there that we've already paid for. I don't quite get that. And those Hercs for years to do fire drops and it can be done. And the Chinook's capability of lifting water is the largest in Australia. Hello?

24:00 And why aren't they brought in earlier? Yeah and heli ... You know there are places where you can't use fixed wing aircraft. Well why not use them earlier and get rid of the fire earlier. I mean let's get over the ego stuff and use the stuff rather than spending more money on hiring stuff. I don't understand them. But you know maybe I should talk to a politician about that.

**Well it's on the record.**

Oh good, good. I hope someone's listening.

**Do you want to say anything more?**

So it was about three and a half, four months then went to Edinburgh ... ah sorry to Amberley for about the same time.

24:30 So the ans ... That's when things got lifted up so it was more weapons training, ambush patrol work, getting a lot fitter, climbing ropes - which I'd never done before, that was a whole new thing. I remember climbing up a rope and we had to go along, climb a vertical rope and then go along a horizontal. So there was a trick to doing that and ah I remember swinging around and falling off a rope and swearing and he said you can't do that now get back up the rope and climb it again. So the trick to ... There's two ways to get on the rope vertical, um

25:00 horizontal. You can either go along the top, but you've got to keep one leg dropped down and it acts as a balance, a counter balance, and you bend the other leg behind you so that the rope's across here. But if you pull that bottom, that vertical leg up, there's nothing balancing you and you immediately slip around underneath, which means you've then got to hang on by your arms and cross your legs over the rope. So you've got the weight of your body then hanging down, and pull yourself along. So if you can get on top of the rope and pull yourself along that

25:30 way, along as you've got that leg hanging down, which acts as a pendulum, that to me is easier but that's a tricky one. So if anything, anything falls down underneath and flips you underneath you've got to keep your legs on the rope at the same time. And there's a way of climbing ropes up vertically, so yeah.

**What sort of ropes are you talking about?**

Oh horizontal ropes.

**A single horizontal rope?**

Yeah a single horizontal rope. I mean we got taught to walk on a single one with two ropes either side, and you know they're swinging as well, and you know there's a way of balancing yourself on that one but they taught how to

26:00 climb up on a rope, it was you know between two trees or a ravine or whatever it may have been. Um yeah and you do that with packs and rifle on as well, so it gets tricky. Um and a lot of gun work you know. So we were trained very similar to army and weapons handlers. So the air force have always had, sorry the airfield defence gunner component, even during the Second World War, but they were known differently and they were trained similar to the army then. There's a whole

26:30 story about how they were trained, ah and the army blokes come in and run it and all that sort of stuff. The ADG or Airfield Defence has always been there to protect the airfield. But now I believe they actually train the personnel as well on a military base, or the RAAF base, had to be involved in that aspect, they don't just rely solely on Airfield Defence Guards. So the military personnel or the RAAF personnel also get trained in weapons handling and know how to, have to go out and protect the air base as well. But the airfield that's the major aspect of the airfield that is guarded,

27:00 aircraft, and airfield and personnel security. So that could mean going out on patrols or maintaining the perimeter and checking people coming in and off and all that sort of stuff.

**So what sort of weapons were you trained in?**

Ah what's called SLR's, self loading rifle, which was about nine and a half pound is the weapon they've had for a long time. And the army had them as well. SLR1's and then there was a two which was a sort of a semi automatic one. That used to sort of jam up a bit

27:30 so you had to um then check the safety and then adjust the gas pressure, because it used to jam up because it had a barrel, so it was more of a semi automatic. M60s which you see still being used – that was a fully automatic weapon. Um, you might see shots of Rambo standing there with it tucked under his arm, which we got to do on the firing range and it's fantastic. So that's fully automatic. Pistols, little F1 submachine guns. Um what else did we have? Um

28:00 rocket launchers but we never got to actually use them, but you knew how to dismantle and utilise but we never ... I think we might have used them once but didn't actually use them again I don't think. Um what other weapons? Oh while we were in Vietnam we set up a claymore mine – we set them up while we were out on patrol.

**You were trained how to do that at Amberley?**

Mm, yeah.

**What's a Claymore mine?**

Ah it's a compact explosive full of ball bearings and it's

28:30 slightly convexed, yeah it was shaped that way. Little legs, the detonator goes in and you set up so it blasts out that way. And there's a certain range behind you, you set up – you know you don't want to be hit sitting from here, you set it up a bit, obviously away from it when it goes off. Which reminds me of an incident when we were out on patrol because our section did an exchange with the army while we were in Vietnam. So there were a section of army came down from Nui Dat to ah RAAF base Vung Tau

29:00 and did airfield security and we went up and did two weeks up there. So we did reorientation, went out on patrol and did ambush and stuff. And I remember going out on a patrol and for some reason we had a CMF [Citizens' Military Force] officer with us on exchange and he set, we set the ambush up and he had this thing set up in front of him in a.... And I went that's not safe enough and we weren't that far back from it and I'm thinking this is not looking good. So yeah it wasn't ... nothing happened that night but it was like oh I don't think he knows what he's doing,

29:30 mm so ...

**So what sort of targets were you firing when you were training at Amberley?**

Um at the firing range they were either the bulls eye targets usually or they'd have a man shaped target. So you'd start from, let me thing, you started from, well as far back as five hundred yards, but usually it was a hundred yards. So you had a hundred yards to set your weapon and then you might move up to seventy-five, and then you might move up to twenty-five and

30:00 then you might change to a pistol at twenty-five. So you would take turns, oh excuse me, running the bulls eye or the targets up and down, checking where the weapon, where the bullet landed sort of thing. So you got to use all the weapons and also practising to make sure you hit the flaming target as well. And the blokes who got really good when we got back we got posted to RAAF base Richmond and there was a thing called the Long Bay Rifle Shoot which was an inter-service shoot so the blokes who

30:30 were really good would go in those competitions, which I didn't, I was average, I maybe needed more practise. But yeah it was interesting, um the way of lying, the way of handling the weapons. Um, ah got taught how to move through patrols, you know what to do if there was an ambush, what weapons to take, take the high ground. You see all this stuff keeps coming back it's really weird isn't it, you never forget it. A bit like riding a bike I guess. Once you've ridden a bike or you know how to swim you don't forget how to swim sort of thing. Um

31:00 yeah all that sort of stuff. And at Amberley we went out on night patrols and bivouacs and what they call a lantern stalk. So they've got a lantern set up and you'd be protected by blokes and you'd have to try and get up as close as possible without being detected.

**What's a lantern stalk?**

Well you'd have a ... Well you wouldn't so much have a lantern but you might have a light in the middle of a patch and half the blokes would be set up with protection around it and then you'd be sent off in the bush and you'd have to work your way up as close as possible before being detected.

31:30 So you know it would be semi-scrub, bush stuff and they'd do things like you might sprinkle dry grass leaves or a lot of dry twigs or another trick is to tie grass together to form a catch, like a little um loop in the grass so as you go through you might catch a leg and trip if you're walking. So besides relying on twigs and grass which are the normal stuff or hanging up empty cans you'd tie long grass and tie a couple of knots so that it forms a loop so you'd walk and you'd

32:00 fall over, you wouldn't even see it – especially at night time. Tricks of the trade I think they call it. Um what else was there? Oh we did a ... Once I'd gone back to RAAF Base Richmond they eventually sent you out on a search and rescue. So if you work in aircraft there's escape, evasion stuff or the military would do it, so mostly air crew. So the first week is a lot of theory, how to pack a backpack using a parachute and

32:30 rations. And then they'd send you out in groups of three and I was with an army pilot and a RAAF pilot and it was in the hinterlands at the back of the Gold Coast. So for three nights you have to camp out and live off rations and the ADG's from the RAAF base would come out and search for you. So if you got caught three times you'd have to do the course again. We got caught once and they let you go. We were laying there watching these blokes walk along patrolling, thinking oh we've got them covered, and two blokes walked up behind us - you're dead.

33:00 So we got caught once. And then there was a major bivouac. We stayed for a couple of nights and set up a sort of a teepee using a parachute and it was freezing cold, absolutely freezing cold. We slept in our greens, slept altogether, had a parachute on top of us. Had a fire going. Made hot chocolate from the rations and yeah it was good but by God we were hungry when we got back to base.

**And why were you carrying parachutes if you were out on a ...?**

Oh well if you ...

33:30 The theory being if you did a parachute drop you keep your parachute to pack stuff up. But the parachute we used was one way of forming a backpack so you had to make it out of bits of wood, like saplings. So you have to learn how to tie to make a backpack and use the parachute as part of that backpack, for want of a better word. Mine didn't last too well, too long. Yes but that's what you had to do, you had to utilise what you could. To carry your rations if you had rations and somehow

34:00 you know have a ration pack or whatever, and carry the other stuff with you. Um and yeah we found some wild bananas, um found some fresh water crays one day in the creek. But yeah I remember going back to base and we were getting a beer on the way back, and one beer and we were all cackers. You know hadn't drunk for two weeks. The tummy was a bit small and we were a bit hungry and we hadn't had a drink. Yeah it was good, escape and evade and that stuff, everybody had to learn that sort of stuff so

34:30 yeah all the air crew had to do it.

**So was it in those two weeks that you had this exercise of not being ...?**

Yeah, yeah, yeah, about a week. The first week was all theory and then the second week you went out. And if you got caught three times you came back and did the whole thing again.

**So what was the key to not being found, not being caught?**

Um, seeing them first. Keeping quiet, keeping low. Um we had a certain area we had to rendezvous and we had to sort of get there. Um

35:00 move quietly. Yeah keep your eye out. We didn't have weapons but they did but that was just part of the whole thing. But um you need a couple of days to do that, it wasn't like a whole week, that was like two or three days and then two or three days actually at the bivouac site, just sleeping on the site basically and then they'd come and pick us up. Yeah it was good, I enjoyed all that stuff because you know you were out in the bush and being in the air force and you know being involved with blokes that was good,

35:30 yeah.

**Were you being trained for specifically Vietnam at that stage?**

Oh we knew we'd go to Vietnam. We were told ... That was one of the initial things we were told when we joined the Airfield Defence Guard, you could get a posting overseas and that was including Vietnam and I went yep okay I'll go. Oh God, crazy. I was whole eighteen and a half, yeah that's all right, I'm fine, I'll go. Because some of the blokes had already gone to Ubon in Thailand because the RAAF had Canberras flying out there but also the Yanks had their F4 Phantoms and stuff

36:00 flying out there. And they went there in 1996 or 1997 I think. But they weren't amongst the action so to speak. So we had blokes at ah Vung Tau, which was a mixed air base, there was the Americans there as well. And we also had blokes at Phan Rang which was up country again, and they had the Yanks and the Vietnamese and the Koreans there - it was a big air base, so we had airfield defence guards there. They did patrols around the base. We

36:30 looked after the airfield security through the main gate and the gate entrance to our compound. And security in the airfield at night, so around the perimeter. And we actually ended up providing an extra gunner if you wanted to go on a helicopter you could become a gunner on the bushrangers. So I went up for a little while and kept getting airsick which annoyed the hell out of me. And the bloke said oh you'll be right, just have a throw up, you know throw up in your hat or just throw up out the door. No I just,

37:00 I just can't think you know. I mean if I knew about ginger tablets then I would have been dropping ginger tablets. And I think, it's going to sound weird, knowing what I know now and that's a whole other story, I think it was my ... I was being looked after, it wasn't my time to go up because not long after that we lost a chopper and the bloke had only been up like a week flying and got shot up. So I think I was being looked after, as much as I wanted to fly. But I went up occasionally with a mate for a, you know for a flight sort of thing, a

37:30 couple of times. You know fly up early in the morning and they'd go up to Nui Dat and you'd sit there until they got called up and go up for the day and come back. But I was doing mostly airfield work sort of thing doing patrols and ... Oh for two weeks patrols and then night work on the base. And ah when I was ... We'd go into town at night before curfew and pick the blokes up out of town - that was interesting. Our boys would often get followed back to the truck owing some money from the bars

38:00 and the girls maybe. But we'd go in with one shot up a barrel and the safety on just in case, because if something blew up you wouldn't have time to be cocking weapons and ...

#### **That must have been interesting?**

Oh yeah it was, it was. But having said that we um stayed out one night because I learnt Tae Kwon Do while there because there was a detachment of Koreans there. So for something to do a couple of Koreans taught about half a dozen of

38:30 us Tae Kwon Do. So I got my blue belt. And they were called Rocks, that was their nickname, and they were, nothing would hurt them. Amazing ... They could hardly speak English which was quite interesting. And um we trained two or three mornings a week because you'd have different starting times. You worked twenty-four hours on, working, twenty-four hours off and then twenty-four hours standby. So in standby you're in uniform but you know if anything happened you were called up straight away. So you might supervise the girls doing the sandbags

39:00 or you might do a little trip into town or whatever. Or you might um yeah go and pick up blokes before curfew. But um we had ... we passed their exam so we went out on the town that night and one of the corporals we called Darkie, he was quite dark skinned, great ... he knew how to do Tae Kwon Do, and we had use of army land rovers and they were open tops. So there was no doors and there was no canopy on them and we had an M60 man on the back so ...

39:30 Have you ever heard of the rat patrol? Well it was like that, we had this M60 man on the back. So we'd drive around town in one of those or if we did escorts um the highway you'd have the driver and the bloke in the front and someone on the back with the M60. Anyway the M60 wasn't manned though, and we were going to this little French restaurant and we're in the back of VC [Viet Cong] Hill which was the point of Vung Tau Peninsula - you know all these French villas and restaurants, and we were going there to have a celebration. And Darkie's got his .45 [hand gun]

40:00 and we were driving along and these army MP [Military Police] thing comes along and pulls us over and wants to know what we're doing because we were in civilians you see. Mind their own business, we're RAAF nick off. And Darkie's getting a bit agitated and the hand slides up to the .45 and I went oh no don't do things like that. So we showed them our ID [identification] and told them who we were and they still didn't believe us, they thought we were a couple of army blokes who had knocked off the vehicle. Anyway um ... Actually I've got photos of us in the um

40:30 restaurant all getting pretty pie-eyed with the two Koreans and the little ... Actually the bar boy who used to work in the bar for our mess was with us for some reason and we ended up going back to his parents place and still drinking on at curfew, like at half past eleven at night in the middle of Vung Tau. Because it was sort of accepted that Vung Tau was a sort of an R&R [Rest and Recreation] place for everybody - like the other side used to go there as well, not that you would know that. So you weren't supposed to be out but we were out that night having a bit of a good time. I don't know,

41:00 it was pretty late when we got back and we shouldn't have been out, pretty dark and quiet. I remember another time going in and picking up a sergeant when he was out really late one night and we had, we certainly had one up the barrel and the safety was off when we went and picked him up from his lady friend's place. Yeah that was a bit spooky.

#### **Why?**

Well because ... Well presumably the VC were out at night and you know they could you know drop anything on ... if they knew you were out and about late they'd put something on the um, on the road or they might

41:30 just ambush you. I mean you didn't know that, you didn't know. I mean they go on about, when I say they, it was generally accepted we didn't know who the enemy was, for want of a better word, you know they go on about that stuff. Well it was never, it was in the back of your mind but I never took notice of it which sounds a bit blasé. But when we went into town you know the barrel was ready and you were ready. It was like automatic, you did it or you didn't do it. I mean if you had time off you'd go into town for the day. Um

42:00 you were sort of aware of that but you weren't.

## **Tape 3**

00:31 **Just go back ...**

Okay certainly. Well at Amberley we certainly looked at all aspects of patrol work so there's some

similarities in air training I guess with the army infantry, so patrol work, ambush, weapons handling, a little bit of drill work but also getting quite fit – a lot of runs, a lot of support with each other. So we did one mile, two, five, nine mile runs in what was called PT [physical training] gear as well as full battle dress which is with your backpack and your rifle.

- 01:00 Um and the rifle weighed about nine and a half pound and it gets quite heavy after a while – especially if you run in a group, in like a jog. Excuse me. And I remember one long run, I think we were doing a five mile, and one of the blokes was starting to drop off and we had to go back and carry him. So it instils a discipline. I mean that's the whole thing about the military is. If someone breaks ranks and doesn't support each other then everything falls apart so it defeats the purpose. So we went back and carried him through. So actually it reinforces within yourself of looking after someone else but I mean
- 01:30 I guess in terms of battle that's when you needed each other. So there was that aspect of getting quite fit. Um there was even a tip outside Amberley that the PT Instructor used to take us around – run up and down hills and picking up bits of concrete and stuff. So that by the time we were finished we were lean – what's the word, I remember John Candy saying it from a movie – a lean, mean fighting machine – in a sort of funny way. And we were pretty fit. I mean it was good, it was good and healthy. I mean we did all these runnings
- 02:00 and a lot of drill work so you become familiar with weapons so if you had to dismantle you could dismantle with your eyes closed – that was the purpose of the exercise. You knew how to handle. You knew at what rate to fire. If this didn't work this is what you did. It automatic. Um safety was all upmost. You know when you stored the weapons you never had the barrel, sorry the um, I don't know what it was called, the rap tail part of the SLR [Self Loading Rifle], with the weapon generally. Or you might leave it in but your weapons weren't stored with the ammo and all this sort of stuff. So when I hear of
- 02:30 accidents nowadays obviously people don't store their weapons properly. You know kids playing with weapons and it's got the magazine in it still, it's like ... how did the person get their license in the first place. You know you pick up a weapon, check safety, magazine off, cock weapon ... It's like a system, automatic. If someone gave you a weapon now that's what you'd do. So luckily we got up to go up to Canungra, which the army put their blokes through before they usually sent them overseas. I think we did a week up there. So that's full of hills that place –
- 03:00 it's an amazing, amazing place. You know you'd get up at six o'clock in the morning and fog would rolled through the camp. There was even some New Zealand Maoris there who were dark and big and awesome looking – really quite fierce. And I saw some blokes later in Vietnam who were New Zealand SAS [Special Air Service] and I wouldn't want to meet them in a dark corner – oh they were mean looking blokes. But anyway um yeah a lot of cargo net stuff so I learnt how to fall over a cargo net. How to climb and fall over it properly without hitting yourself. Ah I had to jump off a water tower
- 03:30 which freaked me out. I've never jumped off a tower ... Like I've done a diving board but to all of a sudden jump off this huge tower into muddy water, and they had a couple of divers there, it was like ... But you know you had to do it. So it was interesting, and it was funny. We had our officer with us and we'd call him Nip Noy and he was a little shorty and he didn't have a good attitude and so he was up there with up, you know getting the blokes to jump off. And we'd all jumped off and he was left up there – no-one was going to let him come down, he had to get off, and the only way for him to get
- 04:00 off was in the water. So we all said you don't come down, we won't let you come down – that's one way of getting back at him. And it was good, it was another aspect of stuff that you learnt, there was no, I don't know it was just accepting of what you did in service life, you got told what to do and you did it. I didn't have any problems with that. And you got fit. And there was live firing ranges they had there. They had a huge old Bren set up firing live rounds. And I think we got to watch blokes doing that, we didn't get to do that aspect – we got the
- 04:30 fires and fifty calibre stuff. And it was quite amazing how the guns were set in a fixed firing line and they were firing live stuff and these blokes were crawling around underneath, it's like ... And this stuff it's going off, the canons and off the surrounding hills and rocks. It was quite amazing. Yes another aspect of life basically. So went back to Amberley. Um we lived down the back part. Amberley Air Base is huge and at my time there they had the army's 161 Recce [Reconnaissance] ah
- 05:00 Squadron there so they had little Kiowa and the Pilatus Porter Swedish aircraft there. Plus the Canberra bombers. I even remember the old Neptune aircraft, search aircraft, the old prop ones, they were there. Um let me think, F1-11s, maybe were just coming in then I think. So it was a big air base, a big air base and we used to be in the back, and we used to call it Siberia because it was that far down the back by the time you got to breakfast and back again you were hungry. I mean a bit
- 05:30 of an exaggeration but um in winter it was cold – it was just open barracks, dormitory style. So there was like four blankets and your pyjamas to keep warm at night. Um ...

#### **So were you already a unit as such?**

Ah they were a unit as such in training. But it was interesting, again the way we were trained you never stayed with the same blokes so I guess the only blokes I formed some long-term friendships with were the blokes I served with initially in Vietnam

- 06:00 and I've maintained contact with a couple of blokes over the years – one particular one called Charlie Brown of all things – he's up in Queensland, great bloke. And another bloke called Stan Harris and we worked on the Australian Forces Radio together. But that's another story. But um yeah it was pretty cold down there in winter and um I remember one Saturday morning and I was in the barracks, and they still had the F86 Sabres fly, and this thing came flying over about roof top and they scared the hell out of me, I didn't know what it was. And this pilot took it over the top,
- 06:30 you know just amazing this Sabre – like a bat out of hell, it was fantastic. So yeah Amberley was good. We were fit and by that stage you know we were trained for security work, we were trained for ambushes, bla-bla-bla sort of thing. So then we got postings so we all got split off. Sometimes they'd send, some bloke would stay in Queensland because they lived there or some blokes would go to RAAF Base Williamstown who came from New South Wales. I went to RAAF Base Richmond right on the ah river there, and um
- 07:00 way out of town, like out of Sydney, so I only went to Sydney a couple of times. And got there and all we did was sat around all day. I mean here we'd come back and we were all fit and ready to do things and there wasn't much to do. We'd do airfield security, we'd do gate work, um, and we'd get an extra day off for doing the gates – that was a rotating watch on the gates, so you'd check aircraft coming in and out. And at that time of course the Vietnam War was going, this is sixty-eight, so the RAAF were flying the C5 Galaxies in, ah not the RAAF sorry
- 07:30 the United States Air Force. So they'd come in, bring their blokes in and off load stuff and taxis would be in there to pick them up and take them into town for a day or two and then they'd come back. And so you know some American marines or a couple of navy blokes or air force blokes in the taxis and ah ... The wings, it was amazing, because the wings would droop when they stopped and then as they'd take off the wings would lift – it was quite an amazing aircraft. So we just kept keeping fit. Ah I think we went out for a week and did a bivouac and marches through the um
- 08:00 sort of the Blue Mountains aspect of the back of Richmond through there. That was interesting, we did a night walk one night with pitch black, no lanterns, you just had to keep walking behind each other – um that was interesting. I actually met up with a girl. They used to have dances on the base every fortnight, pay night. I met up with a girl there and her Dad ran a mushroom farm in, just out of Windsor. So ended up going out with a girl and learnt about mushroom farm growing. It was quite
- 08:30 amazing how he germinated the wheat, prepared the beds, the hay, you had to water the hay in a certain way and it cooked itself. Then he had this cement bath that he used to get coal from the old steam train and did something with it and that was cooked. He mixed it altogether and put it in these wire beds in sheds and then put this special prepared wheat in and then he'd grow mushrooms. Quite amazing. And you know three weeks before you'd smell the mushrooms, before even the little pinheads had come up.
- 09:00 And to go into the sheds he had this special like a sheep dip you'd put your shoes in so you wouldn't take anything in to destroy. It was yeah quite amazing. And he used to um sell that stuff to other mushroom farmers, including the old Dandenong mushroom farm which was outside Dandenong for years on Police Road. That was ah my first great love, so to speak. So um that was an interesting time and RAAF Base Richmond was good. You know the Hercules and the Caribou so
- 09:30 it was Thirty-Five Squadron and Thirty-Eight, Thirty-Seven Squadron.

