

Australians at War Film Archive

Michael Taylor (Mike) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 23rd January 2004

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1284>

Tape 1

00:41 **Mike, if we could just start by you giving us a brief summary of your life from when and where you were born to the present day?**

Yeah, I was born in Newcastle at Waratah on the 21st of the 7th, 1948, spent up till my childhood there

01:00 until I was about eight actually in the Newcastle area at Cooks Hill and just having a real grandfather, just going out fishing and, excuse me, stuff like that at the lake and grew up, you know. I was supposed to be probably a city kid and then my parents moved to Condobolin in 1958 and I've probably stayed here ever since, went to school here and did an apprenticeship here as a mechanic and worked

01:30 away from here for a while and came back and married here, pretty well business and moved on and stayed here really.

And can you tell us about your time in the National Service and Vietnam, your movements through that period?

Yeah, I joined, I was called up for Nashos [National Service] at the end of, the start of, beginning of '69 and

02:00 eventually went in on the 7th of July 1969. Then went overseas in '70, came home in '71 with it. Yeah, two years with National Service.

And so when you say you went overseas, you went to Vietnam?

Yeah, I went to Vietnam 14th of May 1970 and we came home on the 19th of May 1971, six days longer than I should've been

02:30 there.

Can you give us, walk us through briefly the different places that you went to in Vietnam?

Yeah, we transferred, we flew into Saigon to start with. That should be our first start, and then transported then to Vung Tau and then I was stationed at actually Nui Dat forward support base and with A Squadron 3rd Co [Company] Regiment as what they call a RAEME [Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers] mechanic attached to the squadron.

03:00 **And you stayed there throughout your whole service?**

Yeah, I stayed there the full, pretty well the whole time between there and, you know, we'd have leave at Vung Tau or we'd do operations which would send us out in the field and keep us out of base for six weeks at a time, or a bit longer sometimes, and you'd come back into the Dat [Nui Dat] again and work.

What kind of work would you do?

Mostly you did, we serviced personnel carriers, replaced motors

03:30 if they were playing up and stuff like that and just transmissions. Mainly the army had a regimented way of doing things, which was A service, B service, C service on their vehicles and you followed that plan, what you were doing. We had 13 mechanics actually working the unit. Probably all up, I think it was about 25 guys. They were all RAEME attached to the CAB [?] squadron. We had armourers, radio mechanics, welders,

04:00 storepersons, storemen and stuff like that for stores, plus guys desk work on the tanks and on the carriers themselves and a couple of sergeants and a captain to keep you all in line, or try to.

And when you went out outside the base, what would you actually be doing?

We'd send normally, if they had say, we'd send out probably 20 carriers on operations

- 04:30 and we'd send, had our own what we called fitter's tracks, which were equipped with all our tools and spares to fix in the field, plus two mechanics would go with it and operate with the squadron and you'd spend maybe six weeks out doing ambushes with them or troop operations and stuff like that, and if one of them broke down while you were out there you'd try and repair it on the job. If you couldn't get it repaired you'd either fly in some more blokes or get it transported back to base,
- 05:00 but that was, mainly you just operated with the squadron with it, yeah.
- And when you came back you mentioned, how long was it before you actually got married?**
- Probably six years, yeah.
- And you got married to a girl from Condobolin?**
- Yeah, from Condobolin, yeah.
- How many kids did you have?**
- Sorry.
- 05:30 Two kids, a girl and a boy.
- And then you stayed here at Condobolin?**
- Yeah. When I first came back because of my job, I'd just finished my apprenticeship and the business I was with, which was the County Council then installing power lines around the area, well because the
- 06:00 government guaranteed you a job for the next two years in the same position, same spot, so I had a job to come back to, but actually when I came back here my job actually really wasn't here because it had been made redundant. So they transferred me through to Parkes which was their main depot and I spent the next nearly two years working pretty well up in Parkes actually. I used to travel back and forwards on weekends and just worked at the main base there. Then
- 06:30 I did another, got a transfer back to here again, did another year here with the County Council, and the job got a bit, was going in the wrong direction for us, so we bailed out of it and took long service leave and went and worked for a private garage here for 18 months, and while we were going that the job came back up again here for us, so I re-applied and went back to them again, worked for them for another 10 years and then we quit and got out of it again. They'd changed the structure again, so we,
- 07:00 instead of retraining we quit the whole show and set up our business instead and we've been doing that ever since.
- What's your business called?**
- Taylor's Auto Centre. We run the NRMA [National Royal Motor Association] road service here and dabble in a bit of marine stuff. I'm the only marine mechanic around the area so we do a bit of that as well. It keeps us pretty busy. We have 700-odd calls a year for the NRMA, averages a couple a day.
- And you have a new**
- 07:30 **partner now?**
- Yeah, I do have a new partner, Lisa, and a little girl, Daisy, five, which has been quite interesting so far, a challenge.
- All right. Well we've got a pretty fair idea of how your life has panned out. What we'll do now is go right back to your childhood and this time now we want as much detail as possible. Don't hesitate to tell us everything.**
- 08:00 **I'll start off just asking you, you were born in Newcastle?**
- Yeah.
- What are your first memories?**
- Probably my grandparents more than anything, and the beach. I had a couple of uncles that were keen surfers, stuff like that, and we spent a lot of time up the beach growing up and even when I first moved out here we used to always go back, go back
- 08:30 up the surf and my grandparents' place and stay with them, you know, fishing. Probably pretty good, you know, a lot of grandparents as far as that concerned, and lived right in the heart of the city, was growing up there. I remember the Queen's visit when she came there and I went to school, Cooks Hill school there, which I went back there recently and now they've changed it to some special school. That sort of doesn't exist any more,
- 09:00 but when I was at school there when the Queen's visit, commemorate it, there was a picture given to the school of a photo of the Queen and I was one of the little kids that actually presented it to the school, and when we went back there probably 15 years ago the thing was still hanging in the hallway of the school. It was quite amazing really, one of those things, and the only person I could tell was the

cleaner. There was no one else in there and they'd sort of, I was just walking around then. Wanted to know what we were doing anyway, I told the cleaner.

09:30 Yeah, we were responsible for that, donating that picture at the time, one of the kids that received it.

Do you know why they chose you?

No. Just two kids in the kindergarten class I suppose plus two older kids as well with it yeah. Dunno why, just a boy and a girl.

What kind of school was it when you went there?

At Cooks Hill?

Yeah.

What I remember of it, yeah,

10:00 pretty old school and pretty basic. I don't recall a lot. You know, some of the kids I can sort of bring back a little bit, had kids for neighbours, had one of those streets that you all played in the street after school instead of, didn't have too many backyards there because there were all little townhouses all sort of sat together pretty well. Had some big hills used to race billy-carts down them just for fun, go to the local wood yard and get bits of

10:30 wood and make billy-carts and go to the local, there was a machinery shop just down the road from us and we used to go and pinch the bearings off the blokes, bang them on it and just tear down the hill in amongst the cars and get into trouble.

Do you reckon that might've been when your interest in mechanics sort of first developed?

I don't know, no. My interest in mechanics, that was my mother's doing. I was happily away surfing on holidays and Mum applied for a job for me as a motor mechanic. So that's how that came

11:00 about, yeah, but I haven't regretted it. I've done a lot with it.

What kind of people were your grandparents?

My pop was, my grandmother was a very very sick person actually, and had sort of, didn't have much to do with her, but my pop, he was an ambulance officer and he used to come and pick us up in the ambulance in Newcastle. He was based at Belmont and where we used to live at Mark's Point, so he used to drive us out on Friday nights all in the back of the ambulance out to the lake house that he had there. Lived right on the lake at Lake Macquarie,

11:30 and he was like a, not a very big man, but he commanded a lot of respect as far as that. If pop said do something you did it and don't give any lip with it. He'd take us fishing all the time and now I can understand why. He used to take all the kids out of a morning and let us catch fish and he'd never fish, pop wouldn't, but he'd always keep our fish and he'd go out himself of a night and they were the bait. So we were just the guinea pigs for him, but yeah, he was a nice old man

12:00 actually.