**So she was your sweetheart when you went ...?**

Oh my sweetheart yeah. She was there for a while but then it sort of fell apart for one reason or another and I met up with another girl and um in 1968 or 1969 I was there so about three and a half weeks before Christmas 1969 I got called up to the Orderly Room, there was myself and another bloke, Trivett. And years later I saw him in a RAAF postie,

- 10:00 in a RAAF PR [public relations] film on the movies and it was him. So we both had a posting. I said yes I'll go and he said no I'm engaged so I'd better not go and that was fine, there was no forcing you to go. They just needed replacements. So that was again something within the RAAF, you would go as ones or twos, you wouldn't go as a section so there was that disjointedness around. So I said yeah I'll go so I got um a week or two weeks leave prior to embarkation, went home ...
- 10:30 And actually the girl I had met at RAAF Base Edinburgh was still in and she must have been home on leave and we met up and she and um Dad actually came and saw me off at Spencer Street Station. Then I went back to Sydney and back to RAAF Base Richmond and there was another bloke going over on the same flight, there was just myself and him, he was a tech [technician], a sergeant. And of course that night there was a flight out of Kingsford Smith so at five o'clock I'm still at the base and all the boys decided to have a drink before we go. Well not only have a few drinks I was
- 11:00 blind, pretty well drunk. And half way to Sydney we had to stop off somewhere in Bankstown and I had to say to the taxi if you don't stop we're going to have a big accident in this taxi. I must have stood there for five minutes. I'd never drunk so much beer before because I didn't drink a lot. Um well having said that on pay nights my mate and I we used to have a bottle of scotch but we'd drink it with dry or Coke, which sounds pretty coarse. But I never got drunk, you know what I mean? You could ...
- 11:30 I guess the beauty, and to justify my drinking, the beauty of that you could sit on it because it didn't

have to stay cold. But yeah that night I flew out from Vietnam I was pretty blind, pretty drunk. My girlfriend came to see me off. And um yeah we flew into Vietnam, Tan Son Nhut airport.

**Had you been keeping tabs on the progress of the war?**

Well not really, no, that's a bit of a weird thing, we didn't ...

- 12:00 No I hadn't. There was the RAAF News we used to get which would have updates of what's happened with the RAAF in general, but they'd have what's happening over in Vietnam. Yeah it's funny I never did, I never got to read the paper to keep track of what we were doing. We just got a posting and it was sort of like a little bit separate from it, we were a little bit um detached. A bit weird.

**But had it been in the back of your mind that you might go, that you ...**

Oh yeah, yeah well that was the initial posting, I mean that was what we were told that particular mustering

- 12:30 involved overseas postings, whether it be Vietnam, Butterworth or whatever it may be. In fact now they've done, the boys have been to Timor, I think been to a couple of other places. I believe a while ago they were involved in some security with the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting here a while ago so ... I mean the equipment they've got now, we were like kindergarten. We had rifles, compasses and that was it. Now they've got flaming night scopes, they've got computers, they've got the Sten things, they've got full on equipment, you know they're really are packed and
- 13:00 we were basic, very basic infantry stuff - ah you had to rely on your own wits. So ah yeah flew into Tan Son Nhut airport. I remember us all getting a salad pack to eat while we were waiting to get flown out to where we were going. And my first impression you know there were all these military aircraft, jets flying around, because it was about the busiest airport I think in the world at that time - military and civilian aircraft. And the locs and the Vietnamese women were scavenging around the bins and I was like God what's going on here. And I didn't feel like eating,
- 13:30 you know I'd been drinking and I'd been on an aircraft and was feeling pretty dry and hung over. And a couple of us or a few of us had to fly out to Vung Tau Airfield. So they whacked us on a little 131, which is a twin engine, like a miniature Hercules, it's a twin engine with a couple of ram jets in it. And they just strapped us on the floor and took off and landed at Vung Tau Airport which was a base with Americans on it as well. And there were all these ... it looked pretty rough. There were buildings and wires going everywhere - you know telephone wires and
- 14:00 communication wires and I looked and I went I want out of here, I just don't want to be here - it was the strangest feeling. So I quickly settled in, got put into a section and um we were in huts along the air base and um got you know this is how it operates, you're in a section, you're on twenty-fours on, this is what we do while we're on, you know we do gate duty ... And at that time the main gate to the airfield was sort of in line with our compound so we were within the air base but we had our own compound so there was wire and
- 14:30 fence work and then there was the American MPs and then our gate. And eventually that gate moved up so we were effectively outside their airfield but still within our own gate so anybody coming in and out had to be frisked. We had Vietnamese women working on base in the Mess, cleaning our huts - how easy's that? I mean we didn't have to do our hut cleaning. Washed our clothes. So it was pretty easy. Um you'd check their baskets and we were talking earlier about smells, you know
- 15:00 they'd have food and the um the little wallies which I saw on the TV, I think they're called wallies, those little tins of three and four stacked on top of each other that they carry their food in. And they still do that in India today, the blokes run around taking food to the bloke in the office. And I went oh I know what they are, I'd forgotten about them. So they'd bring their own food in and you'd check the baskets and they'd be ... And they'd talk a bit of English and you might know one or two words of Vietnamese and there'd be all this carrying on and being silly with them and stuff. You know they weren't supposed to be taking
- 15:30 stuff out. You know if you had to give them soap or something then you'd sort of ... they had to write something and say they hadn't pinched it basically. It was all that sort of crazy stuff. Um they'd been employed to fill sandbags which we used to reinforce around the huts and that sort of thing. Um two weeks in country we had, our section had duty on the towers around the airfield. And there was myself and Ben. There was a tower on the approach to the airfield.
- 16:00 So in the first hour two would go out and after the hour one would go back and then you'd be on your own for an hour and a half or something. And ah, I'm a little bit confused about this, but I think I was on my own at this point, and there was an aircraft coming in to land at night so it must, it was dark, it might have been half past eight or nine o'clock. And actually there's one, this particular aircraft now runs up and down the Bay doing the coast watch, it's called a Skymaster, it's a twin boom Cessna - they're called push and pull so you've got a motor at the end, at the front
- 16:30 and a little motor at the back. And he's coming in and I'm watching and I'm going he's below the power lines, that means if he's below the power line that means I'm in line ... he's just coming in on approach way too low. So I jump off the top of the tower so to speak - it was a bunker with a roof on it - and he pulls up at the last moment and goes around for another run. So he comes the next time and he's

appears to be too high, like he's flat, he hasn't got nose down, for want of a better word. So he's coming in, and

- 17:00 he comes over way too high and all of a sudden about I don't know a quarter of the way down the motor just cuts out. And to the right of the airfield, like I'm on the approach to the airfield, so to the right there was a swamp area and he just went in the drink. So I ring up and Ben comes racing out with the land rover and we decide to head off into the swamp. And um ..

**So to take it back a little bit. You were in the**

- 17:30 **Watchtower, the plane was heading into the swamp so you called ...**

Called the radio room. Um, Ben come out and then we decide to head through the wire which is you know supposed to be VC proof, straight through the wire and hit the swamp looking for him basically. Oh we'd let the radio room know what had happened as well so they could take action. And um I'd never been in there so it was pretty grotty and we, and you know there's things floating around in swamps you don't know what's alive or dead, being snakes and stuff. And there was I think

- 18:00 a couple of one of the towers had a couple of vipers living below so we were set on the top of that tower. Anyway eventually there's a local fire brigade that was actually run by American contractors, that were run by the local Vietnamese, so there was a little fire brigade there. So we had to wade through the swamp calling out. And at one stage, and I don't know whether my memory's playing tricks, but I still swear to this day that I called out a couple of times and I heard a voice and that was it. The next minute these flares are getting popped and I could smell

- 18:30 Avgas floating around in the water. And you know pop flares are a long cylinder, you detach the top half and it's got a firing pin underneath it and underneath the other half is the other little cartridge. So you just pop it like a flare and it shoots a cartridge out and it's got metal, magnesium flare with a parachute and it's very bright. I mean if you see war movies and stuff you'll see them popping magnesium and stuff. They're only small ones but they float down long enough and on occasion if you got bored you might put one off by the fence one night. Oh I saw something along the fence I just thought I'd better check it

- 19:00 and they'd float for maybe a couple of minutes so ah ... Anyway they're popping these flares off and I'm thinking if one of those land in the flaming avgas and I'm anywhere near it we could be in trouble. But anyway they didn't so that was okay.

**So that was the fire brigade?**

Yeah the fire brigade popping them off. Because they told the fire brigade and they were trying to locate the aircraft as well. So eventually um we found the aircraft nose down. I don't know how it did but it kind of came around in a half loop and hit the water nose down. And I remember pulling doors off and there was two blokes

- 19:30 in there. And as I pulled the pilot there was a bit of a rattle but he was dead basically. And then, by then the American MPs had turned up and our own service police who had an attachment there had turned up. And there was a bit of a talk and all I can remember is we were both pretty wet and ah I suppose disjointed from the whole thing because I'd never seen a dead body. So it was my first piece of action sort of thing. So we just piled into the back of SPs' [service police]

- 20:00 Jeep, left the Yanks to sort it out and they drove us back around the back of the base - we had a shower. Ah the officer on duty called up, took some notes, took our statements, what we'd done. Ah and the medical bloke had been called out and he gave us a shot that sort of quietened us down a bit and um we were still ... we took the night off basically. So we had the next day off, that Christmas Day that's right, and um

- 20:30 we got this milk can, we'd call it a milk can because we used to have cans that would keep drinks cold or hot, and we just started filling that with alcohol. So it looked like jungle juice and tasted like jungle juice. And at that time we just had these old American World War II Jeep things and we had a red light on it and stuff so we piled it into the Jeep and drove around Vung Tau for a couple of hours drinking and terrorising the locals and creating a bit of mayhem getting blind drunk basically. Um because there'd

- 21:00 been no talk about what happened, there'd been no follow-up about the stuff. Um come back for tea and there was a show on that night in the picture theatre. See our radio room and headquarters was at the back of the open air picture theatre, or the semi open air, it was a stage. And there was an Australian show that'd come over. So that was on that night but a couple of them were giving us a hard time because we were pretty drunk - so they weren't impressed with us. But um I remember going to the brewery to get something to drink, God knows why,

- 21:30 I mean I'd had plenty to drink already. And I'd left my finger in the door jam and went through the door and caught it and I tell you what I reckon I was sober in an hour. So I didn't get much sleep that night and I remember going up to, next morning, so that must have been Boxing Day, um going up to the medical and Harvey, I think that was his name but I could be wrong, was on duty. So he got a hot needle and pricked the thing and let the blood out and he gave me something to take for my upset stomach and I promptly threw up

- 22:00 two minutes later. I didn't drink for a while after that. But there was never any discussion about the aircraft per say. And it's funny years ago, later, and I'm jumping a bit ahead here, but at the ah 1987 Welcome Home Parade in Sydney um on the Sunday of the concert I actually run into this service policeman - we called him Moon Face because his face was, his whole face was round, and a lovely bloke. And we got chatting about that event and I couldn't quite remember him
- 22:30 and in the end I said were you in Vung Tau 1969 at Christmas. He said I was there. So and then we made the connection and got chatting and he said you know there was talk about you getting charged with deserting your post at one stage and there was also talk off the Yanks giving you a medal. And he said years ago, years later he was in Canberra and he was still in the air force at one stage and there was an area where they kept records and he wanted to find out what happened about the whole investigation. And they took him into the room and said well there's the boxes of records if you can find it go for it. Like there was no
- 23:00 actually record documentation, they were all just in boxes, they just brought them back and just chucked them in a room. So that was, that was interesting running into him in what did I say 1969, well 1970, so we're talking about seventeen years later - that was interesting time.

**So you never did find out what the accident was ...?**

No, we heard they'd been drinking and gone for a joy flight. One was an engineer and flew. But we don't know, but I think that was the sort of the word, they'd been drinking and just decided to go for a joy flight

- 23:30 and went and took off in a Cessna and crashed it. And it's interesting you think well you know someone's dead, you nearly saved them, maybe someone's husband, father, brother, uncle. It would have been nice to be able to talk to the family but you know I was just two weeks in the country. So the rest of the time was spent on the base. The occasional escorts. We got involved in building an orphanage at the back of VC Hill. And at the time the padre was Father John White and he was involved in getting it off the ground. So the army
- 24:00 came in with their equipment and sort of levelled out an area and got the foundations going and each section on their day off, or their standby would go out in the mornings and do work and go out with some sandwiches from the mess and a couple of big cans of Fosters. They had huge cans not little ones but huge ones and we were allowed to have that at lunch - because we weren't supposed to drink really. And we'd go down to the beach with the local kids and muck around with the kids in the water, have a drink and then go back. And eventually the orphanage got finished and we got
- 24:30 asked to go back to the opening. And of course you were advised against eating the local produce, which we did. And drinking the local Barmibar beer because they used to keep it cold with ice. Well their water filtration system wasn't flash in those days so you didn't know what was in the water, but that was all right it was beer and it was cold ... So we got involved with the local VC ... Oh it's not the local VC, the local orphanage there being built - what was called VC Hill. That was the big radio network and communication section
- 25:00 and there was actually underground stuff in the hill we got to look at at one stage. It was all you know pretty rocket proof at the time. And it was sort of ... The entrance to the Mekong Delta where the ships were going into Saigon you'd see them going up that way. Got involved with that. Did some trips up, escort duty up to Saigon to pick up wood and cement and trucks. And there was an interesting event when we came back, and we were bringing back a helicopter engine or something like that.
- 25:30 I can't remember why it wasn't airlifted down. But anyway, excuse me, we were doing the escort and it was RAAF flat top truck with the stuff in it and the mate who was driving it we used to play volleyball together while we were there. And ah I was on the gun on the back on the Jeep and we were driving along and going through a little village when all of a sudden these gun shots go off. And I swung it around, so the belts already in the,
- 26:00 in the chamber and the safety was on so all I had to do was switch the safety off and cock it. So I swung it around and did all that in one second. Swung it around ... well I didn't know where to fire it and here was what they call the White Mice and they were the Vietnamese Police, they had white helmets and white cravats and all this sort of stuff, and we called them White Mice. And he was doing target practise or something off the side of the road. Well we thought we were being attacked so if I'd opened fire and hit him we would have kept going because you just didn't stop,
- 26:30 because there were a couple of them there and they would have fired back, so you wouldn't have wanted to stop to try and get an explanation. Well luckily I just you know faulted for that second and you know we'd wound the truck up so you just get out of there, you just flat and just keep going. Yeah that was an interesting ... Please explain you know two dead Vietnamese. But it didn't happen so it was an interesting ...

**So I mean I imagine at moments like that you're pretty much on edge you don't know**

- 27:00 **when an ambush or whatever could take place. Was that sort of the sensation a lot of the time you were there?**

Mm, probably, especially if you went into town at night to the um, pick up the blokes from town, who'd been out in the town for the night, and the curfew was ten o'clock so ... And you were also taking the

girls back who worked in the mess, the officers mess, taking them home into Vung Tau. So I guess that possibility was there but I don't know if we were sort of aware of it. You were aware of it but you were waiting for it to happen. So how

- 27:30 I explain it, because ... well for me and certainly the other ADG's who'd been involved with stuff up there in Phan Rang and patrol were always waiting for something to happen. So my explanation is that it may have been good in some respects to have been involved in a firefight to um let that adrenalin rush go, because I was always waiting, or we were always waiting, for something to happen. And you'd be going uh ...
- 28:00 And you'd be like waiting for at the tip of where you'd be flipped over and it would never happen. It was like the possible ambush and you know swing it around and nothing happened. So you had just a rush, so you'd get this adrenalin rush and the body's got this adrenalin running through it's body and doesn't know what to do with it. So that sort of thing happening certainly has been shown medically not to be good for the system because it over stimulates and then it's running around and it affects your mental perception. Um another time we were doing escort and we were going through a rubber plantation and there
- 28:30 was actually a firefight happening off to the left. And as we come out of the rubber plantation a helicopter ... we were like that. So he was like treetop, if not below, and he didn't know we were there and I didn't know he was there so there could have been a possible collision, just like that. So you had those things happening on an ad-hoc basis. You know they wouldn't happen for months and then something would happen. Um, on the base the Americans would have what's called red and yellow alert. So red
- 29:00 alert means we'll run an attack so everyone got up and grabbed their rifle and we'd get taken to the towers and then there'd be a stand down. So you'd be waiting for something to happen. We didn't know why they got called. They could be called just to practise, well we didn't know that. Or they could yellow alert, so something eminent or they got word something may be happening but you still got called out. But after a couple of hours the sergeants go, oh they can play their silly war games we're going back to bed, you know nothing's happened, and that could be two or three o'clock in the morning. So you get this broken sleep pattern, go back to bed and you woke up at six o'clock again.
- 29:30 So that sort of stuff would be happening. Um, every couple of weeks the Lon San Islands off Vung Tau was a VC area and they'd attack that and they'd drop these huge magnesium flares and then helicopter gun ships would come in at night and sort of give the place a blast. You know there'd be tracer fire and magnesium flares, and it was like a little firefight going on you know and all these fireworks happening sort of thing. So um, yeah you'd spend most of your time sitting on the towers at night, or sitting in the radio
- 30:00 room or you'd be playing cards at two o'clock in the morning waiting until the next shift came on. Or you'd try and sleep and then go off and do your shift. But I filled in time by teaching myself how to surf at Back Beach where the army were at logistics. They had the old big long boards there. So um I'd get a lift across in the morning with the mail Jeep and um and you'd go in the army base and I'd go down to the beach and have a swim and get the board and I taught myself how to
- 30:30 surf and have run down the beach. So I kept reasonably fit. Then come back and have a swim in the Harold Holt Pool. And you'd often see the blokes coming down from Nui Dat, the army blokes would come down for a couple of days of R&R. And they set up and tell them the does and don't while you're here and they'd break out the VB [Victoria Bitter] and then take them into town and they'd go crazy for a couple of days and do what you do. Um yeah and I kept from doing that. And I did a bit of sailing. They had these funny little one sail things I had a go at a couple of times. But the water was pretty
- 31:00 dirty and there were some sea snakes floating around and you'd be hanging on the board waiting for one more wave, waiting for one more and something would suddenly flip past your leg and you'd be on top of the board. Because you'd often turn up at the beach and there'd be a couple of dead sea snakes hanging on the wire. But um something to amuse yourself I guess. But yeah I taught myself to surf, kept fit. A couple of barbies on the beach there, on the back beach.

**Can you describe to us just what the routine was like. You were talking about the twenty-fours on and twenty-four**

- 31:30 **off and some of the sort of just principles behind airfield defence if you like.**

Well airfield defence only went to the perimeter of the base. There was a road that did run around as well and there was gates out the front. So it was checking personnel coming in and out. If there was an attack on the base then all sections were drawn out and you'd go into the towers or man the towers or man the fence line. Um it was more checking personnel coming in and off because there were a lot of civilians that

- 32:00 worked on the base because the Americans had a big component there. They had a big PX canteen [Post Exchange - American canteen unit] and it was like a huge supermarket. Blokes would go in there with a catalogue, it was amazing, and they'd choose their car and it'd be waiting for them when they arrived home. I've never seen anything like it before. But yeah there were a lot of civilians working on the base doing cleaning, running the fire brigade, working for the Americans, ah so they'd always get checked, you know a bit of a pat down, check their contents. They'd have those little Lambrettas, little three wheeler things moving

- 32:30 in around and they'd act as taxis out the front so you'd get a taxi into town. And at night we'd man the tower from six o'clock at night to six o'clock in the morning. Um we'd do that on our own actually, the Americans would sort of retire to the inside of the airfield so I think we manned most of the towers at night. And that would involve two on first up and then the bloke would go back and then there'd be one on for an hour. And they had lights on, whereas when we did fence duty at Nui Dat there were no lights on the fence line
- 33:00 at all so you'd get shadows. And you know you'd be getting a bit tired about eleven o'clock at night or if you to come on at two o'clock in the morning you'd look down and go is that someone there? I'm not sure, will I hit a pop flare? I don't know it looks like someone trying to come through the fence line. So you'd have all that sort of weird stuff going on. And think about everything, you know why am I here? Is there a God? You know just some stuff just what the hell are we doing here? You know you think what is the purpose of all of this at the end of the day? So it was pretty mundane and
- 33:30 pretty boring. In fact there's a movie come out called Buffalo Soldiers and it talks about these blokes sitting there, Americans soldiers set up in Germany, and they get bored because it's quite boring most of the time - you know there's a bit of action then there's nothing. So accept for the occasional escort duty up to Saigon to collect stuff or I went up with a mate on a helicopter for the day it was pretty boring at times, you know. The blokes could get pretty drunk but I didn't drink much. I mean on a day off I might have a couple of beers but
- 34:00 I couldn't see much point after an hour you know with drink going in one end and coming out the other I thought well it doesn't make sense to me. You know you'd feel a bit light headed and can't remember what you're saying the next day and I didn't like that at all so I got smashed a couple of times. But I played volleyball as well, we got a volleyball team up and running. We used to play against the different army unit at Back Beach because there was only just the RAAF, we were pretty small, there was 35 Squadron which was the Caribou transport, the Wallaby Airlines
- 34:30 and 9 Squadron so they did dust offs which is medical evacuations and bush rangers, so, and there was you know small logistics backup. So the army had a fairly large area so we used to play volleyball against them and eventually got to the finals and I've got photos of us playing volleyball and the commander would come across to watch us and it was good, we were pretty good actually because I'd played volleyball at high school as well and I really enjoyed the game. And we even played against the local Vietnamese Police Academy. They just walked away with us.
- 35:00 You know they were five foot nothing and you know like a beanstalk and could bounce off everywhere. And so it was a good game, we got wiped but it was good and you know the Vietnamese thought it was fantastic so it was a good little game. And actually they took in a couple of rockets. I remember hearing some rockets go off and they actually took a couple of rockets which weren't far from us and I've got photos of you know smoke going off and all that sort of stuff. So that was about the closest we got to a rocket attack, because they took ... the VC decided to attack them rather than us which was a bit
- 35:30 strange but maybe because they couldn't even get in close enough to get the rockets to launch. Yeah it was little incidents that happened, you know there wasn't a lot happening. Ah New Year's Eve which would mean I'd been in the country about two and a half weeks I think, I had that night off and you know everyone was getting pretty blind in the mess and I think I pulled a couple of coloured grenades and threw one into the back of the mess and there's red smoke pouring out. And the corporal
- 36:00 who was on duty that night was drunk and sort of berated me rather badly and the officer on duty had to come up and had to sort of separate him a bit and tell him to go away. You know naughty boy don't go setting off smoke grenades. Oh it was something to do.