And what was it about him that commanded respect?

I think he was just, he was just tough and I think when you're a little kid you respect that a little bit, and he was always still pretty fair, but if he told you to do something you did that, and he had actually a putt-putt launch, just a little Blaxland, and it was a big honour, you used to have to carry the magneto out. He'd take it off and you'd carry it out

12:30 and when you got big enough you were allowed to carry it without dropping it in the water. That was a big honour then, so you grew up a little bit in his eyes when you were allowed to do that. No, it's a good life.

What about your father?

My Dad. My Dad was a builder by trade and he was the sort of guy that worked pretty hard and probably didn't do a lot with him cause he was always at work. Just one of those things. My mother probably, had more to do with her than my father

13:00 and I didn't have a lot to do with my father until my later years really. We started to do a bit together and I think it was just that era that your Dad was out working and if he wasn't working he was down the pub having a couple of beers. I think that was just the lifestyle back in those days really. I can't remember like going to the footy with him or anything like that. I used to go to the footy with my aunties.

Really?

Yeah, it was just one of those things. I can't really recall that actually.

What about Sundays? Would he

13:30 **have a day off? What would he do on his day off?**

Yeah, oh yeah, probably sit around for Sunday lunch with it, but yeah, it's just one them things I just really can't recall him being about. He was around, but I can't recall doing things with him. It was just more with everybody else than anything.

And you said you spent more time with your mother. What kind of woman was she?

Mum was tough. Still is. Mum was 80 last year

14:00 and she still comes to my workshop three days a week and cleans the floor, mops it from one end to the other with a mop. The only workshop in town that has a mopped floor, and she just doesn't know anything else except work, even when we were growing up Mum worked pretty hard to raise three kids. I had two sisters, and all within the same, you know, only 12 months apart or so. She did a lot for us actually, dear old mother.

So she was strict on you?

Yeah, yeah. You could take a whack from Dad,

14:30 but boy, Mum would chase you. Yeah, if you did the wrong thing by her you knew it for sure, yeah. She was pretty tough.

What kind of things as you were growing up did she teach you? What sort of values do you think she instilled in you?

Yeah, I think, and even now she's very, Mum's very tough with money. She can save money on a pension, and I don't think any of us kids have learnt that but. I think

15:00 we just looked at it and we probably didn't get a lot and we've always looked at it and tried to provide pretty well for ourselves and our kids and I think my two kids, when they were growing up got it pretty easy actually compared to myself, but that's just the way it was. I think back in those days money was probably hard to come by. You had to be a bit tougher and make it stretch and you know, the budget.

So you wouldn't get many clothes?

15:30 My mother made a lot of our clothes and the same my sisters' clothes and stuff like that, and she used to sew for other people. She was a dress-maker as well so she kept herself pretty busy doing that, making stuff. Yeah, we were probably brought up pretty tough. I started, you know, when we did eventually move to Condo [Condobolin], you know, I was going to school and also working side jobs as well just to keep going.

16:00 **What kind of place was Newcastle while you were growing up?**

It's not the place it is now. It's incredible really. Yeah, the wharves were all, one of my uncles was actually a wharfie [dock worker], 'cargo-ologist' they used to call themselves back then, was the flash name for it, for a wharf labourer, and yeah, every morning, he used to live with us actually and he'd wait to hear his roster number called on the radio to be in that group of guys to go

16:30 to work, and away they'd go. It was, it's a lot different to what it is now. It probably got that reputation back then for being that smoky steel city and stuff like that, BHP [Broken Hill Proprietary] orientated, had the wire rope works, stuff like that there. Yeah, but now life, with my two uncles probably revolved around the beach. You know, Saturdays and Sundays pretty well we'd all choof off up the beach because they were members of the surf club there.