#### **So the airfield was under US jurisdiction was it?**

It was under US jurisdiction and we had our own compound and we looked after our own. We shared security but the major security at night was our

- 36:30 responsibility and we shared gate security as well as our own and looked after our own security as within the compound. Because that was living quarters, mess, eating, sleeping, washing, yeah that was about it. Logistics as far as clerical work was further up near the squadron headquarters but it was still within the airfield so it was a pretty big airfield. They had gun ships there called um Cobras.
- 37:00 And they had Broncos, sort of tank attack things. They actually still use them over ... they used them in Iraq, they were a sort of small aircraft, jet powered things. They used to have their little bumblebees, little ah Hueys 500 things, quite small and round and they called them bumblebees because they made a noise like a bumblebee. And occasionally an unmarked DC 3 would land there and little mondo guards would trickle out and then they'd trickle back on and they'd take off again. That was the CIA or the invisible air force, no markings at all,
- 37:30 just a grey DC 3. They're still using those there, just land, come in, get their stuff, off they go again.

#### **And you knew what they were?**

Oh yeah knew what they were because there were no markings on them, so that was interesting. But that didn't happen often but if you happened to be on around the base up the flight line or whatever and

um or maybe for some reason on the tower earlier in the afternoon you'd see it come in and go out. And the RAAF Herc. would do their drops in, you know they'd bring their stuff in for us or medivacs out. So there was an army

- 38:00 base at ah logistics where the medical hospital was, so the bloke would go there and then they'd airvac him out of Vung Tau. So the Hercs would land, props still running, turn around and drop the back, load them in, take them off again, they wouldn't hang around. So um you know the RAAF would fly in pretty regularly doing medivacs in and out of Vung Tau. Um, and we'd get all our products, stuff coming in with the HMAS Jeparit from Sydney – she'd bring stuff in and land it off the wharf. And at one stage
- 38:30 she couldn't do that because of the war demonstrations. We were pretty aware of that, that's when you know there was a punch a postie because they wouldn't deliver our mail. I mean it wasn't our fault and these buggers weren't going to give us our mail or pick our mail up. So it was punch a postie on back home, that was one of them. Then the wharfies went on strike so they used the Jeparit to bring stuff in instead of normal cargo. So we were a bit anti them, you know they were anti war us and we were anti the blokes who were demonstrating so um ... I wasn't agro but you know it was
- 39:00 just our mail I mean for God's sake there's no ... So if you went home we said punch a postie. Not that I ever did but that was the sentiment, sentiments at the time. We had five days of what was called R & C where the RAAF actually went to Butterworth. So we'd fly over on a Caribou, but you had to be in civilian clothings. Which is funny, which takes ... I'll back track a bit. When I actually flew out to go to Vietnam ah we stopped off at Singapore but because Singapore's meant to be neutral and you know
- 39:30 couldn't have a 707 land full of you know two hundred blokes dressed in military so we all had our summer pants on, you know the biscuit drab colour, all had blacks shoes but we all had to have civilian shirts. It was pretty obvious what we were. So we landed in Singapore all looking very civilian like and flew onto Tan Son Nhut airport. And the same thing at Butterworth. We'd fly into Butterworth, RAAF Base Butterworth and then change into civilian clothing and then get a taxi and get a ferry across
- 40:00 and then five days at Penang. Fantastic. Yeah fell in love with the local receptionist at the hotel, bought her flowers. Um wrote her a couple of letters sort of thing. They've got some beautiful women, you know they were a mixture of Eurasian, you know Indian Asian and Malay, just beautiful women, amazing. Slept in the bed with sheets and a blanket, air conditioned. Went to a proper restaurant. You know it was just ... You know the food was good at the time, you know the RAAF food compared to the army was a lot better.
- 40:30 Did a bit of touring and creating havoc in the aquarium dropping some stink bombs. I don't know why we did that, we did. And yeah just travelling around Penang and going for tours. And I've got photos of going to a couple of Buddhist temples and there's a snake temple and they had huge joss sticks burning and they had somehow drugged the snakes, they were sort of quite drugged. I don't know whether they'd taken the fangs out but I've got a photo of me
- 41:00 holding these two snakes. Everyone rushing up and taking photos of me holding these two quite venomous bloody snakes of all things. Um and then there was a turtle, a special turtle temple or something and this whole pit just of turtles crawling all over each other. So beautiful Buddhist temples and the colourings ... Again it was a cultural thing for me, you know seeing the other side of, except Viet, another side of Asian life and all that sort of stuff. So it was good
- 41:30 and it was five days away, you escape the other stuff and then flew back home again, or back to Vietnam.

**Does that make it a bit harder in a way going back, like getting that escape and then back into it?**

Escape? Oh look I just accepted it as part of the, what you did. You know I think it was around May, June so I'd been there about three and a half, oh no four and a half months so it was a bit of a holiday so everyone looked forward to it, because you knew you still had time to go. And in Penang they had these calendars and when you arrived ...

## Tape 4

- 00:33 **Now you were going to mention something about Penang, you met someone somewhere?**

Oh yes in Penang, there was ... Darkie who I talked about earlier, the Corporal who we'd had the incident with in the Jeep he'd come with me or we'd come out together and Hixie, oh three or four of us I think, yeah Hicksy had come from RAAF Base so he knew some of the Mirage Squadron because 77 Squadron were based there, 75 Squadron, and

- 01:00 and there was a detachment of them at Butterworth so he must have got in contact with them so we met them. I was staying, oh a couple of us, we were all staying at the Eastern Oriental which was an old British barracks years ago, well some years ago, and it was a hotel, and ah so we met up with them for a drink. And a couple of them brought their wives over who were Australian and the wives started talking,

and we're chatting away. And they sounded so Australian it was like bizarre. Like we're all Australians but the Mirage pilots didn't

- 01:30 sound different but the wives sounded different and real Australian. So if you ring up, and I've noticed occasionally that if you ring up from overseas and you get an Australian operator how our language sounds so different. It was really bizarre, I'd never heard it before. I thought do we sound like that, a really nasally sort of ...? So it was just interesting. You know these funny little things you remember. And you've probably talked to the World War II blokes and they don't remember the bad stuff it's all the bad stuff, the um, the incidents that happen you know like
- 02:00 meeting these Australian women and they sounded so Australian, you know this nasally thing. And then meeting some Pommy sailors. There was a British aircraft carrier that pulled into port while we were there and we bumped into a couple of them in a bar at one of the hotels. I could not understand them. They were so English, and whether it was Cockney or something, I just wouldn't know what they were saying. It was weird, absolute weirdness. That was funny. So there were all these little
- 02:30 things that happened. So we had a good time, yeah. I mean we knew we were going back to Vietnam, that was the way it was, you know it wasn't oh no I don't want to go back stuff, because I hadn't had any bad experiences. I mean I've talked to different army blokes and you know some of the stuff they've had is quite horrific. I mean, excuse me, I don't think Charlie Brown would mind me saying this but he did some hot extractions with choppers which is where they go in and pick up SAS blokes out of a hot spot. And so he's seen a lot more stuff than I have. But we all have our experiences and it's, and it's
- 03:00 interesting because I do counselling and it depends on the resilience of someone how well they handle that then and I guess how well they handle it in years to come. Everyone has different degrees of handling things, you know. Whether you allow it to run you continually. I mean you won't get rid of the memory. Ah I guess it's extracting an emotional hook, I guess you'd call them rebirthing, it's the emotional hook, you want to take it out. You won't forget the memory, the memory's there, it's the reaction I guess. And it's a bit like the flashbacks you can get. You can
- 03:30 have a flashback where it's just the flashback and the memory or it's the flashback plus the emotion that comes with it. So you want to detach the emotions because that's the part you don't want, you want to get rid of the emotional stuff. In fact some years ago um, and I've jumped a bit again, in Albury, Wodonga I was um going for a walk around what was called East Albury, where I used to live and share a house, and there's a ... well it's sort of bushy, it's where the houses finish and it's just farming land, but a bit of a hilly area and there's the Telecom
- 04:00 tower up there and you can see the airport which is down on the flat, so it's pretty close. And I'd gone for a walk and I'm walking along the dirt, on this dirt track, I'd been for a bit of a run, and I come out the top and it's pretty warm and all of sudden the warmth, the dirt track, the props turning around to take off, I had this amazing flashback to Vietnam. It was so bizarre. I just stood there and it was like it seemed to last for thirty seconds, it probably last a hold ten, and went wow, that is so strange. I hadn't had such a
- 04:30 strong flashback before except when I smell the dried fish stuff and then I just go back to Vung Tau village which you know pungent, it just hits you. But this was a combination of sound, sight, warmth ... It was like all my senses just came alive at one aspect and I was just back there. And I didn't have any negative response to it it was just quite amazing. So it depends where the person's at in their life. And
- 05:00 that's a pretty strong one I've had. I haven't had anything that strong. I've had occasionally ah when I flew into Hawaii, I remember flying to Hawaii you know five o'clock in the morning and coming through customs, you know it was warm, daylight was just coming on, all the tropical plants and went God it's like being in Vietnam. But again it's more of an amazement which sounds a bit weird I suppose but it's like wow this stuff can happen, you think it's all gone but it's still there. And it just takes a combination of factors and sensors to operate
- 05:30 together and you'll get the memory flips it straight out, video camera up and running straight away. It's nearly like everything is sitting in your head there in the mind and all it takes is a sound or a smell or even sometimes a word and the memory's up, up and running. So it's like there's this parallel memory running with your conscious and it only takes a gate to open and you're back in there straight away - well I'm back in there straight away. But each time I have it I don't have that emotional ... I haven't had any real emotional stuff with it,
- 06:00 it's more of an amazement. And I guess that comes from studying counselling, I'm quite amazed at how people's minds operate and what's running us or what we allow to run us basically.

**So those flashbacks are they solely of the Vietnam time, or other times as well? Is it just the uniqueness of that?**

Oh the uniqueness of that I think. I mean I've had flashbacks of other times in my life but they're not as strong and they don't happen that often. Sometimes it can be

- 06:30 down the street and there might be a particular smell of Asian cooking and it sort of reminds me semi-Vietnam and I go oh yeah that's ... Yeah it's like going down Victoria Street, Richmond you get the smells and the ... And the warmth of the night. Again it's all these factors ... It becomes strong when

more factors come in – you know the time of the night, the heat ... it builds up and there's a flashback and I go oh, you know oh this is amazing, you know and it's nearly like you step back in that scenario and you sort of exist for thirty seconds and then you step out of it again. I mean

07:00 I go on, you then move on. You don't sort of stay in that because it's not reality it's just a memory. But you know that's only my ... Other blokes have had stronger ones and had a lot more horrific stuff, like the Battle of Long Tan, you know two blokes had been on patrol and been ambushed, were getting in fire fights, so they've had you know more full on stuff. And that's stuff they don't want to remember because it's not ... it's the negative stuff I guess. So when they get it it's not pleasant I guess.

**For you it sounds like it possibly is.**

07:30 **I mean it's not necessarily a bad thing to have.**

No. No. Well when people say it can be positive well it is it's part of your life, it's a positive. You can put a positive bent or a negative. I think Bob Hawke said years ago no matter what happens in one's life no matter how bad it is there's something you may be able to get out of it. So I tend to, I hope to or attempt to operate that way – okay something's happened now what can I get out of it, what is something I can learn from it? So I'm continually

08:00 self correcting if I can. I mean you can't do it all the time but ... Yeah people have said do you wish you'd never gone? And I say no I enjoyed it. Which sounds weird. And I mean a couple of women in my life, for want of a better, said they felt that Vietnam was a good thing for me – in so far as growing up and you know if I hadn't gone to Vietnam I would have stayed in the air force longer or who knows. It was just ... you make decision in your life and that's where you go. You know I could have said no I don't want to go to Vietnam

08:30 and they would have said yep, fine stay here. I might have got a posting twelve months later and opted on the opportunity again. And it's funny while I was in there in Vietnam my number come up, so I would have gone anyway but I beat them to it, in a better service of course – sorry army but that's how it is. But yeah I enjoyed it. I don't see any negativity attached to it but I didn't have the experiences that a lot of the army personnel or some of the RAAF pilots or gunners had so ... I was always on the edge.

09:00 So for years, and a lot of service personnel get this, there's jumpiness. It's settled down a lot now that I do a lot more meditating and I teach it, the jumpiness is not there now. But for a long time I could walk into a room and someone walk up and I wouldn't see or hear them. And also I mean the recognition isn't there because I'm in another space, like on the roof. And I'd swear and laugh because it's so freaky, it's weird, weird stuff. Or I'd swear

09:30 you know. But that's settled down now, but it was for a long time I'd be ... And it wouldn't happen ... I'd be, it wouldn't be constant either, I'd be all right for a while and then I just ... someone would walk in on me and I'd ... startle, oh shit where'd you come from? You know I should have seen you or I saw you but it didn't register. It reminds me of a cartoon years ago ... there was this little cartoon and it was this cat and dog and this dog was always annoying the cat and when he was scaring the cat he'd lean up on the roof with his claws stuck to the ceiling then he'd

10:00 drop, clunk ... That's how I felt, that's how I sensed myself. But you know everybody has different responses. I mean it doesn't happen as often which is good. It still can but I just accept that's part of the makeup. There's a friend who was a ... had also been in Vietnam, he was a counsellor, he's no longer a counsellor, he was with the Vietnam Veterans Counselling Service, he said it's in your DNA [deoxyribonucleic acid], you know it's in your makeup, it's in your cellular stuff, it's happened to you, you won't get rid of it, which we've talked about in the break, you know the body mind connection.

10:30 You can't erase that stuff, it's there. And you've probably experienced that with the other blokes you've interviewed – you know the World War II blokes there's stuff in there that doesn't go away. But that happens for people who have any major event in their life – from women giving birth to trauma or earthquake people, people involved in civil war you know it's all there, it doesn't go away. I guess the resilience of the person determines how they carry it. So it's the wound, you know the emotional wounding, it's whether you carry that

11:00 with you all the time because that then determines your life which is ... you can't say it's positive or negative. Again I talk about the path that someone has to take you know to determine that's how you want to operate or not, whether you want that to keep running your life, as someone said, you had an experience twelve, for twelve months thirty years ago, do you want to let that continue to run your life for another twenty years? He's not saying forget it he's saying

11:30 do you let that determine who you are. Because that's only one part of your jigsaw, you're a combination of factors and that's only one part – it may be quite big but you're not just once piece you're a jigsaw. But that's, I've got off a bit.

**But those um, talking about sort of jumping up on the ceiling like that cat in the cartoon was that the sort of experience you had as soon as you got back or is it something that crept in?**

It seemed to creep in. I don't recall it being there in my

12:00 early days, although having said, I'll qualify that. Yeah it was there slowly because I came back um and

spent about twelve months, let me see 1970 or 1971, I got discharged 1972 medically unfit because I'd had a hearing loss and dizziness and tinnitus and so they felt that it didn't ... my health mustering wasn't up to date with the mustering for ADG's. And in reflection they could have ... Actually I got offered the position to become a drill instructor and I said no I don't want to go in

12:30 pushing recruits around. And in those days they weren't so faux pas about retraining so I could have been retrained into a clerk or something else, and I would have stayed in the air force for thirty years, that was my goal, air force, do twenty-five/thirty years that sounds fantastic, you know I could have gone into air crew maybe. But um I got merely discharged, worked a couple of different jobs and ended up in the public service for twelve years. And I think that it started to creep in then slowly, and certainly in my married life I noticed it a few times.

13:00 And I remember my former wife walking in at one stage in the house, when we were in Albury-Wodonga, she walked in the laundry and sort of was so engrossed in something, I sort of went she was there but it just didn't make sense and I was like God - I reckon I was on the ceiling that day. And it's happened a couple of big ones. Even at work now it occasionally happens if I'm in the staff room and someone walks in and I'm doing something and maybe because I'm so engrossed, I don't know what it is. And I don't attempt to work it out it just is. And we make fun of it you know, they say something I laugh and we have a

13:30 joke about it and you know that's just funny, that's me, that's my quirkiness.

**But are they sorts of experiences that you know your mates who have also been in Vietnam are have experienced as well to varying degrees?**

Um, I haven't talked to them directly about it but certainly with Nick we used to have a lot of talks and he'd say that's one of the, one of the symptoms, the jumpiness, the ... it's called hypervigilance or hyperactivity, you know on edge all the time waiting for something to happen -

14:00 that's one of the scenarios of what PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder] stuff is, yeah that's just one of them so I guess I have a component of it, yeah. Short temper, anger stuff which is under check if I meditate regularly. If I don't meditate regularly it creeps up on me and that annoys me because to the best of my knowledge and my memory I wasn't like that before I went over. And my Mum has said I certainly changed when I came

14:30 back to what I was when I went, but most blokes will change anyway because of the whole experience. But the anger bits something that's always ... it's under the surface and something will trigger it, yet it can be something quite small sometimes. Whereas when something major happens I can slip into automatic and takeover and do what I need to, but if it's something quite small like on the road then I'll just lose it. But if I meditate regularly it doesn't ... I can sit back and it just washes over me, but at other times it's like you know I lose it.

15:00 Which I don't like because ... not because I'm not in control, it's not an aspect I like. But again that's another aspect of that whole post traumatic stuff, and being there for just that short period of twelve months. But luckily I was still in the air force so I came back home and went back into service life. However instead of going back to a base where there were other ADG's I got sent back to the Air Training Corps of all things, the Headquarters in North Melbourne doing semi clerical work and that was completely boring.

15:30 There were two other blokes who'd been to Vietnam but we'd all served at different times so we didn't have that commonality. So I used to get the train in and eventually I travelled in from home - I was at RAAF Base Titan which is the stores depot and that's gone, and it was completely boring. If I'd gone back to a proper base it would have been a different scenario I reckon. But again that was just the way things went. So we didn't have any common things to share, experiences. We'd all been there but at different times, where most army personnel,

16:00 I'm making a big judgement here, went over as a section so they trained together and went over together and probably even came back and lived in the same area which a lot of them do like around Albury-Wodonga, Bonegilla, Bandiana, a lot of blokes got sent back there, or Townsville or whatever it may be, so they congregate in that area and they stay there and maintain their contact. So what I'm saying is I came back and eventually went up on my own and met up with some of them on Anzac Day so ... But in Vietnam I made some good friends, Charlie Brown and a couple of other blokes and

16:30 Stan Harris. And got involved with um The Australian Forces Radio so that Good Morning Vietnam, Robin Williams, I just love it because I was a bit, a bit like that but I got told to quieten it down. But I love that show, I can sort of resonate a bit with a how he used to carry on.

**Can you tell us about that, how you got involved and what your particular ... you were actually an announcer?**

Yeah an announcer. Well how did I get involved? I think they were looking for announcers, it was volunteer. We used to um ... The Station would open at six o'clock in the morning,

17:00 because we were only allowed two and half three hours play time from the Yanks, by the Yanks, and the rest of the time their American Radio thing was going. And we'd open the station up and we'd patch in Radio Australia news stuff. Sometimes it used to come through Butterworth, I'm not sure of that, I could be wrong, but we used to get some radio from RAAF Base Butterworth, they used to have their own

station and put together stuff. I'd never done that stuff before so it was a pretty ... the old console, the old turntables going, the dial and you had a little peg to hold it to the

17:30 um, the record, so that the turntables going constantly on thirty-three or forty-five. Um, you could pick your own records, you'd line them up, whack them on the top, so the turntable's running and you'd just pull the pin and she'd run, ready to go. Um so you'd patch in Radio Australia. I've got some tapes which unfortunately have been rolled over but I've still got some of that stuff. And I'd introduce Australian Force's Radio and talk and give the time and you know try and adlib and play records for two and half hours. And often you'd come

18:00 off, off duty that night so the shirt's hanging out and the pants are pulled out and you're still a bit wired up so it was a way of unwinding, and yeah it was good, I really enjoyed it, I did it for about two and half three months I think before I left Vietnam. You know I even had thoughts of being a radio announcer when I came back but then you had to train and sit there and all you did was repeat commercials and I went this is not what I want to do, I want to play music, you know I want to be out there, I don't want to sitting here doing commercial stuff, so it was just a thought

18:30 when I first came back and I let it go. But it's great, yeah the Robin Williams stuff because I um ... Ronnie Burns [popular singer] and all that stuff, The Real Thing [song by Russell Morris] I cranked it right up and I was rocking and rolling in the studio and ah yeah the CEO [Chief Executive Officer] said I need to quieten it down a bit - but it was good anyway.

#### **Quieten what down?**

Oh the music, it was getting a bit full on, rock and roll. It was great, I loved it. And Stan Harris was sort of the technical officer at the time

19:00 and you know he'd oversee all the equipment. I mean he had another job to do as well but he oversee the radio station. And we played volleyball together and when I come ... when my tour was finished I sort of looked up his wife for him to say he's okay and looked up his family and they were out in Broadmeadows somewhere, and we sort of kept in connect. Same with Charlie, I had phone calls, occasional letters and then Stan eventually left the air force and he was involved with OH & S [Occupational Health and Safety] stuff and he worked for the National Safety Council and he used to come through Albury-Wodonga

19:30 and we'd catch up for a meal. And um I went up to Canberra for the Memorial and we caught up then - he's now in Byron Bay. And Charlie I actually caught up ... well certainly at the Welcome Home Parade, and I went up two years ago for an Anzac Day and caught up with him there and it was good to catch up with him. And there was a lot of ADG's who retired to Queensland, who came from Queensland. For some reason the airfield defence guard had a lot of Queenslanders. So I caught up with a lot of those blokes, that was good - it was only a short march which was even better.

20:00 And it was a good day. There's another bloke Bob Golley, we actually did foot patrols together when we were up at Nui Dat when we went out on patrols for a couple of days we were all in the same section so I've got photos of us coming back in through the wire - there was myself, Bob Golley and Charlie Brown and a couple of other blokes. And ah I sort of kept in contact with him and a couple of other blokes you'd sort of, you'd recognise their faces but just can't remember their names. That was good, that was a good weekend - I think it was a Friday or Saturday or something like that so yeah it was good.

20:30 **Now just getting back to Airfield Defence for a moment. Um I'm just curious to get a clearer picture of the set up there, how many of you there were um doing the work you were doing, who were you answerable to, you know who was your CO [Commanding Officer].**

You asked me that half an hour ago I think.

**I did.**

Sorry.

**You don't have to answer it but um ...**

All right no there was a, there were three sections and there was ah ten or eleven of us in a section, so there were three sections of flights or

21:00 three flights I should call us flights, there were a, one, two and a three flight. So, well say there were ten blokes in a flight so flight on Monday would be on duty for twenty-four hours so they'd man the radio room, so that's anything that comes in the towers or for the Americans or whatever. So there'd be a bloke in there and there'd be a bloke on the gate to the compound checking traffic in and out and civilians. There might be some blokes doing work on the fence with the locals,

21:30 excuse me. There might be some stuff to take in town or the other blokes might be doing a run up the road to pick up something, if not then they're just sitting around, hanging around playing cards until their time comes up. So you might do two hours in the radio room and then go off for an hour and have lunch and then come back and go on the gate. Section two or flight two they've got off. So you know you might ... well you don't do your washing, it's getting washed for you, you might sleep,

22:00 I went to the beach, some go to the beach, some would go into town to drink and meet the girls or buy

records or you could go into town and if you bought a reel to reel tape you'd go and get dubbing done. Which I always found really weird. Here we are in Vung Tau in a war zone and here's these Indians running shops which I thought really ... but there were a lot of Indians there and they were running shops. So you could go and pick out your LPs [long playing record] of rock and roll or the latest music and they'd record it onto your reel to reel tape. So you'd have this whole

- 22:30 long play of you know copyright music for your reel to reel tape which everyone used to buy their reel to reel tapes. Or you'd just go shopping or you may just hang around the base or go to Back Beach and swim, which I used to do a lot of. Have a meal, watch the pictures that night. Get drunk if someone ... Oh it depends what you wanted to do. Then the other section, section three or flight three would be on standby so they'd still walk around in their uniform but they might supervise
- 23:00 sandbagging. They might be, if there wasn't enough blokes to do an escort they might do an escort. They, that night they'd go into town to pick up the blokes before curfew, or take the officer's mess girls and the other bar people back home, escort them home. Pick them up bring them back in. They're on standby. They'd watch the movies, go to bed. But generally you'd go to bed in your greens because nine times out of ten the Yanks would want to play war games and you get called out, so rather than you getting dressed you just pull your boots on grab your
- 23:30 rifle and jump in the Jeep and out you go and go around the towers and sit out there for a couple of hours, then come back in, go back to bed, then you're on duty for twenty-four hours. Which was pretty basic, radio room, gate duty any other duties. We had a, generally a corporal in charge of each flight and then a 2IC, which I was for a while and then there was, probably a sergeant a flight sergeant and then there was the commanding officer, usually flight lieutenant, flying officer, usually a flight lieutenant.
- 24:00 So he was the ground defence officer. So he was in charge of us, in charge of the ground defence of the airfield. Um, and then there was the CO for the RAAF so he was in charge of the whole RAAF Base component which is then 9 Squadron, 35 Squadron, your logistics, ah the service police. And then the squadrons had their own COs in charge of a squadron. So it was like a normal base so the chain of command sort of thing. Um I mean if there was something they needed us to do we'd go and do,
- 24:30 um escort duty or maybe just sitting around ... Like it could be quite boring on days, there wouldn't be too much to do, you know you were just waiting for your time to go up and sit in the radio room, um and learn how to roll smokes in the radio room. Blokes, oh the army blokes if they come onto base have to register with their weapons with us, because everyone had their weapon, you didn't leave them anywhere. So we had a store room where they'd register their weapons, note down what they were, lock them away, you know take the magazines out and then store the magazines with the weapons,
- 25:00 and then they'd take them again when they went off. Um they might come in for a meal, they thought our food was pretty good. I mean we got rations, we had rations but we had a lot more salad food and stuff and we also had American stuff as well. But the two weeks at Nui Dat I got crook on the food up there. But also we were on malaria tablets twice a day, or once a day, I've gone blank on that, whereas at Vung Tau we were only doing it a fortnight on pay day. And plus at Nui Dat
- 25:30 you had to have your sleeves down every night and there was a ration of beer and we were on the malaria tablets daily, so I reckon that's what made me crook as well. And I got pretty crook when I came back. Mum reckons I had a touch of malaria. Even though we were taken those tablets when I came back ... Because she had nursed Dad because he had malaria pretty bad when he come back for a while and Mum reckons I had it. The doc didn't think so but she reckons it was. I had the ... I remember I was rowing when I was living in Melbourne and I'd moved out of home and got my own flat and stuff
- 26:00 and met my former wife, and I remember going around the flat with her, where she was sharing with someone else, and I started to get the shivers and I just couldn't get warm and eventually drove home and oh a shocker. Sweated, the bed was just wet. I was really crook for a couple of days. So I don't ... Yeah it didn't last long, it was like just a touch sort of thing.

**Didn't anyone else get particularly ill while you were there? Was the food ever a problem?**

Um, no I didn't really recall it. I just noticed I got crook

- 26:30 when I was in Nui Dat. The food wasn't ... I mean the food wasn't flash or anything compared to what we were getting, we were living pretty good really. It could have been a combination of the food and the malaria tablets maybe. Um I got crook for a few days, didn't feel real good, didn't want to eat, didn't drink. Um it didn't last long. But um Nui Dat you know was quite interesting. You know we did patrols and ambushes and laid out ... and the first night we went out on an ambush the heavens just opened up - as soon as we walked through the wire
- 27:00 the rain just come down in a tropical downpour. If you've been in Asia and you've seen a tropical ... it's just ... it's like a bucket of water all over you. And we just laid in the rain all night. We had all the leaves and mud ... I had mud on my chest for a couple of days, just couldn't get it out. Just laid in the mud all night waiting for something to happen. Which it didn't, which was fine. And then I remember going out on a couple of days ambush and patrol and there were little fireflies flying around in the air and hearing noises and waiting for something to happen and nothing happened and yeah it was really quite
- 27:30 weird.

## **So this is in Nui Dat?**

Nui Dat, outside Nui Dat.

## **When these patrols, what was the nature of ...?**

Oh well to keep the area clear but we think it was the light green so there wasn't much activity happening and immediately around Nui Dat that was for experience. So we went out with an army officer plus our corporal. So we stayed out for a couple of days and you know ambushed at night for the supposed track that the VC might come through, but never did. Checking the locals,

- 28:00 the locals around the area on the roads. So they'd come along in their water buffalo and their carts checking their ID. The water buffaloes didn't seem to like the smell of us so you sort of kept a wide berth around them. And just checking their ID, checking locals on the road and then going back into the bush at night and setting up an ambush and then eventually came back in after a couple of days. Um ...

## **So it was to give you a bit of a taste of what it was like ...?**

Mm, and I guess ... well it was nothing like

- 28:30 some of the other blokes tasted. I remember going out with my mate Chris and we did some drop off at some fire support base and the blokes had been out for a week or two and their army greens were just rotten. And they were just taking out fresh greens and food to them and they were just dropping them off. And I mean they'd been out in the bush for a week. I mean that was tough. We didn't do that sort of stuff, we had it pretty easy. But we had a snippet of what it was like and I guess as I said earlier part of me sometimes thinks, you know it scared the hell out of me, I mean I could have got
- 29:00 injured, if I'd been involved in an exchange just to get rid of that adrenalin and stuff that was sitting waiting on the edge. So my mate explained it to me and it made sense. You know if you look at the human body as a glass and you've got x amount of stress in us and it's all in different levels, so that Service personnel go over and by the time they get over there their stress level has been pushed up a bit. So if this is the glass and there's stuff happening plus there's no support at home and your stress level's there, by the time you get over
- 29:30 there and you're starting to get involved your stress level's sitting on the edge and then it gets pushed over, or flows over this way inside out. So he said you're up here waiting for something to happen but then it all keeps ... so your amount of free play is not much and then if something happens and pushes over you don't have any free play. He said what you've got to do is get that down artificially as far as you can by meditating or relaxing so you've got more level to play with. For all of us is to keep our stress level down
- 30:00 here so we've got more room to play. He said by the time you get over there you don't have much to play with, so it flows over. So I, my way of equating that was that if I'd been involved in some way or been in a helicopter and got into a fire fight or you know had I been up once with Chris and we got called out and things were happening then you know something could have happened, but it didn't, so you know we had ... I had my own little incidents, you know the near miss on the M60 and you know the
- 30:30 helicopter just missing us on the road, ah that sort of stuff. Just you know everyone has their own experiences.

## **But were there other outlets for that ... I mean you're saying the stress levels were ... Obviously for some guys it's just a matter of going out and getting blind and ah getting laid.**

Yep. Or getting laid. Everyone went into town, you know everyone went into town eventually and the local girls who worked on the base would call cherry boy because (a) you arrived and (b) you hadn't been to town - oh you cherry boy, oh you cherry boy. No, no, no I'm not a cherry. Oh yes you

- 31:00 cherry boy. And they for some reason knew when you eventually went to town. They even knew what day it happened or whatever. So yeah you'd go into town and you'd visit the brothels, pay the girls. I suppose that was one way of getting rid of your energy. Um I think I lasted three months. Um, and the same in Penang. But Penang was funny because a bloke you know a trolley and a bicycle boy would line us up with a couple of
- 31:30 girls who were posing as school teachers who were more up market or, or all that sort of stuff and I said okay, yeah right whatever.

## **School teachers?**

Yeah a school teacher wanting to make some money on the side. Oh okay. So yeah same thing in Penang. But that was how it was. A couple of the blokes got really engrossed in women and fell in love with a local girl or you know one of the girls working on the base they fell in love and wanted to give them soap and gifts and stuff which had to keep to a

- 32:00 minimum because he could create a bit of antagonism amongst the locals - he get more than I got sort of thing you know. So you weren't really supposed to give them much stuff - maybe a bar of soap occasionally, that sort of stuff. So um yeah most blokes went into town and got drunk. But I didn't get ... I mean I think I can count on my hand the number of times. I mean we had the bloke I was talking

about, the officer Nick Noy came through on his way to Phan Rang and he stopped off over night and we all sort of got on the booze that night. And I don't know what happened, we were in the barracks

32:30 sculling Whisky and Budweiser, oh just drinking stuff, just drinking. I don't know whether I got slipped a mickey finn or what but I was so sick the next day. I had threw my heart up. I swore I'd never drink again. I'd never been so sick. I thought I was going to do. I think I had alcoholic poisoning. I didn't drink for probably close to a month. Couldn't even eat. I was on duty that day, on standby and I was in the radio room and I was sitting there and sweating and I'm feeling like I'm going to just ... I just want to lay down and sleep and not wake for

33:00 about a week. Oh shocking. But I was drinking beer and spirits and oh not good stuff. The next time I got that pretty blind was on the week before I was to return home. And ah there was a little ceremony. So on the last Saturday night whatever blokes were going home that following week they would present with a pewter, a mug and inscribe your name and what time you arrived and all that. And you had to wear your most civilian clothing but you wear your worse ones,

33:30 if you had such a thing, because you would eventually get stripped that night and your clothing would get ripped and torn off you. And I've got photos of all that sort of stuff happening. And eventually they present you with a pewter and you've got to scull it with whatever's in it at that time or whatever you want so I, for some reason I had vodka and orange, don't ask me why. But they'd stand you on the bar and they'd put rubbish bins underneath and you'd have to scull it. And you know as soon as you sculled it you'd put it on your head to be first I think. And the sergeant who'd flown out of

34:00 country with me was coming back so we, I think we both finished at the same time. And I had vodka and orange and I think the vodka had settled to the bottom a bit but I got it down and sculled it and here I am with the photo of me with the thing on top of my head and it's dribbling down my mouth. Oh not a pretty sight but some of the things you do when you're twenty. So um ... And you know just rags of clothes hanging off me, that sort of thing. That was sort of ... you know your leaving, party leaving time.

**Based on if**

34:30 **if you believe all the American films on Vietnam everyone's smoking dope the whole time.**

Oh yeah, yeah.

**But was there ... did you see much of that?**

Well yes and no. I smelt in ... Because the radio room backed onto the theatre you could actually watch the pictures through the radio room grill. So even though you were on duty you could watch a bit of a movie. And I could smell this wheaty sort of smell and I went is that marijuana, I've never smelt before to be honest. And I thought well it must be because

35:00 we don't normally smell incense. Anyway a day or two later a bloke had been caught and he was sent home. That was the rumour and we never saw him again - he was a techo or something. techo's are blokes who do instruments and stuff. So there was this techo ADG stuff, there was a bit of ... I put it down to us being a bit like the um the Foreign Legion, we were pretty rough you know what I mean? And there was a bit of antagonism between us and the rest of the air force blokes. But anyway to answer your question he went home. So I never saw anyone else smoking it. I never ... I've never smoked it, don't want to, I get

35:30 crook enough drinking. I wasn't aware of any of the other blokes, we all just drank. If there was it was done pretty quietly and I was either very naive or just never smelt it. So the answer's no. The army personnel I don't know, they may have or may have not. Oh I knew there certainly were about the Yanks doing it but we certainly didn't. And it was the last thing I'd want to do going out on patrol - God smoking ... let them know you're coming and not being awake when they do. No not something I did. We certainly didn't drink

36:00 and we certainly didn't wear perfume or even Johnson's Baby Powder - you know you went out pretty clean. Your dog tags had little rubber, little rubber edgings so they didn't make a noise - I mean yeah played it pretty straight - we didn't ... I certainly didn't. I mean I had the opportunity in Penang but I said no thanks. Darkie said do you want to try some and I said no I get drunk on whisky, that's fine, I know what's happening, I know where I'm going but I don't want to know about the other stuff, I'm not interested.

36:30 You know Darkie was a bit of a dark horse really - he lived on the edge a bit. Yeah so no the answer's no I didn't do it ... I wasn't aware of anyone else, anyone else, yeah never smelt. Only once and the bloke was gone so yeah things were kept pretty tight.

**You talked about those male/female relationships of a transactional nature, were there sort of relationships that weren't necessarily based on the economy?**

Sex?

37:00 **No yeah well that as well but were ... and perhaps um what do you think of sort of ...?**

Oh no I'd never had any relationships with anyone, no, no not over there, no, it was purely just a transaction of money for action, for want of a better word. Transaction for action. A purely monetary exchange. No I didn't get involved with any of the women. A couple of the blokes. I think in a way, a

couple of them I think of and shall remain nameless, I think maybe hadn't had any relationships before they went over – they were pretty

37:30 innocent and naive I suppose. You know pretty young. You know a lot of us had joined the air force pretty young – seventeen and a half, eighteen. Well compared to what blokes were in the First World War, pretty young, but of a different era. Um so yes I think if they hadn't had some sort of relationship they got caught up the whole freedom you know of sex being available. And there were some lovely looking women, they weren't all dags, as Robin Williams says in that movie. Um, yeah so that was a bit, they got a bit caught up in their ...

38:00 in the moment. But I certainly didn't, no I didn't get to know ... Except when I went to Penang you know and there was some beautiful women there and I got caught up with it, and it was a just friendship if you know what I mean, like it wasn't ... I mean it was purely platonic. We chatted and I took her flowers and I actually went and met her parents and I was there for five days and we wrote back a couple of times and then it was all over, you know it was just ... this gorgeous looking woman sort of thing – you know there was no involvement, there was nothing physical about it it was just, just something that happened yeah.

**And had you**

38:30 **been keeping in touch with your girlfriend back in Melbourne?**

Um, yes we were still ... yes we were pretty close um but had drifted apart when I come home ... I actually came home for R&R. Most blokes went to Thailand, Bangkok or Penang but I had run out of money, I only had enough to stay in a hotel in Thailand, that was about all. I'd blown all my money in Penang.

39:00 They said well you can't stay in the country so you'll have to go home. So I flew home for R&R which you only had seven days and there's the flight there and back so you only had five. So I flew home and she lived in Sydney, she was a nurse. So she got a bus down and was going to stay with me at my parents place for five days and then went back home again. And then I think towards ... Did she meet me on the way home? Yeah she came on met me when I came home, flew into Sydney and she met me there again and then it sort of

39:30 drifted apart – you know she was in Melbourne and I was in Sydney and I said look ah ... Even in Vietnam I said look if you find someone else that's fine, you know that's no great dramas. You know she was my second big love I guess, yeah. I met her, where'd I meet her, I think it was at a dance again, a RAAF dance, yeah. Could the girls would come on the base for the dance sort of thing, so that's how I met her. Um once that ... No never had contact with her again. And you know it's a

40:00 bizarre thing you mention that. I was in Camberwell last year and I think, because I'm involved with the Department of Veteran Affairs as a volunteer for what's called the Men's Health Educator Role. We go out and give talks to ah ex-service organisations, RSLs [Returned and Services League] about men's health. And I'd gone around to the DVA's [Department of Veterans' Affairs] office in Camberwell to get taken out with the local bloke and I was early and I'd gone for a coffee and was telling a story, trying to build a picture, talk, talk, talk. Um and I was coming up to the

40:30 lights and this girl was starting to walk across and she was about I don't know in her twenties and I went ... I thought I was seeing double, I thought I'd seen this girl that I'd known thirty years ago, I thought I was seeing her double as a young one, and I thought maybe it's her daughter. And she's getting closer and she had the same face, lips, the colour was blonde, even the way the hair, the body shape, just the whole thing was like a walking double of her when she was ... when I knew her. And she walked past and I nearly stopped her to say look have you got a mother

41:00 who lives in Sydney or was your mother in Sydney or ... And it's just one of those things where I just wish I'd done it and made a fool of myself completely. And it funny you mention that because I've never forgot that. I mean there was nothing but everyone must have a double walking around. It's just amazing. And you know I only remember that because of you asking that. This girl walked past and it was just like her twenty years ago. And I thought maybe it's her daughter. Anyway um

## Tape 5

00:31 Well Nui Dat was ... I mean it was pretty basic, the first week was spent on reorientation which was renewing of weapons handling which all the blokes did when they first arrived. You know the army section or whatever turned up. They'd be reorientated with weapons handling, detonator handling, putting Claymore mines together. And even the detonators were dangerous because you know if you didn't handle them correctly they could go off and ruin your hand. So you had to be faux pas with all that sort of stuff.

01:00 Patrol stuff, you know going over theory, sort of reorientating you into what's to be done when you go out. Even though they'd practised all that stuff, excuse me, in Australia and even though we'd been doing to a degree in the country, you were still did a reorientation. So you were doing the things how they had to be done at the base. They didn't want someone walking in and doing their own thing

basically. Plus we did ah some fence work at night which meant we sat on the fence with no lights so you were just sitting in the dark

01:30 in spots along the fence listening to strange noises in the trees. And we used to talk about these drop bears that used to drop out of the trees and drop on you. It was just a joke, you know the drop bears make the noise sort of thing. And so you didn't have lights to light the fence up with so your eyes had to become accustomed to working in the dark. And the weird thing about that was that you'd do that night work, and whatever a couple of hours on and a couple of hours off and you'd come back and have breakfast and then you'd have to keep working that day. Whereas back at Vung Tau you'd come off and might have a few hours

02:00 off or the day off whereas we kept working. So it was pretty tiring for a few days. But you got used to that anyway.

**So what sort of sleep did you get?**

Oh you got your normal hours sleep but the night we were on the fence we would just come back and have breakfast, freshen up and then practise what we need to be practising basically.

**So tell me more about being on the fence, you're patrolling how far and ...?**

No, no patrolling on the fence, we were just sitting there, a bit like the towers around Vung Tau airfield except we were in fox holes, for want of a better word. Gee it seems that long

02:30 ago I can't ... I can remember sitting there but we weren't under cover we were just ... I think more of a foxhole effect. And I think it was just to give us experience of being on the fence as well. So we didn't see anything. Although I did have a bit of a weird experience that I thought I saw a helicopter light and I went helicopters don't have lights and there was no noise there was just this light appeared. I mean they had gun ships and um the Americans had a C131 I think it was and there's a name for it, a nickname.

03:00 It was just full of guns, like it had machine guns and everything set up through its fuselage and it was be called in and just strafe an area and would just literally cover. There would be just a couple of square of inches of ground with ammunition, flying bullets as it were. Um Puff the Magic Dragon that's what it's called. And actually as I'm talking here I've got some books that you could have had a look at that had all types of American fighter aircraft but it's packed away somewhere - actually no it's out the back if you want to have a look at it later.

03:30 Yeah Puff the Magic Dragon because they would call it in for fire support and it would just obliterate an area basically. But that's what I thought it was but it wasn't so it was just this white light that was moving horizontal and then it stopped and went down vertically and disappeared. I don't know what it was. Maybe it was a UFO [unidentified flying object], who know there was no sound but there was no other experience on the fence that night just that particular one - who knows.

**What were the bush sounds like at night?**

04:00 Oh there were animal sounds, insect stuff, drop bears as we keep calling them, but I think they were just maybe a monkey crawling around sort of thing. Depending on where you were you'd get the fireflies, little flying insects that light up, but we tended to see them more when we were out on ambush and patrol and it might depend on the time of years. So we saw a few of them when we were out on patrol and mainly ambush. So you could be looking for lanterns and it could be just these things moving through the bush. Because you'd set up an ambush on known areas of um

04:30 activity or an area where the locals weren't supposed to be after curfew. So if you weren't supposed to be there there then there's only one person who could have been there, it was possibly the VC. So if someone was there that wasn't supposed to be there you'd pull a flare or pull a claymore. Which never happened but ...

**But you did set up ambushes is that right?**

Oh we did set up ambushes. So ...

**Can you describe setting up an ambush?**

Um there'd be an area picked and if there's a track

05:00 nearby you would pick generally the high ground if possible. But set up a line of fire so you'd have um us spread out, machine gun would be in the middle, lead and ending. Ah Claymore mines would be set up at supposedly a safe distance from you as well and you would have to take turns on the machine gun at night so the other blokes that were back further might tend to grab some sleep if possible, but you would be on ... take turns at manning the machine gun and acting as watch. So if something actually happened you would play pull the Claymore and open up fire and the other

05:30 blokes would come in. Or everyone might lay for a while in the ambush and then maybe just retire but be there and you took turns in manning the machine gun. But ...

**So this on high ground near a track ...?**

Near a track. Well when I say high ground that was the purpose of the ambush if possible. It was all

flats, it was all flat so you'd just take the best line of fire so that you're not being hidden too much by shrubs or trees so your fires not dissipated.

06:00 And also a line of fire was set up generally so that it crosses at the ends. You weren't firing out that way, it was cutting across each other at the ends to a degree. So if you were in a ... Another way they would do it if you were to set up an ambush in a fox hole sort of thing, you'd set up so that the line of fire cut across each other so that there was no gaps between the line of fire. So you might be in this hole facing across to your right and the other one would be slightly on this side across to the left. So their line of fire was cutting across so you didn't have an open space where you were just firing

06:30 straight out and somebody could come through the middle. So your line of fire was meant to cross as well. It sounds all very scientific.

**Oh no it's good to get these sort of detailed descriptions of how you did it. Say in that situation where you're on high ground near a track, what would you be expecting to see?**

Well ... Well generally the VC I guess coming through who might be wanting to infiltrate in or get close to Nui Dat itself or ...

**As a patrol or with vehicles or ...?**

Oh just patrols, it wouldn't be vehicles. They

07:00 wouldn't be transporting stuff because it would be too close to Nui Dat. And that whole area was pretty secure anyway, except in 1968 when they had the Battle of Long Tan. But after that it was pretty secure. Baria, I think is the correct name of the township just out of Nui Dat. There's a photo there of the pock holes all through the building where it's all been shot up. So the VC would come and go but I think the Australians had that area pretty secure anyway. And the general consensus or my understanding was

07:30 that they wouldn't normally attack an Australia unless they thought they could out number them, unless they thought they had the advantage because generally the Australians knew what they were doing - they didn't clump around the bush, they were pretty quiet and you know secured an area pretty well. So I think where we were working was light green so it wasn't heavily dense, there wasn't a lot of movement. But we were being sent out for practise, for experience but you never know someone could come in through a track who shouldn't be there. Because curfew, everyone had to be in

08:00 town, they weren't allowed to be in certain areas. So if they were in that area then they're only there for one reason and that is because they're involved in enemy activity - and you'd take them out before they could do anything. You wouldn't be challenging them. If you did they'd open up fire, you'd have a fight well and truly a fire fight. So the advantage was you know if they looked like it then you'd pull the pin and open fire. It didn't happen to me.