17:00 I probably starting surfing from a pretty early age actually. Rode on surf skis and stuff like that and surf boats pretty early in my life. Both my uncles went on to be life members there and actually won, my Uncle Bill, he actually got killed up there in the surf when surfboards first came out. He was riding a board, he took to it pretty well. Normally they rode their surf skis, but he got into boards when they were great big and he got hit on the head with a board

17:30 and died in the ocean actually. Pretty tragic for a guy that was probably only in his 30s back then I suppose, would've been.

When was that, that surfboards came out, first surfboards came out?

Yeah, would've been around the '50s or '60s I think they were, something like that. In the '60s I think they first came out.

So as a little bloke you were put on one of these big boards?

Yeah, yeah. We were on the boards. Used to jump on the front of their skis with them and, surf skis, and surf the waves and stuff with them.

18:00 That was a big treat when you were little.

You must've been quite a strong swimmer?

Yeah. I learnt to swim from a pretty early age. Had an old bloke next door to us where we lived in

Newcastle, was, he was an ex-RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] guy and he was also a swimming coach so he'd cart us off to Newcastle Baths and we were chunked in the deep end and learnt to swim. We used to call this bloke 'Sergeant Sheriff', and that's what he was. He was a sar-major [sergeant-major]. He used to yell at you, but taught you to swim and he coached a lot

18:30 of kids swimming back then years ago. So we were pretty proficient swimmers. Went on to race and stuff like that for a few years as well.

Did Newcastle, did it have a reputation for having good surf?

Yeah, yeah, good beaches. Really good actually. Even these days they're still pretty good, even though Newcastle itself is washed out a bit sand-wise and stuff like that, but no, it was always good. There or Blacksmith. I had some cousins that lived further out and we used to

19:00 go up there and surf with them. Still even when I was young loved going up there. When I was here working as a kid we used to always go back up Newcastle pretty well.

What were your sisters like?

Yeah. I don't know, sisters are sisters I suppose. We probably clashed a lot together.

When you were growing up?

When we were growing up, and we still clash a bit now even when we're older. We're all scattered all over the place. Got one in Bathurst and

19:30 one in Ballarat and sometimes that's not far enough apart occasionally, but we're not a close, it's quite amazing, we're not a real close family. We don't have heaps of family gatherings or anything like that. They probably, I can't really recall, we just sort of got on with each other I suppose. We didn't do heaps.

Because you were the only boy were you treated a little bit differently

20:00 **by your parents?**

No, not really. No, just toed the line like the rest of them. Do as you're told. No, I don't think I was treated any different to any of the others. When my Mum and Dad separated and that I suppose that took us, I had to earn a bit of money then. You know, we all had to pitch in and do things to keep us all going, but we survived all right. Probably where I got work ethics from I suppose. I always worked pretty hard.

20:30 **What about your sisters, did they treat you a little differently?**

No, they, just brothers I suppose. Normal brother sister relationship. You either love them or you hate them, one or the other.

And at school when you were still in Newcastle, did you take to school? Were you good at school?

No. I was just one of those guys that always got on the report card, could do better if paid attention.

21:00 Seems to be the run of mill thing I think for a lot of blokes actually back then, could do better. Some subjects were all right, but others you don't.

Which ones did you take to? Which subjects did you take to?

Woodwork and tech [technical] drawing, all that sort of stuff. Maths wasn't any great highlight or English or any of those other mundane subjects. Practically subjects was more down the alley, and I think that was probably most guys growing up. Boys back then pretty

21:30 well the same with it.

Were your mum and dad really strict with you about your education, about going to school and doing your homework?

Yeah, probably. We were made to go to school. There was no slacking off as far as that went, and homework-wise you were pretty well made to do what you were told. Cause TV was only just new, so we didn't have a television, so the radio was probably the go more than anything. The neighbours had TV.

22:00 Used to duck and go and watch there.

Really?

Yeah.

Do you remember what shows you used to watch?