**Had it happened ... I mean what was the frequency?**

Oh look

08:30 I don't know because we were only up there for two weeks and nothing much happened while we were up there. But certainly I think the army would experience it more when they went further out into the field, you know out for a week's ambush and patrol stuff they'd probably encounter fire fights and stuff like that. Or come across the VC or the NVA [North Vietnamese Army] which was involved in the Battle of the Long Tan. And it was funny I was in the air force oh a bit before and I wasn't really aware of that. It depends how much you read papers and that sort of thing. But what we were doing was pretty low key,

09:00 but it was good experience - you know that's what we'd been trained for and got, got a chance to do it basically. I mean if something happenend, something happened, I mean you knew what to do - then you'd just go into automatic. It likes once you walked out on the fence you were on patrol - the weapon's ready, hold the position, this is what we do, if we're attacked we do this, if we're attacked we go here ... Um you just go into automatic, I mean that's what you're trained to do. Which is what you practise when you're ... When we were up at Amberley that's what we were practising ambushes and stuff. And you know

09:30 some of the ... a couple of blokes would act as the enemy and open up with blanks and you'd take to ground and attempt to go to high ground if you could or whatever and get the gun into position so that was the whole exercise. Whereas on the fence at Vung Tau we were on towers so if they were to attempt to infiltrate then you'd send up the magnesium flares and call in support and you'd open fire from where you were, and extra blokes would come out and the Americans as well. So you may have a running fire fight amongst the

10:00 fence or inside the fence - there might be grenades going off or whatever, it just depends. But again anything that happened there was from blokes getting a bit tired and a bit bored, setting off pop flares and someone set off a grenade one day. Yeah we were a little bit more laid back in Vung Tau.

**How ... Can you describe the Nui Dat Base? How big was it?**

Oh it was fairly big.

10:30 There were two airfields, one for the helicopters, the bushrangers and that and Kanga Airfield was sort

of through a bit of scrub. The Caribous landed there which I ... I landed on at one stage in a Caribou and I remember, I don't know what happened, but I think um either coming or going on an R and C we had landed for some reason at Nui Dat to pick up some army blokes and we hit the dirt and we were still rolling pretty quick and I was up the front and looked across and saw the pilot's hand come across and hit the brakes because the fence was starting to loom up pretty quick.

- 11:00 I don't know where the pilot's brain was, I don't know what was going on they sort of forgot to hit the brakes or something, because it was only a short take off stuff. Don't know what happened then but in the end the pilot stopped it. Um we didn't get to see a lot of it but from having seen aerial maps now I see what was there. There was um the two airstrips and up behind the Kanga Airfield there was a small hill and that was called SAS Hill. And that's where the Special Air Services hung out amongst the bush and the tents.
- 11:30 Um, there was what was called the Play Boy which was the prisoner of war camp. And then there was the sleeping quarters for artillery and infantry and the regimental artillery and the logistics. Yeah it was fairly large yeah. Probably about thirty or forty acres, I don't ... It was big. But to say how many acres - well certainly bigger than Melbourne Football Ground, let's put it that way. Yeah it was huge, it was quite large because they had two airstrips
- 12:00 and a couple of regiments and artillery support and all that sort of stuff. Although I remember driving around there one day at the end of the airfield with the sergeant in the Jeep and this wild pig sort of ran out from nowhere and we were about to pop it and we went oh I don't think we should do that on the base, it could draw fire. So this wild pig took off, come out of the scrub and we let it go.

**So where were you located?**

Oh God let me think, where was I located. I suppose from an aerial view we were to the left of the helicopter pad,

- 12:30 I don't about two or three hundred yards. There was just a row of tents set up. They were all open air, fairly large tents with sandbags around the side up to about waist height. Stretchers on the floor, four or five to a tent. Some rope to hang up your clothing for washing and little pans to do your washing. There were a lot of rubber trees and trees around. There was walkways as well, wooden walkways so when it rained you weren't walking in the mud. The canteen or mess wasn't far
- 13:00 away. We sort of hung about in that area. Again it's ... I guess if I was talking to someone else who was there they may talk about something else and then I'd remember something else but to sit here I'm just running off my own memory so there's only pockets of information or things I can remember. Sometimes you know there's only things that happen that you remember, all the other stuff, the day to day boring stuff you can't remember well.

**But it was very wet?**

No well luckily it was the dry season, it didn't rain much when we were up there,

- 13:30 so it must have been around, somewhere around May, June. I don't recall it being wet when we were up there. It certainly rained when I was at Vung Tau at different times, you know it was quite humid and that but ... Oh sorry you're right it did rain you're right, when we went out on ambush that night - yeah it just bucketed down. We laid in the mud and you tried to put some leaves under you so you're not in the mud. But a great way to lay in ambush all night in the bloody rain. The next day was spent cleaning the weapons pretty thoroughly because they got a bit wet.
- 14:00 Yeah it rained pretty heavy that night. So that was the only time it rained basically was that ambush night.

**So you said before that when you arrived you had to be trained ... part of your time at Nui Dat was to be trained in the way things were done at the base.**

Yeah.

**Yeah, which may have been different to how you were taught, the way you'd been doing things. So is that something you could talk about?**

Oh a bit different. Oh well it was just to do with orientation, you know where the base is, this is what we do. Um if there's an attack this is what happens, this is what you'll be required to do I guess.

- 14:30 The weapons handling was always important, safe weapon handling. If you're going to go out on patrol you know you set your Claymores up. When that was done make sure the distance between you and it ... Handle detonators like this. Don't this to them they'll go off, you'll lose a hand. Um, just getting used to how the army operated within their own confines I guess. Yeah just fitting in with what they did. Following up any information on ambushes. Just keeping you up to date with stuff. You know a couple of nights on the fence.
- 15:00 Ah I think we might have had a couple of days that were fairly easily, you know come sundown take your malaria, roll your sleeves down, you're allocated one or two tins a night of beer and there was a meal and you just went back to bed, maybe wrote a note, wrote a letter back home. It was pretty, oh it was pretty easy at the time. It wasn't, we weren't taking weekly or nightly attacks, there wasn't much of that happening. Although I remember when we went back to Vung Tau and one night the corporal for

some reason, I don't know he had been drinking,

15:30 and we were on standby. And he called us out and he reckoned ... and it had been raining, and he reckons we were going up to Nui Dat. And I was second in charge at the time and, and I can stand corrected on this of course, and he reckons we were going up to Nui Dat to help out. And I went they've got you know a couple of divisions, battalions up there, why would they want twelve blokes? This is not right, you know this doesn't ... So I went down and saw the Commanding Officer who was in charge of our section of you know

16:00 the flight lieutenant, ground defence office, and I said this is what's happening is this true? And he said no, I'll sort it out. And the corporal wasn't happy with me because I'd gone over his head. Um so we didn't talk for a while. So he wasn't happy with that. But I thought it was a waste of time and I thought it was ridiculous. And he was already to pack us off in a Jeep and send us up the road.

**Is that before you actually went to Nui Dat?**

Ah yeah it could have been.

16:30 I can't quite place the time and place. It was 1970. We may have already been in Nui Dat, I can't remember, but that just sort of sits in my mind that I went over his head and he wasn't happy with that.

**Did you do that often? Was that something that you felt compelled to do?**

Um ... Oh I still do a bit to a degree in my working life, yes. But I usually take it up with people now before I go over their heads. But I just ... It's something I've always ... You know if someone's being picked on in the Services or

17:00 even civilian life I'll stand up, but I just thought it was a waste of time. I think he'd been drinking and ... He may have not been, but he was just getting carried away with things. I don't know where he got the information from but I thought no this just didn't sit right - you know you get that gut feeling, no this is bull. I didn't wait for him to do something I just went straight to the flight officer and said look Joe Blow's doing this, he's saying we're doing this, is this correct, you know he's got us ready to go off to Nui Dat, and he said no, no, no, you're not going anywhere,

17:30 end of story. He wasn't happy.

**So just getting back to Nui Dat, being on the Base and being orientated and stuff, like um you showed us a photo before of discharging the weapons before you came in, before you came back onto the base. So what was the protocol there?**

Well we got lead back in through the wire because there was a, you know a path through the barbed wire fencing. So I think the intelligence officer may have come out with us, met us just outside the fence to walk us back in. So when

18:00 you're out on patrol your weapon's armed, you've generally got the safety on generally, to the best of my knowledge, because otherwise you could fall over and your shot could go off. So if there was contact you just flick your safety and you start firing. So once we'd come inside the area, immediately inside the fence you had to clear your weapons. So that means undo the rocket launcher, make sure there's no grenade up there. Point the weapons either up or with the M60 point down. Lift the back of it up ... Oh and also remove the belt, back up,

18:30 safety on, make sure there's nothing down the chamber, no loose rounds. Ah close it, pull the trigger so it's also set, ready to go. Make sure there's no round sitting in the chamber for some reason. So if a shot goes off it goes into the ground. Because you know if you're walking back with a live round up the barrel and you might fall over somewhere. There's was no need for live weapons on ... immediately on unless there's something happening. That was just the safety protocol you had to do straight away when you went in. And that makes sense,

19:00 a guy walking around the base with a loaded weapon you don't need that unless you're under attack sort of thing. So we had weapons at um Vung Tau but they weren't loaded. And we had our magazines but they were kept separate. And if something had happened, like if we got called out then you'd whack the magazine in. You wouldn't cock it though, you'd have it ready but it only takes half a second to do all that. But yeah clearing the weapon was a safety precaution. And as you'd go out you'd cock the weapon and it's ready to go.

19:30 **So what was the strategy if you came under attack at Nui Dat?**

I don't remember. Look, oh look I'd have to theorise. I guess our section would be called out ... And I think we were allocated an area of the fence line anyway and it would depend what's going on. And if it ... And if Nui Dat was to come under attack, and I think it may have once through rockets anyway. So there'd be rocket launchers dropped in against, I don't know if they'd get

20:00 an actual attack on the wire per se, I think more rocket attacks to just disrupt the system or take some people or if there were aircraft there attempt to get the aircraft. So with a rocket attack you'd have to dive for safety and wait to see what's happening from there.

**Were there trenches?**

Good question. I don't remember. Now isn't that shocking. I don't recall. There was plenty of sandbagging stuff so you'd throw yourself against the sandbags so that if a rocket went off the sandbag took it.

20:30 unless it was on the other side of course next to you. I don't recall. That's the sort of thing I just don't remember, can't remember, yeah. Just that if that happened you'd dive for the sandbag and wait and see what happened, whether you got called out or whether you took to the fences or just kept your weapons ready. And if that was the case they'd be trying to locate where the rocket was coming from and they'd call the artillery in probably, to either fire back or may get someone up in the air

21:00 to attempt to spot them and then would then direct the artillery and then they'd start firing back. That's the way they would counter act that. Oh the Base would certainly be on the alert and they certainly would man the fences just in case it was a diversion for somebody to try and infiltrate. But that ... I never experienced that anyway.

**You were talking about stress levels before you know with the glass and how they rise and um ... Did you**

21:30 **experience that kind of stress at Nui Dat, I mean being much closer to the action and was it a different kind of experience for you than Vung Tau, did you feel less secure?**

Well it was just another extension of my work, or our work situation so the answer is I probably did but I wasn't aware of it at the time. Um it was probably more stressful in the fact that we were actually out there patrolling. Because we didn't do that at Vung Tau whereas the ADGs up at Phan Rang actually ran

22:00 their patrols outside the airbase so they got more experience of that. But I guess in terms of being at Nui Dat and being on patrol, being on ambush um an experience we wanted to have and an experience we were being given so I guess the stress was certainly being pushed up higher in the glass, within the body. Which means you had no much room to play with if something were to happen. But if anything was to happen then the reaction would be automatic, well it was supposed to be automatic, in a response that you either go to

22:30 ground, return fire, group, you know look where it's coming from and then take directions from whoever's in charge as to what to do next. Um but I guess on reflection it was just something I was doing. Which sounds weird. We were trained to do it and you were tense and ready for it but when I think back it was like an automatic space to be in, you weren't thinking about what would happen or what if this happens or what if that happens. We're just out there patrolling, out there laying in the rain waiting for someone to come along. If someone comes along

23:00 and they're not supposed to be there then you open fire. It was as simple as that basically, which may not have been as simple for some other people but that's how we operated. Um I'm not quite sure how the army operates as far as what their protocol was but we were in the light green so I don't think there was much to be expected but you just didn't know. There's always that unknown factor. Someone could come ... A couple of people could come walking down the track who weren't supposed to be there and carrying weapons so ... we certainly wouldn't be challenging them.

**Was it very**

23:30 **busy at the airstrips, like the helicopter strip and ...?**

Yeah the helicopter strips were reasonably busy. There'd be um ... You know the Yanks might fly in occasionally and the 9 Squadron and Bush Rangers would be coming and going - you know maybe taking troops out or going out in support. Or there might be one going out and taking some troops out and a gun ship might go out with them. They always have one there for dust off on standby. The flight out earlier in the morning would be waiting. So there was a couple of huts off to the side in

24:00 amongst the trees where the blokes would hang out, oh excuse me, waiting for a call. So it could be quiet some days other days it'd be quite busy, depends on what the army was encountering. Occasionally the Caribou were coming in and out you know maybe bringing some troops in, bringing some stuff in, not so much troops. Often they could come down in convoy from Nui Dat to Saigon anyway, sorry Nui Dat to Vung Tau which I think was an hour and a half, maybe two hours away. Or they might fly them down just depends on how many were coming down

24:30 and whether there was a Caribou coming and going. But they tend to operate up and down the country a bit doing ... It was called the Wallaby Airlines so it would carry troops and goods and stuff. So yeah it was reasonably busy I guess. But they just spent a lot of time up there.

**Can you explain what dust off means?**

Dust off is a medical term when they had a medical evacuation happening. If the army had encountered fire and taken wounded on

25:00 so they'd have to come in and once they'd secured the area because certainly it would be harder for them to get in if the place was hot, which means you know there's a gunfight going on. And as soon as the helicopter arrives there it's like a sitting duck so generally I guess um once the area was secure the medivac chopper would fly in and they'd put the wounded on and take them back either to Nui Dat or straight to um Back Beach Logistics, to the army hospital there. Again I didn't have experience of that

but you'd see them coming and going. I guess the um

25:30 how badly they were wounded would determine where they were taken.

**So what was your impression, was there a lot of fighting, a lot of action going on, were there many wounded coming back during that time?**

Oh look I didn't ... no I didn't see any of that because I didn't do a lot of helicopter work, I just went up a couple of times with a mate and um spent a day up there so it was pretty low key. Ah we went up once I think, did a little bit of support, let some rockets off, started a bit of a grass fire that's about all. I didn't

26:00 see all that other stuff. That's why it would be worth while if um, if other blokes were to do this, you know especially blokes who were you know worked on the gun ships and stuff, you'd get a completely different perspective about what happened - or the pilots as well. In fact I remember one of the pilots, he'd played for Footscray or had played for Fitzroy, one of the two teams, and they started up a football game for a while. But then he got told he couldn't play because if he got injured they'd be one less pilot, because we didn't have a lot of excess pilots.

26:30 But I played rules for a while and then found out I got hurt too much and stopped playing - I can get hurt in other ways. A bit weird isn't it. I returned to volleyball and just wear a volleyball in the face. But yeah the pilot he played for VFL [Victorian Football League] at the time, had or had played and he was a pilot and they said no, no we need you to pilot we don't want you playing footy. So that was interesting.

**Can you just tell me you said you flew out with a mate, where did you fly to?**

Oh well

27:00 flew out of ... We flew off from Vung Tau and then we flew to Nui Dat and we landed there and we I guess waited for something to happen. I think they got a call out so I went up with them. I went up to get some experience what it was like to be on the chopper as a gunner because I was offered the position to do so. Which was good, you do so many hours and you get the half wing and just the whole buzzy thing you know. Um and I think they got called into supports and contacts going on somewhere in the bush outside Nui Dat but I can't remember how far it was. I think there's a couple of photos showing the fire

27:30 that started after they fired some rockets, M72 rockets. And um not much going on. We didn't take fire, like we didn't have anybody firing at us and just let some rockets off and they dispersed and they were fine and we eventually flew back to Nui Dat. Um, American rations were pretty free to access. You know there were cans of peaches and pudding and all sorts of things. And their ration packs had little packets of five cigarettes and you'd have them and exchange for something else or some chocolate or stuff.

28:00 So their ration packs were quite amazing. Um but that was the only time I went up basically, just up in a chopper to fly up and get some experience. I went up a couple of times but I just kept getting airsick. It was very annoying but as I said earlier I think I was being looked after, it was like no you stay on the ground, get your experience on the ground. Um because you know if a chopper took fire and got taken out only one way down and that's straight down. They didn't survive a fall very well.

28:30 **Okay. So anything more you can say about Nui Dat?**

No not a great deal. I mean ... Yeah well I've said a couple ... you know the food wasn't really flash but that's just the way things were. No like I said amongst the rubber trees and the rubber plantations and the trees, it was tropical. Um just a two week experience doing patrols, doing

29:00 the ambush stuff. And we were pretty safe. We flew up in a chopper and came back in a chopper which is good so we weren't stuck on the road. Um, the blokes I served with I've got some photos of them which I can't locate at the moment. I found out later a couple have died. I don't know what from, they sort of died later. Which is interesting because they'd be in there early fifties. And in fact I was at a meeting just before Christmas for the RAAF Vietnam Veterans, I'm on the committee, and um the secretary was saying oh

29:30 Shorty Lee had died and I said what, Shorty Lee? And he was a real shorty and a funny bugger. And we don't know what or where from. Just died and we go gee that's bizarre, you know early fifties and ... I don't know what from, it could have been an accident or whatever we don't know but blokes are starting to drop off one way or another, it's like getting weird. It makes you more aware of your own mortality, you just think you're going to um, keep living for want of a better word. And these blokes are in their fifties

30:00 and they're dying one way or another for whatever reason. So um yeah there's a couple of blokes who have died who I've known but I haven't experienced anyone who I knew up there who have died. Um although having said that there was one bloke, I think he might have shot himself up at Phan Rang, I recall, but I'm not a hundred percent sure. Oh talk about shooting themselves. There's a um,

30:30 there was a sergeant up there we called um The Phantom because you could never hear him turning up, he'd sort of arrive and you just wouldn't hear him so we called him The Phantom. And ah he was in the sergeants mess one night and he had a little pistol and he somehow ended up shooting himself in the foot. I mean you weren't supposed to carry a weapon into the mess at the best of times but we don't know what he was doing with it but he shot himself in the foot. The expression goes, he ...

**What, was that**

31:00 **deliberate or ...?**

Oh I think it was accidental, he was probably mucking around with the bloody thing and showing his mates and it discharged. Which is easy to do. I think it was a pistol or actually no I think it had a revolving chamber so you only had to sort of cock it or something knock the trigger and just flip your finger and off it'd go. So it was a bit of a joke he'd um shot himself in the foot. Not very smart.

**Um okay so back in**

31:30 **Vung Tau, um just at what stage by the way did that trip to Nui Dat occur during your time?**

I think it must have been mid-year, maybe June. I mean it rained, it rained as I recall only once up there so it wasn't like the wet season, I'm pretty sure that's the dry season so um it might have been mid-year. I certainly been in the country for a while so I would have been nearly half way through my tour I guess. And our section, our flight just got

32:00 picked to go up there on exchange. So you know their blokes would come down and man the gates do what we were doing, they were getting the experience of doing that I suppose, which was a bit of a change for them. Um but probably half way through - it was not something I was thrown into straight away.

**Sorry who were they that came down?**

Oh it would have been just a flight section of army who you know were together in part of maybe a 7RAR or whatever who was there at the moment. Um they set up so that there was an exchange

32:30 between the two service areas so that we got a better understanding of what was going on at the two different bases. So you know twelve blokes of theirs would come down. They'd look after the radio room, get some orientation, do the gate, do the towers at night - you know do what we were doing basically and we went up and did what they were doing. So that's about all that was happening then.

**So you're sharing this base with the Americans, were the Americans very well supplied? The PX was pretty ...**

Oh the PX was pretty full on. It was huge, it was like a supermarket.

33:00 I've never seen anything like it. I mean we only had a little canteen, not there, but you know back home the ASCO [Australian Services Canteen Organisation], the Australians had this canteen organisation. So you could still get something to eat between meals, you know it was like a little cafe, you know toasted sandwiches and stuff and bacon and eggs. And there was a bit of a store attached to them sometimes on the bases. But this was full blown menswear, jocks, socks, food, clothing, order your

33:30 car so it's there for you when you arrive back home - you know your Thunderbird or Mustang. It was just ... It had everything and anything, it was like it was the quarter store in, as you say a quarter store, a store built into a whole supermarket complex. You know it was so mind boggling. Everything's so big in America. Um I went there once or twice just to buy some extra stuff in the clothing, or I can't remember what it was now. Um yeah it was quite bizarre, they were full on. And their flight rations and the cigarettes and pudding

34:00 and fruit and chocolate and well it just had everything in it. So if you crashed or whatever and the flight rations were with you you'd be right. Which was quite bizarre compared to our rations.

**So was there sort of wheeling and dealing with the Americans?**

Yeah well there was a little bit. I remember going up to Bear Cat, a big airfield just outside Saigon - huge, you know huge base.