No, not really, but probably 'I Love Lucy' has been around for a million years and some of the 'Hopalong Cassidy' and that sort of stuff and 'Rin Tin Tin'. Sort of can't pick up any others. I can remember the house next door where Sergeant Sheriff used to live, they were just a married couple without any kids and

22:30 they always had chocolates at their place. There'd be chunks of chocolate, and they had the only TV pretty well in the street. So all the kids used to go around to her place and we'd dive around there and sit up and raid the chocolate and watch the television at their house.

When would you do that? Would that happen in the evenings after school?

Yeah, after school. Just dive across. Once you finished doing what you had to do you'd duck in and see Aunty Peg. Even though she was never aunty, that's who you always called Aunty Peg.

And you said you had a radio at your

23:00 **home?**

Yeah.

What would you listen to on the radio at home?

I can always recall the cricket being on. Whenever it was on the cricket was on. Not sure what other shows. I just can't remember really.

So you were 10 when you moved to Condobolin?

Yeah. I think about 1957, '58 we moved up here. My parents came up to run a hotel here. My Dad was a builder in Newcastle, but they had a mate and he decided to come up and asked

23:30 my parents did they want to come up and take over the Family Hotel here. So we did that and came up here.

What was that called?

The Family Hotel.

It was called the Family Hotel?

Yeah, straight across from where the Royal [Hotel] is now. It's no longer there. It's Retrovision [chain store] occupies the place now, but yeah, we came up to run it and ran it for a few years, and the other bloke decided to do a runner one night and he'd been taking all the money all the way along apparently. But anyhow, my Mum and Dad decided to stay on here and Dad went back

24:00 building again, building houses around here. Did quite a bit of that until my parents separated and then he moved away and went and worked in Parkes and lived up there.

All right. It must've been quite a big shock for you, someone who enjoyed being near the surf to suddenly move to the bush?

Yeah, it was a bit of a transition really. You know, we'd just get back as much as we could. Back then it involved catching

24:30 a train to Newcastle, from here to Newcastle and I'd do it by myself heaps of times.

Really?

Yeah, as a young kid. Just get on the train and go down. School holidays, we'd spend it all up there. Just hop on the train.

Who would you stay with?

With my grandparents, yeah. Just go and stay with them or my cousins. We'd just head back down.

So you missed, you must've been missing Newcastle?

Yeah, I missed the ocean. Yeah. Yeah, I still, and I don't know why I'm living here now. I still like the ocean. It's just one of those things. I just

25:00 love it, yeah. Even though we've been here that long and we could move, you're still here. I don't know why we don't. It's just one of those things. I think you appreciate it more if you live in the bush and go back down every now and again.

And what was the Family Hotel like when your parents took it over?

Yeah, it was a pretty fun place to be a kid growing up. Just a two storey building and just tear around and meet all the local identities with it.

25:30 Some of them we still know today actually from then, that we were kids growing up there and Mum used to work the bar and stuff like that. When they finally left Mum went to work over the road actually just as a house maid and stuff like that, you know, cleaning and washing and eventually graduated to working in the bar. She worked there for a lot of years actually, at the Royal, and then she went to the golf club and worked at the golf club as a barperson over there for a long time.

26:00 Mum's more responsible for bringing us up than what my Dad was, and you'd see Dad every now and

again. Just touch him for a quid [pound] when you saw him. But Mum, she probably did everything for us, you know, like money-wise and stuff like that and supported us. Most of us, like my two sisters and myself were both, when I was going to school I used to work in the cordial factory after school.

This is when you went to Condobolin?

Yeah. This is when we were here, yeah.

How come you needed to go out? Was that your choice

26:30 **or was it really necessary?**

Yeah, just necessary to make a bit of extra money if you wanted better thing or wanted things, you'd make money to do it.

How old were you then?

I was 14. Started my apprenticeship at 15 as a mechanic.

What did you have to do in the cordial factory? Which cordial factory was that?

It used to be Oppy Brothers cordial factory, but it no longer exists here. It used to be here for a long time. I was mates with Jeffrey, he,

27:00 the old man owned the place and we used to knock around together so he and I used to make the ginger beer and hop beer.

What did that involve?

It was a lot of fun actually. We used to ferment the hops in big oak casks and then you'd leave them for a couple of weeks to ferment and then you'd bottle them off on a bottling machine and stack them all in the cellar and sample them as you went.

How much money did you get paid for that?

I can't recall actually. It wouldn't have been much.

27:30 I can't really recall just how much. It would be only a few pound, which then it didn't take much. I think beers were only 20 cents, was it? 20 pence or something like that, two shillings back then. Pretty cheap as far as that goes.

Can you describe what the Family Hotel was like? You said it was a two storey building.

Yeah, two storey, pretty old two-storey building. It had a big verandah out the front of it, over the

28:00 front and sort of back stairs and verandahs all they way around it really. Spent summer nights up there. Had your typical local people in the place. They had a couple of parrots there in a cage I can remember. They used to, you'd get there and talk to the parrots and they'd talk back. I remember that there. I remember guys bring horses to the backyard sometimes and

28:30 muck around with them in the backyard.

Did people stay overnight there? Did they have accommodation?

Yeah, stay overnight, had overnight accommodation there as well.

And meals, counter meals?

Yeah, counter meals and that there, yeah normal, and still the 6.00 o'clock drinking back then. They'd be in for their, all the men would be in to have a few beers before 6.00 and have to go home again.

Do you remember the drinking hours? That would've been in the '60s?

Yeah.

29:00 **Early '60s?**

Only just sort of vaguely, but they'd all come in and have a few beers. Sunday used to be more of a session I think with it, yeah, but we spent a lot of time, we used to go fishing from there just down the river, stuff like that. I can remember actually when we did first come there we were on the back verandah and the bowling green is behind it, and it had lights on the bowling green. This is when we first come here, and we thought it was a swimming pool.

29:30 Just seeing the lights over the back of it when we first came actually. I can remember seeing that there.

Probably a bit disappointed when you found out.

Yeah. Well, they were building the pool then, which is interesting.

Did your mum, did she run everything? Did she look after the rooms and do the cooking for the counter meals?

Yeah, yeah. She didn't do the cooking, but she used to look after the rooms and stuff, you know, just the general run of the place.

And what would your dad be

30:00 **doing in relation to the hotel?**

He did the cellar work and cleaning of the bar and cleaning all the pipes and making sure all that side of it was operational, right to go. Every night and every day he'd clean all that, and you'd keep your keg stocked up.

What was school like in Condobolin?

Yeah. School was pretty good here probably. Most of the guys that I grew up with, like we all went to school

30:30 together, played footy together, knocked about together pretty well and there was nothing like they've got up there now. The original school's still there and also where I went to intermediate high, it's still up there as well, but they've all got these nice grass lawns where before all we had was a cricket pitch down the middle and the rest was all gravel everywhere actually. So the playground was pretty rough as far as that went. We had

31:00 probably a lot of fun at school, a lot of swimming carnivals during the summer. Then played footy during the winter season. I didn't mind, liked playing football because my uncles both played rep football, so I'd try and follow in their footsteps as it went. I played a little bit of rep footy when I was a young kid.

What did you play, what kind of football?

Rugby League, only real football.

And you would've been a good swimmer at these swimming carnivals?

Yeah, swam a lot. Yeah, swam pretty well actually, wasn't

31:30 too bad. The training side of things, a bit like everything, what you put into it you get out of it. If you train hard enough you do all right. Yeah, nowadays I really hardly swim.

So the kids accepted you when you went to Condobolin?

Yeah, initially I got in a couple of fights with a few of, as you do, with some of the young local kids that, you know, marked out their territory a little bit and the city-slicker kids, which I didn't know how to fight either.

32:00 You soon learn to toughen yourself up a bit, normal school ground bullies and they always pick on the quietest bloke initially, but we managed.

Was the fact that you could play sport quite well and swim and stuff, did that help you?