34:30 There were aircrafts and stores and logistics. And we went up there with a big ah, I can't think of the name of it, a truck, I learnt how to drive it, it had eight gears, a huge big thing you often see in world war movies. No, it doesn't matter. Anyway we went up there and we stayed overnight and the Yanks liked the slouch hats for some reason so it was either a slouch hat or a dozen VB. I mean they were drinking Budweisers, it's like lolly

35:00 water compared to drinking VB. So for that you'd exchange um, they had these poncho lines which are like a silk, camouflaged silk blanket and they would line the poncho line it so the water proofing and this would go inside it and sort of keep them warm. And I remember exchanging my slouch hat which was a pretty silly thing to do but that's what you did, and I think I bought a dozen VB so I got two ... So I had a dozen VB for my slouch hat and a couple poncho lines, which I've still got. I've been

35:30 carting around for thirty years on my numerous changes of residence and abode and ... I could have bought that there and showed you, oh here it is, remember this? So it's a camouflage green looking thing, so I've still got them, yeah. Um I think a couple of boys were involved in a bit of shady stuff on the side. One bloke was able to get a hold of a Willies Jeep - you know those World War II things, you know you still them. Then he reckoned he had some Yankee who was wanting to um get a hold of a Land Rover and he could give us a chopper or something,

- 36:00 it was like what? Well when they left Vietnam, when they eventually pulled out, the choppers were landing on the aircraft carriers and when everyone got off they just pushed them off the edge because they had no space for them. Oh you know I'll give you a, you know I'll give you a helicopter - you give me a Land Rover we'll get you a helicopter. They just write stuff off. They couldn't understand how we had to account for everything because we just didn't have the equipment. So that's why things were pretty tight and you know there's rumours, supposedly rumours or
- 36:30 stories about the RAAF not always going into tight spots to support the army. There's a bit of funny antagonism stuff about that still. I don't know anything about it, it's just gossip I hear. I've heard rumours and blokes talk about it and I don't understand that sort of stuff, thirty years on I mean why keep going on about that stuff. But that's because the Yanks had aircraft to burn and the blokes to burn so to speak so you know they were probably quite willing to go in and do what they had to do and they saw it as their job.
- 37:00 But the RAAF did their job as well. So again you need to talk to people who were there first hand and get that experience. You just hear these funny stories getting around. And blokes make comments about the RAAF, you know the little orchids and all that sort of stuff, you know they do the hard stuff but you know crazy stuff. Because we're seen as I guess the sort of junior service of the navy, army, then the air force - they consider us to be the junior service. So there was a bit of that stuff back in the sixties as well. But it was all in good nature so it wasn't
- 37:30 fighting and all that sort of thing. So um ... Yeah they would sometimes talk about that. But certainly a few of the blokes were selling barbed wire or corrugated iron. I don't know where they got from but they were selling it and making extra money and then they had to get that money home because you were allowed to send a certain amount of money home each month from your pay. So they were asking if I wanted to send some extra money and I said no I don't think so, I'm not interested. I don't want to get caught up in anything here thank you. So there was a bit of a black market and stuff going on. I'm not quite sure I
- 38:00 didn't want to know about it. Don't ask me, I don't know it. Oh yeah that reminds me of an incident one night. The um ... Just out of Vung Tau on the way towards Saigon there was a big fishing village and we'd um ... one of patrol, escorts had come back and picked up a big crab and bought it and put it in the mess kitchen. Anyway um I was on duty that night in the radio room and the boys had been drinking and they got a bit hungry so they broke into the mess and got their crab,
- 38:30 as you do. They wanted to eat. So they got reported so the S ... the service police got called in and they were acting all tough and who's this and how did they get in and you were here and you were on duty and you would see them and you know what's going on, you know who do it. And I said well you know they got their crab. I don't know I didn't see them, they went past, I didn't know what they had. You know they'd gone into the kitchen, I knew what they had. And there were all sorts of threats flying around, oh we'll send you home if you don't tell us who it was and I'm like it's only a crab for God's sake. The mess, they got in and got some food, they hadn't
- 39:00 taken weapons or something. But you know they were playing it all up you know. I said it's a crab, I didn't see them. Some blokes went past, I don't know what they had. You know they were blowing it all out of proportion but I guess they didn't have much to do, they had to sort of do something I guess. But it was um ... And talking of kitchens there in the back where we sort of had a semi kitchen, the rats were in pretty good supply around the area. I remember walking down there one night and there was
- 39:30 this big black ugly rat sitting on the sink and it was like ... I just went oh my God, I just turned around and walked out. It was like I don't want to know about it, I don't need to go into the kitchen tonight. And you'd often sit on the towers some nights and you'd see a couple of them running around and you'd sort of find a loose sandbag and try and drop it on them. Oh it was shocking. Occasionally the mice would be running over your bed at night after you'd gone to sleep. So I can't handle mice or rats now - ugh! I don't like them. I can't
- 40:00 understand having rats and mice for pets. I'm sure they're quite nice but enough, no thanks, don't like them.

## Tape 6

- 00:34 Just that there's the back road to Back Beach so when you come out of the main gate of Vung Tau at the airfield you turn left and wander around the back way and you meet up with the main road, you've gone the long way around and there was a sort of a little hospital Red Cross complex at the intersection, this T intersection. And I don't know we'd been over to Back Beach or something and ah one of these huge
- 01:00 American trucks came around the corner and took the fence out. And there happened to one of these white mice I've talked about there, and the Yank didn't stop so the white mice bloke just pulled out his forty-five, bang-bang, he just started shooting after the truck. The Yank just planted his foot and kept going. Because the story was that if you either run over someone or shot someone accidentally you don't stop to sort it out just get out of the area of the accident because you don't know what the reprisals would be or who they were basically. So

- 01:30 you were very careful as well. But um ... Another interesting place um was what's called the Five Ways which is in Vung Tau itself. It's where they had all the national flags of the countries of all the countries that were there. And it was sort of a meeting spot. If you were going to meet someone for a drink or meet someone in town. But years ago I was in Perth and I was wandering around the back of the museum and there were a couple of shops and they were Vietnamese and they were selling and I thought oh this looks interesting so I walked in and started looking at
- 02:00 the artefacts and things and a girl came out and we sort of got chatting and when she found out, I don't know how it come up or what I was doing, but that I had been in the air force and been in Vietnam she went out the back and got her father. And he'd been in the South Vietnamese army. And we got chatting and he had a little restaurant down the road and he said come down and have a meal ... I didn't do it but it was interesting. that he struck at this instant friendship because he'd found someone who'd been there sort of thing. So there's a small group of
- 02:30 them that march actually on ... well they certainly march on Anzac Day and I think there's a small group of South Vietnamese that now march on um Long Tan Day which is August sixteen or eighteen, at the shrine a small group sort of march, but usually they march on Anzac Day, but not many, there might be thirty or forty of them, that's interesting. You know only the ones who got out, that didn't want to stay there.

### **So were there**

### **03:00 many South Vietnamese military personnel around?**

Um, you'd see them in town, you'd certainly them in town but they weren't on the base per se because it was an air force base. They, you know maybe some officers might come through occasionally but they were more stationed in town and maybe outside Vung Tau itself in you know bases. We didn't have a great deal to do with them no. But you'd certainly see them in town walking around in greens and stuff. But you know I didn't go into town a lot.

- 03:30 Um I used mainly to go in to get some tapes, reel to reel tapes made up. Because I bought a reel to reel tape, now when did I buy that? I bought that when I went to Penang - picked it up nice and cheap, an Akai Tape still got it, it still works. It's amazing, just amazing. All this nineteen seventies music. I don't know where I'm going to play it. Um and you'd often go in and just buy the Akai big seventies tape and say I want that, that, that and that and you'd walk away and have a drink or visit the girls and come
- 04:00 back and it'd be all recorded for you and exchange MPC [Military Payment Certificates] which is the military currency, monopoly, but you'd call it Monopoly money because every so often the Yanks would, I think it happened once while I was there, maybe twice, they'd change the currency. So one night the MPC of this type is worth what it is, you know five cents, twenty-five cents, two dollars. The next night that is gone, they bring this new type in, so all that is useless, all that MPC money is just
- 04:30 no good. So blokes, you know the Vietnamese might have a couple of thousand dollars of this stuff and it's hopeless, just, you either exchange it or you don't. So it was really like monopoly money. So it was used to a degree on the base to buy stuff and a little bit in town as well. Not much American dollars though. So they'd exchanged the currency overnight and blokes would go bankrupt because they had too much and couldn't ... may have to justify where they got it from. So yeah that could happen occasionally and you know there were stories of blokes you know
- 05:00 being, going broke overnight, like in town itself, but not us because you wouldn't have any point to collect that sort of money. So you'd get an allowance of um, I don't know what were we getting, some ridiculous allowance when you hear what the blokes are getting now. Um yeah it was enough to buy you a drink and stuff on the base.

### **But why would it change ...?**

Oh to protect it and stop blokes accumulating it

- 05:30 and building up a big supply of it and blackmarket and all that sort of stuff, yeah. They'd just completely change it over so they'd have it all printed up and ready to bring it in when they thought things were getting a bit too hot and I don't know they just decided to change it overnight. You'd have to go back to the pay office and exchange the money and get the new currency. Still MPC but it was different. Different colour and all different design maybe - they'd change it.

### **06:00 So were you using other currencies as well as the MPC?**

No there wasn't ... Oh there was the Vietnamese money but we didn't use that much, I think I've got couple of coppers, you know it's like stuff I bought home, you could use that as well in town but usually the locals were happy to take the MPC or you might exchange it for the Vietnamese money. I don't know if it was worth much, I'm not too sure. But again the blokes would have to take the MPC because that was a standard sort of bartering

- 06:30 form of money.

### **So MPC money could be transacted between, just between Vietnamese?**

Yeah, yeah they used it was well. Yeah and I guess they could ... I'm assuming this, I might be wrong ... they could work out an exchange rate for the local Vietnamese money as well. But I didn't use a lot of it much. I mean I brought a couple of notes back and a couple of metal dollars and that was all. I didn't have a need for it really, I used the MPC on base to you know buy your beer and wine and

07:00 wine ... sorry beer and whatever else you needed to get done, hair cut or something like that or go down to the Yank PX to buy something extra. There wasn't much to spend money on except girls and beer and beer and girls. Sorry.

**No, no I was going to ask you about the girls and the recreation and ... I mean were you at all concerned about Venereal Disease and STDs [Sexually Transmitted Diseases]? Was that something that was discussed or ...?**

I don't think it really was. Well it was

07:30 certainly discussed at one of those father and men, father and boys' nights years before. But it was certainly discussed because blokes started getting it and they'd have to go and get a shot and they'd got back to town and get it again. It's like, hello, don't you think you need to do something here? Um, I'd heard a couple of Yanks got sent home because they just kept getting infected and you know they'd send them home. One or two of our blokes might have got infected once or twice. But um yeah

08:00 we certainly were aware of it, yeah I mean there was protection there and you'd use it and that's what you were supposed to do I guess, but some blokes didn't bother.

**What about the girls did they insist on it, suggest it or prefer it?**

Um ... It would depend on what was happening I guess. No I guess the short answer is they probably didn't, no, they wouldn't, well not to the best of my knowledge, in my experience. Some did, some didn't um it

08:30 depends on what was happening. I'll leave the imagination to that one. Um but yeah some blokes used them and some blokes didn't. And some blokes got infected and they had to go down to the orderly and get a shot and that was, actually I think it was reported, so I think if you got three that was it, if you got infected three times you're out - you know three strikes and you're out. And blokes didn't want to short tail their tour

09:00 because part of the tour is that you know you got that Defence Service Home Loan which is available for return servicemen and then eventually Whitlam brought in service personnel. But that was another plus I guess, you served over there and if you served over thirty or whatever it was then you were entitled to that Defence Service Home Loan which was at a huge reduced rate. So yeah you wouldn't want to jeopardise that I guess as well. And blokes went over to do a job

09:30 and well you wouldn't want to be sent home for that anyway, especially if you were married or about to get married or were married, to be sent home because of your STD. So no, not many blokes, a few did, but not many blokes got caught with it or got sent home - one or two might have.

**Were you aware of unwanted pregnancies amongst the girls, was it something that was known about or ...?**

10:00 I heard about it but no I wasn't aware of it, no. Um, no didn't see them, didn't know about it, ah wasn't aware of it until later I guess, you hear about it later in the news - I read about it in the paper. I don't even remember being told about it or anything like that so yeah. I mean I got friendly with the Padre, Father John, but nothing like that ever came up - because we were involved in building the orphanage,

10:30 but there was never any discussion about that sort of stuff. And yeah it didn't come up for discussion so out of mind out of sight sort of stuff I guess. It wasn't talked about. But it was interesting being involved in doing some community work there. I mean we didn't just go over there for twelve months you know drinking and womanising and that stuff all the time, we got involved in a little bit of community work which was good. It gave us something to do in the morning instead of sitting around on our

11:00 bums and twiddling our thumbs. Um yeah it was good. And I presume the orphanage it still there, I presume so. Um so that was a bit of community work involvement which was good. But didn't have a lot to do with locals, not a great deal, just the ones who were coming off base, working on the base, and got to know a few of the girls and you know you'd joke and carry on and make jokes and make funny remarks when you were checking their bags and there'd a lot of laughing

11:30 and, oh you, you number ten, you number ten, and, or you're number one, you're number one, depending on what you were saying or doing to them. So um ... Yeah because the girls would usually work there all the time so you got, if you were there for twelve months you got to know the regular house girls or whoever was working on the place. Um, there were girls working on the bar or worked at the officers mess they had to be taken home each night. Because it was a bit late

12:00 and you know they could be bumped off or you know just a courtesy thing they did, they took them home. Um, yeah it was funny, I mean it was probably a bit like the big Tan Son Nhut Bear Cat, you know the locals working on the airfield up there. There were locals working the front-end loaders and the big forklifts - they weren't all service personnel working there. Because we went out there to pick up some

cement and wooden stuff for the orphanage and you know there was a local Vietnamese woman working the forklift. So they were

- 12:30 utilising them on the base as well. Because as I said we didn't have to clean our huts - I mean I think they even made our beds - they'd wash your sheets and wash your clothes. So it was paid employment for them, so we were looked after. It was a bit of a bugger coming back and having to do your own again after twelve months. And go back to a base and maintain it and maintain your room - a bit hard to take after having your own house maid for twelve months. It sounds a bit weird in a
- 13:00 war zone but you know that was on an air base so we weren't up in Nui Dat so to speak. I don't know what it was like at Phan Rang- I think they would have locals still working there, I assume so, doing the same sort of stuff. But I think at Phan Rang there was, um the air force was there, the American air force and also the Koreans and I think even the South Vietnamese had a contingent. So there were four major ... um the four nations were there to the best of my knowledge. Certainly the Koreans because I've seen a flag
- 13:30 raising ceremony and there's Korean, South Vietnamese ... Yeah I think there are the four, the Americans, the Yanks. So that would have been a lot bigger and a lot more happening. They would have been flying jets out of there, the Canberra Bombers, the 2 Squadron flew out of Phan Rang, the RAAF 2 Squadron - who lost a Canberra Bomber and its pilot and navigator. When'd they lose them? Late sixties, early seventies. So they're still missing in action of course, they never found them. So that's something
- 14:00 that the Government's doing through the Americans and is still trying to locate the MIAs [Missing in Action], I mean that's sort of like looking for a needle in a haystack really. I mean you know that's if they've still got them on the records but I ... you know thirty years later. Some local would have stumble across wreckage and find it and report it and I mean who knows I mean ... But yeah they're missing in action. Um and a helicopter would go down ... Yeah ... Yeah helicopters are great aircraft, I used
- 14:30 to love flying in them but you know you were a sitting duck. You're just floating around somewhere up in the sky - if you're down low especially. I mean it doesn't take much - a couple of shots through the engine to get the smoke rising and the controls going haywire so ...

#### **So with the Korean contingent that was there, they were at ...?**

Well we had a ... Well we had some blokes there but to be honest look I don't know what they were doing. We had them certainly teaching us Tae Kwon Do. Um,

- 15:00 they may have been based in town in fact, I just don't know - it's strange. One of the blokes had done Tae Kwon Do and brought them along to teach us, and said if you want to learn it, want something to do, do it two, you know two or three mornings a week when you're not working. We got pretty fit. You know got the uniform, it was a heavy canvassy sort of thing and you'd sweat like anything. And you know they had us doing push-ups and knuckles and punching rope boards to build up the callous on your knuckles. And doing, um doing movements before you'd even do the free spar.
- 15:30 Um, I remember a couple of free spars I missed some blocks of ... A young kid was practising with us one night, a little Vietnamese bloke and they taught him some extra kicks and I was doing some free sparring with him and I missed the kick and he collected me fair and square in the groin and I went down like a sack of tomatos ... I thought I was going to die, absolutely die. I'd never been kicked there before. And I mean you see blokes and they get kicked and they jump back up and I go I don't think so, you don't get up after one of them. Um
- 16:00 and Toddy was moving my knees up and down trying to get me to breath and ... Yeah it wasn't a pleasant feeling. And another night Darkie had actually been shown how to do a side kick or something and we were free sparring and I missed his block and he clipped me right across the nose, just with his toes, just come across, not full on. But um it was good. Because they had a real discipline as well, it wasn't just a martial arts for fighting. There was an actual creed
- 16:30 they had that you had to recite every morning before practise about using it to protect women and children and not to use, only if provoked or you know you were in a corner and had to fight your way ... That sort of thing, there was actual a creed there so it was a very martial art discipline stuff. I mean all the Koreans learnt it in the Services over there but it wasn't to be seen to be used um badly or you know just for fun. So it was sort of a self discipline actually which was good, we enjoyed it, well I enjoyed it. And I
- 17:00 sort of took it up when I came back and then let it go and then I went back years later and went no not this getting hurt again, you know getting blocking and kicking and I went no, no thanks, it hurts me too much. I took up rowing instead.

#### **Did you spar with your mates out of class?**

Ah no, no, it wasn't appropriate - that was part of it, it wasn't something you did. You only sparred when you were training. Um there was only three of us doing it, myself, Toddy

- 17:30 Brendan and Darkie. So there was only three of us basically doing it. And no, there was no desire, no need to, it wasn't seen to be used for that sort of exercise.

**And have you used it in self defence?**

No, no I haven't been in a ... Having said that I have been in a fight with another bloke in the air force but that was towards the end of my tour and there was a few words spoken and there was a shove and push and I didn't get a chance to use it, unfortunately. He had me in the ah, on the bed

18:00 in the hut and giving me a bit of two-oh and they pulled him off so ... And I had to drive up to Nui Dat or somewhere on escort that day and I wasn't feeling really flash after being punched around a bit, so I gave him the silent treatment for two months - just didn't talk to him, completely ignored him. He wasn't in my section so it didn't matter. And I actually I can remember we were sitting ... actually listening to The Goon Show, the ABC relayed through Radio Australia and we were

18:30 listening to the Goon Show of all things. And I don't know he said some words and I answered back and he gave me this remark and kept getting quite heated and shove came to push and it was on so ... No I didn't get a chance to use it - I should have I think. Yeah so ...

**Was that something that had been brewing or ...?**

Um oh yeah there was a bit of antagonism between us - he was a bit of a smart arse I guess. And I just tried ignore him and he just one day was standing there and you know how blokes stir each other and they say things and call you names

19:00 and I got jack of it and we acted and yeah I didn't utilise my teachings. So I come off the worse for wear, I wasn't hurt or anything, but just bruised and stuff but I had to jump into a bloody Jeep that afternoon and drive up the road so I thought I'll fix you I won't talk to you. Big girl, I used to do that, but like you know that saved me from having to deal with him anymore.

**What were you**

19:30 **escorting up to Nui Dat?**

Um, good question. I ... May have been Nui Dat or it might have been Bear Cat and we might have just taken some goods up. I don't know what we were doing, taking something up somewhere - I can't remember.

**So that was one of your roles?**

Yeah, do escorts up the road. So you'd be in the Land Rover with the M60 on the back plus you'd have your own rifle with you and um you'd escort a truck up the road somewhere to pick up stuff or do something. So I truck wouldn't go off on its own, it would never go up with just someone riding shotgun.

20:00 Um the Land Rover would go up as escort as well. So ... Look I can't remember. I mean there's things you remember quite clear and other times you just remember ... I just remember myself driving off and I had the sunglasses on and feeling pretty sore and sorry for myself and cursing him mentally and having to do the job. Oh look I can't remember. I mean it doesn't tell you much, but we were going somewhere, doing something. I mean some days it was quite ... not boring but it was just repetition, you worked twenty-fours on, twenty-four hours off, twenty-

20:30 four hours standby and it would just run seven days a week, three hundred and sixty-five days of the year.

**But getting out of the base was that good, like an escort job?**

Oh yeah it was something to do. Even the trip into town was something to do for the night. You know go in to pick up the blokes, take the bar girls home or the girls that work behind the bar. There weren't bar girls there as in you know girls to be talked to - they were there to do their job that's all. Um yeah it was something to do. You got to see the countryside and you were still on edge, you were still

21:00 not wanting to get involved in anything unless something happened. Um, except for those couple of incidents I talked about earlier it was just a straight up and down run. But you still had to be alert because you didn't know if anything was going to happen. You know you could be going through a village and they could have opened fire or they could have planted ... you know seen you going up and watched a couple of routes and plant a mine in the road, you just wouldn't know. Or go across the bridge and they'd blow the bridge. It was just an accepted risk,

21:30 I guess that's what I'm saying. You just did. Same as blokes who live in Nui Dat, or were going up to Nui Dat in trucks and going out somewhere, or APCs [Armoured Personnel Carriers], they could run across a mine so the similarities of risk I guess. But it was something you weren't, well I certainly wasn't driving around with it in my forehead because otherwise you wouldn't be able to operate or function I guess if you were too concerned about what was going to happen or may happen. If something happened then you reacted or

22:00 responded, so you just did the job. A bit like ... Oh it's a bit like nothing I guess. Well a similar idea is that in my work, you know doing body work and stuff, and I've worked in different spas you know and somebody says oh we've got a VIP [Very Important Person] coming in, so-and-so's coming in, and I go well so? He's coming in to get a massage and body work, why should I treat him any different? I mean I'll still be pleasant and polite but they don't want someone ... oh I don't know if there's any analogy,

22:30 you know sucking up to them or being different. You do your job and make them feel confident in your work and just treat them and be pleasant and polite and then they're okay. I don't know whether that's a good analogy. You just do your job, not worry about who the person is. You know go out to do your job not too concerned or you were concerned about something might happen but you wouldn't want to be walking around thinking oh I could go around the corner and someone's going to shoot me or I'll drive around here and something could happen or you'd be useless, you wouldn't be able to function properly. So I think that just comes down to your training anyway.

23:00 **Did you fraternise with the Americans very much?**

Oh, look yes and no. Got to know a few of the MPs [Military Police] who were on the gates. Friendly with a couple. And I remember one, he was a Negro, and he just didn't want to talk at all he was ... I don't think he liked whites somehow, I got that sense - he just wasn't interested. Oh look they'd come through. We got to know a few MPs but I think we kept to ourselves a bit. Um ...

**Did you socialise, did you drink with them?**

No not a great deal to be honest, no.

23:30 If I went into town I'd often go on my own because often the blokes would go off and do other things or I'd go in and get some taping done or I'd often go and swim on my own, spend a lot of time on my own. Um the occasional session. We'd get together for a drink. We went over to Back Beach one day and had a big barbie and had this huge semi trailer full of this, this huge esky full of ice and VB and had a barbie for the afternoon on the beach. But um not a great deal. And if we did I can't remember how we met them or where we met them, you know they might have come back to the base

24:00 and we had a few drinks on base and drank Budweiser and they'd drink our VB. But as to forming friendships with them, no I didn't - sort of a strange sort of situation. Maybe, maybe because it was mostly air force squadrons so they just had their pilots and back up staff and they did their own thing and we did our ours. There wasn't a lot of intermingling as such. Not like some blokes did or you perceive to see on the TV - I didn't see a lot.

**What did you think of them, I mean**

24:30 **generally in the way that they operated and their attitude to the war?**

Um ... Attitude we didn't talk about much. They seemed to be pretty laid back and friendly. They were certainly taken with the Australians and the accent and loved the beer because it was nice and strong and thought we were pretty fantastic, well sometimes, we gave them a bit of a hard time. We used to take the Mickey out of them a bit. I remember we were going on an escort, and don't ask me where because I don't remember, but there was a

25:00 convoy of Americans coming past and they had flak jackets and helmets on and we were nothing, you know just got our silly giggle hats on, no flak jackets. And they've got flak jackets and helmets and they've gone peace brother, peace brother and we're going yeah yours too! We were ... Yeah we used to give them a bit of a hard time actually, used to get a bit rude with them. But they thought it was all quite good fun. But as to sitting down and talking about the war and stuff it didn't happen, it didn't happen, we just did our job.