Yeah, it did. It helps you mix in with people. It always does if you're good at something, you get accepted it pretty well, but yeah.

32:30 **And what about your parents, how did they mix with the locals here after coming from Newcastle?**

Yeah, Mum and Dad mixed in pretty well really. Mum's now just a fixture around the place as far as that goes. People come to my shop now still pull up and talk to her as far as that goes. My Dad's been dead for quite a number of years. Died of cancer unfortunately. That's the way it seems to go. Yeah, but Mum, she's

33:00 pretty well a fixture around the place and goes with my shop now. You just can't get rid of her. It's one of those things.

You said at the time a lot of local identities used to come to the Family Hotel. Do you remember any of those characters?

Yeah, some we do. Some of the dark guys that were stockmen back then. Gundy White, Gundy's still going around, and his boys, you know, I played footy with his kids

33:30 and stuff like that.

He's an Aboriginal bloke?

Aboriginal guy, yeah. Served overseas with one of his sons actually.

And why is he well known around here?

Just, he was a good stockman back then and just a good pretty clean living guy, not a trouble maker or anything like that, and you've got the Reardons, you know, they're still here, property owners, stuff like that, and you've got the

34:00 Dawsons. They're still property owners here, still in generations from one to the other, and the Worthingtons and people like that, and TA Malee. His son's still kicking around, people like that. Everyone used to call them 'mister'. They were cockies [farmers] then and they'd come into the bar. It was always 'mister this' and 'mister that'. It was never first name basis back then in the pubs. It's changed a lot these days.

How do you see Condobolin

34:30 **then when you were growing up to the Condobolin now?**

Population wise it probably hasn't changed that much really, but...

What's the population?

3,500. Yeah, it's always been 3,500 as long as I can remember. It's quite amazing really, but it's still, we even, where we are now where we're living, this 20 years ago, this was the only house in the street, and now it's full up. You can't get in it. 'God's waiting room' they call it.

Why is that?

The average

35:00 age of the people in the street. It's pretty horrific really.

That doesn't apply to you.

Eh?

That doesn't apply to you.

No, no. I've had a bit of help there lately that's sort of brought it down a bit, but yeah. Just the average age, just what they call it having a joke, but it was all bushland all around here actually. When we first came to Condobolin it was all this area and even where you interviewed Bruce the other day, it was just bushland all right through here. So in 20 years it's come a long way really. It's probably

35:30 gain a lot sporting-wise, you know, facilities, stuff like that. It's been, to me it's probably been a good place to grow up in. I don't think if I'd have stayed in Newcastle I would have done half the amount of things I've done. By living in a country town anyway, you just get, people say there's no opportunity, but there's miles of opportunity. You've just got to take them and run with them, that's all. That's the biggest thing with it. If you sit on your backside you'll never do anything. The same with

36:00 kids here now growing up. They don't apply themselves to different things. They just won't go anyway. It's quite interesting, we have a lake here now and there's a lot of other families. I've been skiing for probably 30 years, probably a bit longer actually, and only last year one family took it up from here and the guy has known me for a long time and he's played cricket and his family stayed at home, and he just said,

36:30 "Why didn't you tell me about this years ago? Just involve my whole family in what I'm doing." His kids have really taken to it and it's been a good thing. I think that's the essence of all of it, and from there if you can just get a sport and can work it and go away from here with it and see a bit more of the world, yeah, that would do the world of good rather than just stay here.

Why do you think that's happened to you here in Condobolin but it wouldn't have happened if you'd stayed in

37:00 **Newcastle?**

Well I think if I stayed in Newcastle I probably would've ended up a surfer bum I suppose. Work-wise I really wouldn't know what I would've done. I couldn't say there. As I said, my mother, I was quite happy away surfing after I finished school and my mother applied for the job, came up as apprentice mechanic here in Condobolin. She interrupted my holiday ringing me up and telling me to get back here, I've got a job interview to go to. So yeah, so I started an apprenticeship