25:30 Um, there were a couple of officers would come around some nights to check on the towers at night and I think I might have dropped off to sleep for, I don't know, a mili-second and this Yank had pulled up and said are you awake up there boy? Yeah I'm awake yeah, yeah. Are you sure you're not asleep? No I'm not asleep. You know I might have gone like that you know because it's two o'clock in the morning and you're getting pretty tired and you can go like this and you're, oh hell, a whole five seconds, you feel like you've dropped off for about thirty minutes. It's a shocking feeling, you just drop into this deep sleep

26:00 and you come out again but ah ... I saw, actually I saw an American talking one day, the MP, one of the MPs and he was giving him a hard time, I didn't like the way he was talking. Really talked down to him. He was black and he was giving him a hard time. He was an officer and I thought we don't ... And it was this boy stuff. Don't talk to me like that boy. You know I hated it. The way it it's so degrading. But um

26:30 a couple of Yankee they were big Negroes and boy they were big men, I thought I wouldn't want to meet you in a dark corner somewhere and give them a hard time. Oh they looked like they'd look after themselves. But when the white caucasians some of them spoke to them and okay they'd you know they'd talk, you know don't talk to me like that, if you're going to use the word boy and it's so, there's this degrading tone in it. No not a nice word, not a nice way to talk to people I don't think. But that's how some of them talked to their own blokes

27:00 so um ... which I didn't encounter any of that sort of degrading or talking down stuff with the other ranks or anyone. Because it was a pretty small compound and everyone got to know each other pretty quickly. I mean it wasn't a huge contingent. I mean you got to know most of the aircrew. You know some you didn't, like 35 Squadron, who were busy doing their own thing. But 9 Squadron because all the ADGs would act as extra gunners on the gun ships so they mixed and talked with them.

**So what were relations**

27:30 **like between the aircrew and the ADGs?**

Oh look good, it was good. We got on well because often we might do trips with them or and because we were supplying the extra gunner um we all knew each other so there was no antagonism, we were there to do our job. Oh we used to pick on the blokes, especially um they'd never get out of their flying suits. You know they'd come back for a drink and go to the brewery and they'd be there at ten o'clock at night and talking while he's doing this. I only because I wanted to, I wanted to be there as well.

28:00 So you know couldn't ... you know you had to get a can opener to get their flying suits off them or ... I mean it was all in good fun, you know and they'd get their half ... get their hours up flying the country and the half wing would be on. But that's you know that's part of what you were there for, it would have been nice to do it but um they were good, no look we just had fun, it was just boy stuff, you know making fun without being antagonistic or that sort of ... But we all got on well, it was good, got to know the pilots a bit and all that sort of stuff. And it was funny the um

28:30 the last Long Tan, no the one before I think it was, yeah, Long Tan March, the officer who gave an address up at the shrine was air force Colonel Beatty. And after he'd finished talking they explained where he'd been and he'd been a pilot in 9 Squadron, and my ears pricked up. He was there in 1970 and I just couldn't get his face right because you know he's in his fifties like me, and I said oh do you remember an air crewman Charlie Brown, gunner ADG? And He said oh yeah I think I flew with him. I rang up Charlie Brown and said Charlie, do you remember air force colonel, you know Pilot Beatty? He said

29:00 yeah I flew with him. So it was interesting to come across someone like that. He gave a really great address but he's now retired so ... That was interesting to just cross paths briefly with someone like that - he was sort of that same period we were both there and he knew Charlie Brown and had flown with Charlie Brown, so yeah it was good. So it's good always to catch up ... So every couple of years I try to, well attempt to get up to Queensland and do the Anzac March up there and catch up with the blokes up there. Not to spin war,

29:30 just to sort of catch up and just talk and see where blokes are at and all that sort of stuff and what they're doing. Some haven't changed, some have, you know. Some blokes are doing things completely different and you can't get two words out of them. It depends, depends on the shared experience I guess that's what I'm saying. You know they might have been there but you know different flight and doing different things, even though you were there at the same time they were doing their own thing. So you don't have a lot of commonality and if you haven't talked for fifteen or twenty years what are you going to talk about? You know some blokes talk,

30:00 some don't, so it just depends. But you know the airfield defence guards nowadays have certainly got all the whizz bang goodies and yeah it's good.

**How much news were you getting from home?**

Ah, Dad used to send The Sun Herald across occasionally. Um we used to see the old Pix and Post, remember they used to have the old Pix and Post magazines? You'd send them across and you know you'd cut out the girlie parts and stick them up on the wall and all that sort of stuff. Um he'd send them across regularly. Mum would write. Dad would write occasionally.

30:30 I'd write. Um ... Actually I asked one day Mum if she'd kept any and she said no what would I want to keep them for? Oh okay, it's all right, fine, I just thought you might have kept them you know to see what I was writing. No, no we read them and they're gone. Oh okay. It would have been interesting to read back, see what I was writing back, you know not that you could ... Not so much you couldn't say a lot but you know some days were quite boring, got up, went to work, sat on the guard, checked the locals, watched the radio, nothing happened.

31:00 You know went into town and had a drink, just ... Watched the sun come up, went swimming, went surfing. Yeah the news used to come ... Dad used to send the papers across and the Pix and Post, that was good to read, to see what was going on back in Australia. And also I remember the cartoon that used to be in the Pix or the Post, the outback, those drawings of that pub. Oh, the pub built outside Albury-Wodonga on an angle.

31:30 I've gone blank. But it was a cartoon. A bloke would draw these funny things that happen around this pub thing. You know rabbits running around with traps attached to their legs and parrots flying backwards and all this strange things ... but I can't remember the name. But that was one way of keeping up to date with the news. And also working on the radio station, on Radio Australia, and that used to come through most days so you'd hear what's happening back home and that sort of thing. You know demonstrations and you know the postie's not doing to deliver the

32:00 mail and the Jeparit's not going get loaded so we wouldn't get our load of beer and ... Bloody wharfies and punch a postie when we get home. So that was sort of how we kept up with news. I don't know what I wrote about half the time - there was only so much you could say and I mean sometimes you couldn't talk about stuff happening. You wouldn't want to say if you'd been under rocket attack, you wouldn't want to tell them that because they'd get all upset and worried so ... Not that we were but um, I just wrote.

**So while you were over**

32:30 **there and you're getting news about the anti-war protests in Australia so how did that affect you, you and your mates?**

Oh I guess at the time we were pretty angry about it, we didn't feel supported. I guess to me at that time we thought we were doing the right thing. I mean after having read a few books now and looking at how Mr Menzies was pushing us to get there and you know all that sort of stuff, and what's come out since ... You know in theory according to what I read the Brits gave

33:00 Vietnam back to the French after the Second World War, once the Japanese had been pushed out. If they'd let them be Ho Chi Minh would have come in and they may never have gone pro Communist. But anyway that's past politics. But at the time we, I, well I and we I guess felt we were doing the right thing and didn't feel supported and that it was all you know bullshit, the Communists were there, that Communism was you know something to be dealt with one way or another. I mean if the shoe was on the other foot maybe we would have had insurgents and guerilla forces if someone tried to take our country

33:30 over and we didn't want them. You can't make it ... And the Vietnamese, VC and the NVA experienced similar stuff to our blokes, you know they were fighting for what they thought was right anyway, and they've had similar experiences. And they have a really huge returned services um thing over in Vietnam. There was a write up in a paper recently about the the Viet Cong and the NVA - they've got a huge returned servicemen's league, you know it's immense. Um, but at the time we thought we were doing the right thing and you know there was no

34:00 support back home. There were demonstrations and uni students and you know the wharfies and all this sort of stuff. And you know why not attack the Government, why hassle us? I didn't have the experience of blokes being spat on and all that sort of stuff. But we certainly flew in late into Kingsford Smith when we returned home and um I didn't have any of those experiences but maybe because I was on my own and didn't stand out as much and I flew ... I mean I was moving around in my uniform, getting looked at a

34:30 bit because I had returned ribbons and all that sort of stuff. But I didn't have any experiences in the street per se. But at the time while we were over there the blokes, we weren't happy about what was going on over here - the lack of support. But there was lack of understanding I guess on both sides as to where things were at, and where the politics the whole thing was at. So we were only aware of what we were doing and what we'd been told I guess. And now when you read book and stuff released it's a whole different ball game. Such as an Iraq now, same-same.

35:00 Justifying a war for ... well ... Yeah he could have taken Saddam Hussein out in another way maybe. Who knows, I mean they haven't found anything and there's all sorts of conspiracy theories floating around. But I mean I support the blokes who go in there but it's not a healthy one to go into. Um, and then if I was in the air force now would I go? Well I probably would I guess. It's something one

35:30 does. I might have my own private feelings. But at the time when I went to Vietnam I knew I had to go and I was happy to go and see we were doing the right thing - whatever the right thing may be at the time.

#### **What about the conscripts?**

I didn't have a lot to do with them because they were all army - all the air force were permanent. Um, I wasn't aware of any conscripts who'd come in and were sent into the air force - they all went frmy. And you know some were

36:00 sent to Vietnam but they still did have a choice. I mean I've got a friend at Parkdale, he got called up and he actually spent his time up in Canungra driving trucks around and stuff. So he did two years, excuse me, after training in Canungra he didn't go, didn't get posted. Um I think he may have got posted and he said now. I mean some blokes were sent.

#### **So you don't remember any disgruntled conscripts?**

No, we didn't have any because I was permanent air force, I was, um when was it 1960 ... so I was

36:30 nineteen and a quarter, nearly nineteen and a half . It was a posting, we were all permanent air force, that was part of our job, there were no conscripts amongst us so it was just our job we were doing, yeah, so we didn't have to deal with them at any stage. And if I come across them I wasn't aware of them, like the army blokes we were all there doing a job. So in the army blokes there could have been a mixture of conscripts and permanent servicemen. No there was no difference between them and you wouldn't know anyway unless they told you. So I had no

37:00 experience of that, no.

#### **Did you have experience of men like losing it, like becoming psychological unstable, emotionally unstable?**

Ah there was a bloke I think up north in Phan Rang I think he did shoot himself. That was the only one we were aware of, but he was an airfield defence guard. Um and if it's the same one I'm thinking of he may have been like that a little bit I think before he went over. I'm not sure how or why but I think it's the same one. And we were aware of it. I'm not quite sure how he got

- 37:30 into the Services but maybe it happened after he got in. Um, yeah that was a bloke who took himself out. But I don't know why or what his experiences were when he was in the country but that was the only one I was aware of. Other than that most of the blokes seemed to be okay - they drank or smoked, or smoked weed if they had weed. But I never came across it except for that one situation I wasn't aware of anyone, no, not anyone who was psychologically
- 38:00 affected. Maybe years later they might be, I don't know, unless you sit down and talk to them after a while. Although I noticed when I was in Brisbane a couple of years ago a few of the blokes weren't drinking at all, they were drinking like mineral water and bitters or you know light stuff or lemon squashes, which I thought was interesting. Now whether they had um been told not to drink or they'd had problems with their drinking I don't know. But certainly the young blokes, and I'm talking about the blokes you know who are ADGs
- 38:30 who marched with us that day, they were right into the alcohol. And I went my God look at this, you know they were sculling jugs. And I said to Charlie and he said we did that and I said I don't remember sculling jugs. You know the alcohol mentality of the Service is still there, the mentality, the whole culture around drinking is still pretty strong I think in the Services nowadays, just from what I've heard. But men drink you know period, but it's just interesting to see that aspect of it, they were getting right into it.
- 39:00 A bit scary drinking that much. Oh no I've been crook too many times, I don't do that anymore.

**So when it became time for your tour to be over were you relieved about that, were you happy to be coming home?**

Oh yes I think ... yeah I was happy to come home, yeah. Um they gave me a choice and silly me put down Victoria thinking I was unlikely to get it because there were a couple of RAAF bases at Point Cook and Laverton,

- 39:30 I think there might have been two ADGs looking after training of personnel in weapons and maybe a couple of odd jobs. And so when they sent me back to Victoria to the Air Training Headquarters, I went oh God that's the last place I thought I'd be sent. I didn't even know they sent ... we were just doing semi clerical work, it was just a waste of time.

**So you had no choice?**

I guess in hind ... Well I didn't think I had a choice, I never thought of asking to go somewhere else. I just ... You know never thought of speaking up, it was a bit weird. Nowadays I do speak up,

- 40:00 if I get myself wound up about it and I speak up or say the wrong thing but at that time I just took it as a posting. I mean if I'd gone back to Richmond or been sent to Queensland or Williamstown it would have been a different life path. I probably would have stayed there for a while and stayed there longer. But I sent back to Melbourne and stayed at RAAF Base Tottenham for a while and I got jack of that and applied to live out and lived with Mum and Dad for a while in um, out at Dandenong and travelled into work each day - by train and then eventually bought a car and eventually got,
- 40:30 you know had trouble with my ears and eventually had a medical. bla-bla-bla, and got a medical discharge so ... I'd had enough actually, I think, things had changed. So I don't know whether it would have been different if I'd gone back to a proper base with more blokes, whether I would have stayed in longer. It would have been a different effect I guess as to coming back here to Victoria. I mean my whole life path would have been different completely.

**Did you**

- 41:00 **consider going back for a second tour?**

No, it never crossed my mind, no. Some blokes did. I don't know if many air force blokes did. A couple blokes did but I didn't hear of any. Maybe some of the blokes in the army. No did one that was enough. Thought it was you know done my bit. I don't know what for because at the end of the day it didn't really matter did it, it didn't really matter at all. But that's you know the bigger picture

- 41:30 there was something going on maybe. Who knows.

**Did you bring any souvenirs back?**

Pictures, that was all. Um, a couple of head carvings that I bought in Penang, they were like Malaysian head-dress women, like a bust thing. I've been carrying them around for thirty years. They look identical but they're not so they're my little mantle piece things where when I eventually settle somewhere permanent, I pull them out and set them up again.

## Tape 7

- 00:36 **Now you said there was a point where you became 2IC [Second in Command]. Now can you tell us the background to that and how that happened and what sort of extra responsibilities**

### **that entailed?**

Um well generally I think I got it because I was now what's called an LAC which is a leading aircraftsman which is probably equivalent to a lance corporal in the army, approximately. It doesn't carry a lot of duties.

- 01:00 It usually means you've upgraded your skills in your particular mustering and you're more competent and you have more understanding of the stuff you're supposed to do basically. So you've upgraded your skills and are proficient in x, y and z so you've passed tests and done some theory stuff and you're given a little, they're just like a little propeller but I think they're now just one ... Actually I think now they use one stripe in the air force now, they don't use the little propeller, they use the stripe. So that's sort of just below
- 01:30 a corporal. So I've got a feeling a might have been that before I went there or just after I arrived. And the particular section I think was um put in charge ... well the particular corporal I was talking about who I was working with at the time, ah that was just generally organising the blokes and just taking control as far as if you were on ambush I think, oh not ambush, sorry on patrols, I was second in charge of the gun group so it was the M60, so I was looking after the M60.
- 02:00 Directing the blokes. But generally it was pretty easy going, I mean I wasn't out there giving orders per se. If our section was duty for the day I might have to take the blokes down to the base to organise the sandbags so I'd get them together and off we'd go. So there was no real I say this you do this stuff, it was pretty everyone knew what they had to do so we just did it so there wasn't any great degree of authority. But having said that after I,
- 02:30 there was a change of corporals and then I think I lost that position to another bloke and I was a bit peeved about that. I don't know whether it was because I went over the other corporal's head, I'm not too sure why, or maybe I wasn't demonstrating enough authority as the 2IC, I never found out. I was a bit annoyed and a bit perplexed as to why I didn't have it after a while. So this other bloke took over and I wasn't impressed with him either - he was a bit of a smart arse I thought. Anyway you know that's the way
- 03:00 things went. I mean I didn't lose my rank per se, I just lost the position, didn't have the position which didn't worry me much. Everyone was doing the same job so there was no more pay or whatever for it so it was just a position you'd carry. So that's what I eventually, when I was discharged, that's the rank I still held. If I'd gone and done the recruitment training dual instructor stuff I would have got the rank of corporal, but it was no big deal.

### **03:30 So what was your relationship like with the officers and those that you were answerable to?**

Oh look good, yeah we had um, we had a good working relationship. The blokes weren't overbearing. And from what I remember of the flight lieutenant he had a good personality, we got on well. We didn't have a great deal to do with him. I mean he was there to make sure the section ran properly and we did our job around the base and he liaised with the boss and

- 04:00 you know he was answerable to the CO or you know had to liaise with the Americans on the base but no it was um ... You know he knew our names. He might use your first name sort of thing. Yeah got on well, he was a good bloke, ah didn't have any hassles with him at all. I didn't have any hassles with most blokes there, bosses or otherwise. I remember being at RAAF Base Richmond and there was a Welsh sergeant there and ah
- 04:30 he could be a bit, we say a bit snaky, you know he was a bit, you had to read how friendly he was and if he wasn't being friendly you had to call him sergeant but when he was okay you could call him by his nickname. And the other bloke was Bushy ... Yeah they must have been in their late thirties or early forties. And you know Bushy's all right but you know if something went wrong it was Flight Sergeant Bush, but you know things were okay with Bushy sort of thing so it was pretty relaxed really. Um the officers you addressed as sir or flight
- 05:00 lieutenant so and so. They had nicknames but they mightn't know about it. We used it amongst ourselves.

### **Can you remember any of the good ones?**

Ah look no, look there was only Nick Noy, he was a little, he certainly had a thing going about being so short and he was an officer. He was fun, you could have fun with him but you had to read him again and he could be a bit of a pain in the butt. But he was okay, but we had this thing going, so he got his nickname and

- 05:30 you know blokes would sort him out if they needed to, in so far as you know working with him and that sort of thing. But he was okay, we didn't have any real great deal ... A couple of warrant officers on RAAF Base Richmond, one called ... well they were called WOD [Warrant Officer Discipline] so they're involved with disciplinary stuff. When we were walking past his officer one day and we were just strolling along he called out and told us to walk properly and march but you know ... yeah okay so we did
- 06:00 and as soon as we were out of sight we just sort of ambled along again. It was pretty relaxed on the base really, it wasn't you know march, march, march everywhere, it was pretty easy going. But even the

warrant officers were easy to get along with. You did your job, they gave you orders, you did what you do, if you buck the system then you know they towed you into line. So there was no great drama about the whole thing.

**What about um, you mentioned earlier there was a bit of**

06:30 **friction sometimes between you guys and the techos.**

Oh the techos. Yeah that happened more, not so much in Vietnam, that happened to me a bit more on the bases back home. So at RAAF Base Richmond there seemed to be this irritation between us and the rest of the RAAF blokes. Not all of them, I mean you got on well with most blokes but there was this techo and us and them sort of stuff so it seemed to happen when there'd been a few too many drinks on a pay night and

07:00 a dance and all that sort of stuff. So there'd been a few punchups and a few push and shoving stuff. And then one night I remember one dance and a couple of blokes got into a bit of a hassle with a couple of techos and there were a couple of them outside and there were a few of them around them sort of agitating a bit and we all quietly walked around and stood around in a circle behind them and the looked around and they quietly went away. Um it was, I don't know maybe just egos going I think,

07:30 it was just that us and them sort of stuff. But nothing really came of it much, I mean there might have been a quiet punch up here and there but I didn't see any great violent stuff, there wasn't any real in-house fighting per say, just a little bit of irritation occasionally. But everyone got on well.

**Was there any kind of tension in Vietnam in times when be it through boredom or you know some old rivalries perhaps or anything ...?**

Oh again I wasn't aware of it except for my own personal interaction with

08:00 another bloke, um no. Oh one or two blokes maybe but just more of a personality thing, and you just avoided them. You know if they had a drink and got a bit nasty and a bit snaky you just kept away from them, you didn't push the point and there'd be no point getting into an argument with them. But generally again everyone got on pretty well, everyone had a job to do, we were there ... I guess we were looking after security so people tended to do what we told them, because we were there to protect them per se. And

08:30 again you have fun, you make ... I tended to make light hearted stuff and you know the Jeep would come through the gate and you'd flick a bit of a salute and stuff you know and something it gets pretty casual and good morning and yeah just be pleasant, so everyone got on well. Ah I guess all Services can be like that, it just depends on the nature of the personality of the person. But if someone started rubbing people the wrong way they got taken aside or ... And being blokes

09:00 there was no oh side stuff, everyone was up front more or less, you know told to smarten up or cut it out or otherwise you know. The blokes tend to be a bit more up front in talking sometimes.

**Were there times where in the course of just doing your job like at the gate for example you might have irked someone, an officer or something, because they, you know they weren't doing what they were supposed to or ...?**

No, no

09:30 it didn't, it didn't happen really, it didn't happen. Um ... I don't know maybe I just got well with most people. I didn't see the point of irking people or being a bit smarty with people or trying to rub people the wrong way, I've never sort of been that way, I don't see the point of that because it would only backfire on you so ... If we can change track, being on the gate at RAAF Base Richmond, because a lot of married personnel were on

10:00 the base, there were married quarters and stuff and so a lot of the women were coming and going in their cars and they actually had stickers on them and they had three levels of stickers and they'd change the sticker each year and there was a colour for each rank so you knew if there was an officer in the car, an often, even though they weren't in uniform you didn't have to salute them, but we'd throw them a bit of a salute just as an acknowledgement I guess more ... But if the girls were coming through and women were driving you know you'd have ... like flirting's probably not the word but you'd give them a bit of a salute and there'd be a big smile on their face.

10:30 And you know even if it was an ORs [other ranks] or just a sergeant you didn't have to salute, it was just a way of being pleasant and breaking up the boredom of the day sort of thing. You know you'd seem them coming in and do the smile and throw them a salute as they'd go through and you'd take the number and yeah just make light heart of the work without irritating anyone. There'd be no point because it would come back on you. And so I never found I didn't get on with anyone in particular. I mean some blokes could be irritating and not do the right thing and consequently

11:00 they would be pulled up short or given extra duties or if they really ... certainly back home if they um went AWOL [AWL - Absent Without Leave] and really disrupted things a couple of them ended up down at Holsworthy, the army base detention, they'd come back very quiet - I remember one bloke come back pretty quiet, really smartened him up. Yeah that's the last place I wanted to go to a detention centre, polishing the inside of the shoe tins and the eyelets on your boots and having

11:30 you doubling everywhere and like they really rode the blokes. And those blokes by the time, f they did a Holsworthy and came back they were generally on their way back, they just didn't fit in. So you know you didn't follow orders, you know. And some blokes pushed the envelope a bit and were a bit rough and ready and because of the type of mustering we were I think it was a bit more acceptable maybe, you know ranks were more open to that but you had to toe the line but everyone worked together. And that was the part of the whole thing the camaraderie of being

12:00 together, I think that's something I missed for a long time, not being in the service, in the air force. Something that you miss, that's lacking sometimes in civilian life, depending on where you work of course and what you do. Everyone's out for themselves and not really working for a common goal, they are but they aren't if that makes sense. Yeah I never had any hassles with any of the ranks or any of the officers really. As long as you saluted them correctly and addressed them correctly

12:30 there was no problem, everyone did their job.

**You um you mentioned your various duties and one of them was doing the escorts. I'm not sure if we already got a lot of detail on that particular task and what you need to do there?**

Oh in Vietnam?

**Yeah.**

Well the two that come to mind. We went up to Bear Cat and we actually stayed over night. A huge mess, I've never seen such a big mess and there were actually civilians working in there serving food up and stuff. And we stayed overnight, I think I slept on the floor

13:00 in some sergeant's office come bedroom, I don't know, I don't know whether we were supposed to stay overnight. But anyway we went up to collect wood, cement, building material, they had it up there. And I remember the padre come up with us and the woman on the um ... ah what's the machine, I've gone blank, the forklift, wasn't giving us the right stuff and you had to sort of bargain with her and

13:30 get her pick up the right stuff and to put it in the truck. And I remember coming back and I think one of us sat on the truck with our weapon as well as the escort, as well as in the truck as well just in case someone wanted to stop us and pinch it to sell it on the black market. So we stayed overnight and that was interesting because on the base they had these like little caravans and they just did hamburgers. I couldn't believe it. So when the Yanks were walking around they could you know get a hamburger in the middle of the day. Um and I remember driving through Saigon and seeing some um caucasian nurses

14:00 and we were waving to them and thinking this is fantastic we're seeing some white women and all this sort of stuff. And there were women on the base who were American nurses and they actually had a couple of university campus for blokes who were studying somehow or a rather, you know little offices there - it was just another world. So seeing, as if we'd been out in the country for the whole six or eight months, we saw these white women and you know we thought it was fantastic and we were waving to them and carrying on. They were waving back and it was all just in good fun sort of thing.

14:30 But we went up usually to collect stuff to help build the orphanage and come back again. I think that was the only ... a three or four hour trip probably, something like that, because you were only doing fifty or sixty.

**And you were talking about having to go into town and collect the fellows you know before curfew. Were you involved in ...?**

Oh yeah everyone did that at different times whether the flight was on standby or generally it was done by

15:00 the flight that was working that night on the twenty-four on. But if they were busy for some reason you could be asked to go in with a driver. Sometimes it was one of the drivers would take in the truck in and we'd sit like gunshot basically and you know one up the chamber and the safety on and drive into the Five Ways, the flags and all the blokes would clamber on and sometimes they'd be getting chased down the street to get on - oh you owe me money, you owe money.

15:30 So um ...

**So what would happen or would you just get out of there?**

They'd climb on and you know you'd tell them to rack off sort of thing, you're not going to get it tonight, you know didimow-didimow. And then they'd stand there and abuse you, oh you number ten, you number ten I'll fix you, you buy me Saigon tea and you know pay me and ... Yeah it didn't happen very often, the blokes were just a bit drunk and had been out on the town and you know been out visiting women and time to go home.

**Were there times where you actually had to um physically**

16:00 **remove fellows who just didn't want to leave or ...?**

No, no, no we didn't, no. The blokes knew we had to be out by ten because it was a bit unsafe after then because you didn't know who was walking around at night. And a couple of the streets on the way back

were pretty dark so you wouldn't want to be walking down there on your own unless you had a weapon on you and even then it wouldn't be too safe. No, well not that I'm aware of, I mean certainly the time we went to pick up the sergeant and he was in town with his lady friend well after hours and it was pretty dark and a bit spooky. Um

- 16:30 so that was, yeah that was a bit hairy that night. We went in with Darkie I think, went in the Land Rover to pick him up. I don't know why we were going in but we did. Shouldn't have been in town but we did so ... wow it was like half past eleven or twelve.

**So how was that arranged was that the sergeant personally making ...**

Yeah I think he must have personally arranged for the corporal to pick him up or he was running late and he knew where he was for some reason. So we went and got him. I think we picked up

- 17:00 a couple of coconuts off a tree on the way back. Um yeah the sort of funny things that'd be happening. And occasionally you'd go through the fish markets which is a smell you just don't forget. You know if you go down to Victoria Street, Richmond here in Melbourne if you go past that smell of dried fish you just get that flashback straight away - it's there, it's a shocker, it's pungent. You get used to but first up when you've never smelt that stuff before it's a really

- 17:30 full on aroma. It was interesting town, it had the whole village behind it and there was the VC Hill and the big Buddha statues and you know things around there. I remember driving around there one day and the USS Bismarck, if that's correct, no that's not correct. There's a huge battleship it's still, I think they've only just decommissioned it I could be wrong but it's been around, they've kept it for a long time and it's huge and it must have been

- 18:00 a mile or two off in the water and it was firing, it might have been firing into Long Son Island or somewhere in support and you could still the flame here at ... I mean I've got a photo of it but it looks about this small. But you know I was standing on the road and watching it and you know the sound ... so it was quite and you could still see the flash and she was firing a gun . A huge battleship. I can't remember it, I've gone blank.

**Well moving away from the world of**

- 18:30 **vice, you were talking about the orphanage. Yeah you said you were involved in that and you got to know the padre there, can you tell us a bit more about, and you've also told us about collecting materials for the orphanage, and what other involvement did you have with the place?**

Oh initially just doing the foundation work, and laying the foundation and the cement sort of thing and then not much more after that because they had locals involved building it

- 19:00 as well, so we were putting the walls up. But we went up and collected up woodwork and frame work and cement for the walls and all that sort of thing. And eventually it got that we just sort of did the base ground work. I think we might have spent over a month, one, two days a week going out there. So just doing the basic work, the hard yakka stuff done. And the army had left some big cement mixers there for us and prepared the ground and we were doing some of the hard yakka. And eventually it got built and the padre got invited back to the opening and we got invited

- 19:30 to go along with him so ... Not all of us went but a few of us went and yeah it was interesting. They were quite grateful. You know they'd roll up food in rice paper. And I presume it's still there, yeah. It would be interesting to go back and maybe see it. Sometimes I think it would be nice to go back over and have a wander around again. It's on my list of things to do and money to save up for. But yeah it was good to be involved with that, to feel like you're contributing in one way. Um

- 20:00 but the locals were happy to see us, you know they weren't anti us. So you know as I said earlier we'd go down to the beach when it got too hot, take our sandwiches and have a swim to cool off and the local kids would come in play with us in the water and stuff. No paedophile stuff. I mean you know nowadays you feel that you can't smile at a child you know or someone will think or they think ... you're thinking they're thinking you're checking the kid out but you know it's all in good fun, they're just kids mucking around in the water and we were nineteen year olds mucking around in the water, we're having a swim and you either

- 20:30 or you were building the orphanage and that's how it was. There was nothing, um hidden agendas operating I guess.

**How was the um, what was the opening like, you said you were invited to that?**

Oh, ah I think there was a little ceremony because I can remember parts of a ceremony. And they had a meal prepared and it was all local food and rice paper stuff, and food, mince-meat rolled up in cabbage leaves and cooked. Um, you know we'd been told

- 21:00 you shouldn't eat the local food, you don't know how hygienic it is but we were there as guests so we ate that. And we had beer and it was just a celebration of the orphanage being opened - it was pretty simple. How big was it? Can't remember. Like a big room. One part of it was like a big room so we hadn't been involved for some time so it was interesting to come back and see it finished off. I think they had locals helping to build this place. But the army and air force were involved in the supplying

and support for it as well, you know the products

- 21:30 and the timber and all that sort of thing – so it was good. But that was through the padre being involved as well – getting us involved in the local, civil projects as the Yanks called it.

**I'm thinking in the last tape you talked about coming back so we'll get onto that a little bit more. Is there anything else I mean that you'd like to get down on the record as far as your time in Vietnam went?**

Oh ...

- 22:00 There's not a great deal ... No I think I've covered most of the stuff. I mean certainly coming back I had a couple of weeks off and I think I slept a lot of that time. You know I had all these tapes, I think I've got, I don't know, fifteen to twenty reel to reel tapes which still I probably had heard them all but I'd often lay down at home to listen to them and I'd go to sleep – I just kept catching up on sleep. Um and I think at one stage I think I still had blank tapes and I'd often go across to a neighbour's place. They had a proper record and monogram thing and din jack outlet and I'd plug it all in

- 22:30 and I'd plug it all in and we'd do some more taping or tape off a radio. I just did a lot of sleeping for a while until I went back to the RAAF base at Titan, when I was back on duty. I didn't spend a lot of time, excuse me, talking to Mum and Dad at all about it. As I said earlier you it's something that I, oh excuse me, needed to have spent maybe talking to Dad and in time I would have talked about it but it was just something we didn't do, neither of us did. Bit of a bizarre situation I guess. In fact in hindsight

- 23:00 I probably to a degree talked to my former father-in-law more, or got him talking more about his time in New Guinea. And he had some funny stuff to talk about, some really ... none of the warry stuff [war stories] but he certainly saw action, but he had some funny stuff about different situations he was in. But yet I didn't do it with my father so that was an interesting lack of communication I guess.

**But did you feel the need to do that at the time though?**

Probably, well

- 23:30 probably not and didn't know how to and didn't know how to bring it up or whether they wanted to hear it. I was home on leave. Maybe they didn't know how to talk to me about or maybe I didn't know what to say or what to talk about. I mean I hadn't seen them a lot but I'd you know written regularly. So there wasn't a great deal to talk about and maybe they didn't know how to converse with me or what to ask me or all that sort of stuff. Ah yeah just got on with life again.

- 24:00 Come home and pick up as much as you could, did what you had to do. Although I remember and a lot of blokes had this experience, I think he took me into the local RSL for some reason and the bloke said you know can you afford to join? So I looked at him and thought well I ain't joining now and I just walked out. I mean I shouldn't ... Blokes should join the RSL now because they're just all dwindling away and there's a lot of property and a lot of administration and a lot of the ground work's been done for

- 24:30 Vietnam vets and the Gulf War blokes and peacekeepers to walk and pick up sort of an organisation that's already set up there for us to just take over which you know in theory we should do. But certainly a lot of blokes didn't get good responses from some RSLs, not all. But you talk to World War II blokes and they say the same thing when they came back, the World War II blokes reckoned the World War I blokes reckoned the Two blokes hadn't really served which was a bit of a crazy thing when the war went for five or six years. Everyone had different experiences at different times.

- 25:00 But now you know they're all dropping off the perch so it's time to move in and sort of pick up the reins and keep it running if we want to have some sort of organisation that speaks one for all returned Service personnel. Not just fragmented in all these different little organisations running around that are at the moment basically.

**When you said um you were asked if do you have enough money, what did they mean in terms of ...?**

Well to join, membership, which I thought was a bit weird. I mean

- 25:30 and I went what's that got to do with the price of fish? And I think on the form it said are you a member of the Communist Party or some damn thing which I think is being actually challenged now, they can't even do that. Yeah it was just someone being a bit smart you know and being young I took offence and thought well stick your RSL you know. Um different era.

**Well we've heard a few stories along those lines so I'm just wondering what, what was there issue with**

- 26:00 **returned soldiers or servicemen from different wars?**

Well I mean they didn't see it as a real war, maybe they didn't serve long enough or there was not support for it at home. Who knows what they're thinking was around that whole thing. Um, I was actually at a delegates meeting somewhere, I won't say where, and we're joking and talking and a bloke jokingly made the comment oh you know you didn't really go to a real war and I laughed and said oh I've been waiting for that one and I would have taken offence twenty years ago but I chose not to now

because he was joking,

26:30 and but that sort of thinking process that was there. And um the bloke said oh well you're only, his mate said, you were only in intelligence anyway, you didn't do anything. So I went, thank you. Well he probably did but um ... Yeah I don't know where that comes from. People form opinions and thoughts about things, who knows why. It doesn't worry me. I wasn't there ... I mean I was in the air force for a reason, I wasn't a conscript and

27:00 I volunteered to go and did what I thought was meant to be done and I enjoyed my time there and I enjoyed being in the air force and I loved it - if I had my time over again I'd do it again, just probably stay in longer and maybe do something different if it was meant to be. So I don't take offence and I go to a RAAF meeting when I can as a representative for the Vietnam Veterans RAAF. And they're all getting on, some of the blokes. You know some blokes from the Korean have retired who were in there but they were mostly older blokes -

27:30 only a couple of squadrons. And they've got this huge premises over in South Yarra they don't know what to do with because they've got to keep it running and you know their blokes their members are getting older and there's the RAAF component and there's not many of them so there's things to be taken up by another organisation. And as organisations get organised to do that then that drops away and falls away and gets sold and we lose that and you just can't buy that sort of property and it's in South Yarra and it's got parking, it's two storeys, it's got meeting

28:00 rooms. You know like all that basically waiting to be taken up by the next generation I guess of ex-service personnel. But they have all these in-fights and don't like the way they were treated when they came back and it was seen as an officers' club and it's not for all RAAF personnel and it's like well let's get over that stuff, you know it's all kindergarten sandpit stuff. Oh you're an officer and I'm an ... Well they're all dying off, let's utilise what's already there and use it rather than you

28:30 know looking for somewhere else - a pity to lose it.

**So that sounds like this is something you're looking at doing now, it's not in the future?**

Oh yeah in the background things are ... I think the RAAF Association needs to consider RAAF Vietnam veterans. I mean you could even extend it for the use of all Vietnam vets or all services you know. But if there's an upkeep and maintenance so it has to be paid for so you have to find ways of making money as well. But you know the blokes are getting on and don't have the time or the energy to put into it so

29:00 it's something that has to be looked at down the road. Whether people want to or are inclined to do so I don't know so ...

**So you're now on the committee of, sorry the Vietnam RAAF ...**

Yeah the Vietnam Veterans' ... Start again, RAAF Vietnam Veterans' Association and it's welfare association so we meet monthly and we're attempting to organise social stuff. But um we have a newsletter

29:30 with general information but we raise money and support ah different welfare, RAAF, or even ex-service organisations to support people who you know are looking after TPIs [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated pensioners] or getting blokes' claims so there's money for office equipment or money towards scholarships for children or blokes who need money. So it's a welfare organisation as such. Um there are about two hundred blokes in it. So they get the newsletter. We're intending to sort of organise

30:00 some sort of social thing in the next year or two, maybe once or twice a year. And we let people know if there's other units having meetings or having get togethers or reunions, so it's just a general information. Um, the money comes in, there's a membership, you get a newsletter, the money goes out, we authorise money spending on welfare issues. So we don't get paid at all it's just a volunteer organisation. There's a museum down at San Remo, Vietnam Veterans San Remo. Um we purchased a hanger and

30:30 so we've donated money to that. We've donated money to the Australian War Museum. You know we've donated money to the RAAF new memorial that was built in Canberra. So that sort of stuff is where the money goes. Um plus welfare work for the people in general.

**How long have you been involved with that?**

Ah gee I don't maybe coming up on my third year I think. I've been back in Melbourne since 1998. I think I got involved in 1999 or 2000 some time so about my third year. We meet one Tuesday every month.

31:00 And it's called Duckboard House, RSL sub branch in Flinders Lane. And it's pretty old it's been there probably about the thirties. And actually there's a lane that runs into, it's interesting one bloke was telling me there's a lane that runs behind it and they use it a lot for ads and commercials. It's one of the few lanes that they can get into that doesn't have a lot of commercial activity, it's just a lane that goes around the back of the building and you can drive around it to go to somewhere else. But yeah it's a pretty old building and I think they've finally decided to sell it and it will be knocked down and then rebuilt and then

31:30 the RSL will occupy the first two floor and then they'll lease out the rest sort of thing. So um yeah it's just a welfare organisation.

**So just getting back to those earlier statements after your return, you sort of told us about how your family or how your parents um reacted or didn't really respond in any great way to your time ... the RSL thing. What about just in general coming back to Australian society how do you think**

32:00 **you know you and your colleagues have been treated on returning?**

That's a bit of difficult one because I think the army, from what I can understand, got more of the rough treatment because of the way they were brought back and the perception that was in the public about what was happening over there. So I didn't experience that really. I certainly, when I was travelling to work, to and from on the train, in fact don't even know how I got from RAAF Base Tottenham to North Melbourne, maybe it was a RAAF

32:30 bus that took us, I was aware of people being aware of me in uniform and the ribbon. But I never encountered anything, even if it was ... I guess it was maybe just a silent thing because they sort of didn't bother saying anything or didn't do anything. I remember going away not long after I got back with my cousins who um, yeah the cousin and his sister was up at ... or Shepparton or somewhere up there, it might have been Echuca, and you know we got chatting and they found out

33:00 I'd been or someone else was there from a farm and when they found out I'd been in Vietnam they were interested, you know what was it like and stuff. And so I sort of told them a bit but there was no antagonism, there's was more of an acceptance I guess. I didn't experience any negativity. I don't know what the other blokes experienced but certainly none that I'm aware of. I'd probably have to ask them to see if they did. But a lot of the blokes were going back to a proper base so you went back into the culture and back into that supportive environment. And I guess the immediate area

33:30 around the base being orientated to providing support to the base and the personnel was more supportive of that rather than being just in the middle of suburbia where you might be more obvious and therefore draw attention to yourself and maybe some criticism as such. I didn't experience at any time. Um no didn't get much of that at all - didn't get any flak.

**Well after you'd caught up on some sleep**

34:00 **um what, what did the air force hold for you after that, you were still in there a couple of years.**

I was still in there a couple of years but I was having problems with my ears, I was getting a lot of Tinnitus, getting dizzy spells. Um, I was getting bored, I was bored out my brain it was just, yeah it was a shocking, shocking experience really. Um, ah I guess as I said earlier if I'd gone back to a proper base I mean I might have been bored but obviously it would have been amongst the RAAF per se you know

34:30 and then maybe some you know some re-education, you know I might have talked to about re-mustering. Um pretty bored, had a couple of rear end hits in cars and had a couple of medicals and then they discovered there was a bit of ringing in the ears and yes they confirmed that and then there was a hearing loss and um I guess I was agitating a bit - I'd had enough, I wanted out. But in hindsight if they'd re-mustered me or offered me something else that had been suitable then I may have

35:00 probably considered it but it didn't happen. So um they decided after a couple of hearing tests and other things and sent me off to ENTs [Ear, Nose and Throat] and did all their tests that the health standard or the hearing wasn't good enough for the mustering and they just discharged me. So I guess nowadays they certainly would re-muster you or re-train you, I mean why lose somebody who's competent in other ways just because of one bit of a hearing loss. I mean blokes had glasses and this sort of thing so ... Um

35:30 so I guess at that stage I was happy to leave but I wasn't. You know maybe I brought that on myself by pushing for the medical. So um that was a bit stressful and I just started getting real bad, not pleasant, a real bad herpes cold virus just over my eyes. They just blew out of ... I didn't know what the hell they were. You know I didn't get them often, only when I'm pretty stressed. But ah ...

36:00 round my nose and they're shockers. But that was pretty stressful as well at the time. I had blood tests and no there wasn't anything nasty floating there it was just a cold virus but I didn't know what it had come from. Um, so once I was out I was discharged, discharge papers, got paid out, um went looking for a job. Ah eventually, what happened, I had a toss up between working at Monash University Library or at National Plant at Vermont as the dispatch clerk and

36:30 for some reason I took the dispatch clerk's job, I don't know why. So I worked there for a while and that was okay, it was interesting. Um and then I was agitating to get into the Public Service, I saw it as a way of some sort of career I thought in clerical. Worked at The Age for a whole month. And um eventually you know got through the test that they used to throw out every six or twelve months and got into the Public Service and ended up working for the Department of Army at Victoria Barracks of

37:00 all things, which was interesting. So that's was good because I could fit in with the service person, army mentality there. And once blokes found out you'd served overseas or whatever they were more

amenable to you, you're not just another public servant running around flicking papers. It's a bit weird, after I'd done that you know here I am running around delivering mail, because to me it was a real come down to what I'd been doing, it was like instead of moving up it felt like I'd moved backwards or taken a side road for a while. But I went back, because I'd finished

- 37:30 school at fifteen and a half, so I went back and did night school for two years in a row, two subjects and got my Leaving Certificate. And um then I was already to jump and do matric and went oh I think I've had enough of night school for a while. Ah because in the Public Service in those days if you upgraded your qualifications you got paid more basically. So I went through different departments and ended at ah the Government Book Shop up in Melbourne, in Swanston Street opposite the old Museum, Australian Government Book Shop – that was good fun.
- 38:00 And then at the aircraft factory where I do a Nomads, an aircraft spares thing. Um got married. The girl came from Wangaratta and we just kept going up there and for some reason ended up moving up there. And I moved into a taxation office. They had a big PAYE [Pay As You Earn] section that handled all of Victoria and Southern New South Wales. And I did twelve years of Public Service eventually. Um had some health problems, went and saw a naturopath, a
- 38:30 bloke in the Public Service where I was working said go and see this bloke, he'll sort you out. And he did, it was like ... And it was amazing. He had me do a cleansing diet, take some minerals, da-da-da-da and it was like someone turned the light on in my head and I went oh there's another way of looking after yourself, it was like ... And I've always been interested in medicine, don't ask me why, and I went crikey this is amazing. And coincidentally there was a massage therapist there who knew this naturopath and they'd both learnt through this school and they were setting up a regional school in the area
- 39:00 so I ... And he said you need a massage, go and see this bloke Barry Tanka, you're pretty stressed out. And um, so I started getting massages and talking to this bloke and I thought oh I might go into massage so that's how it started, I went into massage and then, I was still in the Public Service, and then I set up a little clinic part time with a naturopath, she was wanting someone to come in and share a room, and started doing that a couple of nights a week and a Saturday morning. And then one thing led to another and did a couple of courses and
- 39:30 then this bloke was wanting to give his practice up but there was three of us who all of sudden took the running over of the school so I ended up teaching it for a couple of years – you know sort of learning on the job I suppose but I sort of had a knack for it, for want of a better word, I could do it and I knew what had to be done. So we ended up taking the school over and running it and training students and ended up setting up the first centre in Albury-Wodonga, which was interesting. So I left the Public Service. I took twelve months off to do three Year Twelve
- 40:00 subjects with the idea of being a naturopath and ... which I didn't, I sort of took a side road and did Nutritional Science. But set the centre up and then got invited to join another centre in Aubury which had float tanks in it at the time, which was quite an innovative thing, in the middle of, what are we talking about, 1998 – 1990 sort of thing, you know float tanks in Albury-Wodonga. They were great. He was an acupuncturist so it was a bit of a multi-disciplined centre. So I left the Public Service after having twelve months leave without pay.
- 40:30 And I remember finishing my study and the boss rang up and we were chatting away and he said well are you coming back and I said oh no I don't think I will and he said no I didn't think you would. And then he said um well you'd better come and sign the papers and I said oh, oh, oh okay and I hung up and I went into this absolute cold sweat. You know here I am walking away from twelve years Public Service, four weeks leave, seventeen percent loading and I'm about to walk out in the cold and do it on my own and I went oh God I don't know if I can do this. Um, oh
- 41:00 it was a shocking feeling, a shocking feeling. But I did, I eventually walked away and I was married at the time and we set the centre up and got it up and running and it sort of just kept going on from there. Yeah kept studying and learning new skills. Um and then went solo for a while. Came to Melbourne and worked with a gentleman I'd learnt, did tissue body work back in ninety-three, came and worked here in Melbourne for a while and it just didn't happen, which was a bit weird. Ah it was about when the recession kicked in so
- 41:30 things went really, you know slid pretty low. Worked at Falls Creek for a year, for a season in 1993, up at Falls Creek, in Astra Lodge doing massage and bodywork stuff and that was good. I eventually went back and thought oh Melbourne's just not working so I went back to ... because I was actually travelling back to Albury-Wodonga every couple of weeks to see clients, which was really you know a complete reverse. So I went back and set up my own sort of new age book shop, had a room there and operated there for about oh four about
- 42:00 of four years and eventually decided ...

**INTERVIEW ENDS**