37:30 at 15. Yeah, I had actually to go to Parkes for tech [technical college] and the only way I could get to Parkes because I didn't have a licence back then was to catch what they called the rail motor up here on a Sunday afternoon. So I'd get on the rail motor and go to Parkes which was 100, or was then like 60 mile away. It would take two hours to get there on the rail motor and then they booked us into a hotel

38:00 up there, the Cambridge Hotel, on the Sunday night and I'd go to tech on the Monday and not do anything because my class didn't start, and I'd just work around the tech or I'd just watch other guys or just motor around for the day, bum about, and then on the Tuesday I had tech. Then I'd have to catch the rail motor back on a Wednesday morning. Did that every fortnight. Get back here at 11.00 o'clock and then go to work on Wednesday morning. Did that for a year.

How did you find that?

Oh, it was all right when you look back, had a pretty good time really.

38:30 A 15 year old living in a pub for a whole year, we used to, every fortnight. It was quite interesting. We got to meet people out of it, and then the next year we got a special licence which I could drive then.

What does a rail motor look like?

It was a small, it was just like a single rail carriage with a motor in it and they used to call them 'day rattlers'. They used to rock on the tracks and just about bash your head on each wall as they'd go along like this all the time. They were a fun

39:00 thing. They'd stop at every little station on the way up, all these little sidings all the way through and back, and they'd carry the mail back and forwards between Condo and Parkes. Yeah, a bit of an experience.

So would you have called yourself an outgoing kid?

Yeah, I don't know really. Possibly. Yeah, pretty hard to say.

You've spoken about mixing with people and catting to the identities and stuff, it seems like you were able to chat away.

Probably did. I

39:30 do know a lot of people, or they know of me. One or the other over the years. Yeah, probably I don't know. I wouldn't say outgoing, probably just quiet, go about my business and do things quietly and get there with it.

You said that you were away surfing when your mother applied for this job as apprentice mechanic. Were you back in Newcastle surfing?

I was back up in Newcastle, yeah.

And you obviously

40:00 **just sort of followed your mother's instructions? You didn't rebel against them?**

No, I wasn't game to do that. Oh no, it was just, a job's a job and back then it was. A job was a job. You took and away you went with it and applied yourself to that.

Did you have any idea what you wanted to do when you were about that age?

No, none whatsoever. I was probably happy to work in the cordial factory just lumping drinks and boxes and stuff around and doing stuff

40:30 involved with that I suppose, and that's probably where I would've ended up if I hadn't taken on this job, but anyway, being a mechanic is probably, you know, I've seen a lot of the world actually as a motor mechanic as a career, so it's been good.

Do you think your mother kind of felt that you had an aptitude for mechanical work?

I don't know. I think she just wanted me out from underneath her, probably more to the point with it. Get you doing something in your life instead of sitting around.

And

41:00 **you said that you, you mentioned that your parents split up. Did that happen when they were at the pub?**

No. It happened after. Yeah, we moved out of there and yeah, it's just one of them family things you never find out what went wrong.

Were they fighting a lot when you were growing up?

Yeah, they were. Now you look back at it, yeah, there had been times when they fought a bit, and I think my Dad, I'm probably sure that Dad was probably

41:30 a bit of a heavy drinker. It seemed to be a bit of a trend back in those days, and I think that's probably what caused it and Mum's probably got sick of it and told him to go.

So how old were you when that happened?

I would've only been probably 12, 13.

Did it have a big effect on you at the time?

Possibly it has. It's hard to say really.

42:00 It probably has had a bit of an effect.

Tape 2

00:34 **Mike, you said that when you came to Condo, apart from, well the biggest thing that you missed was being near the beach, apart from that difference how did you find being in the country, like as far as the people were concerned and the general pace of life and the open space and all that sort of stuff?**

Well, the pace of life,

01:00 yeah, I suppose to a little kid you don't notice it that much, but slow down, but the distance. You know, I can remember coming out here in a Ford Mainline ute [utility truck] and half the Parkes road was gravel, and it's 50 miles of gravel road. Yeah, probably a bit of a culture shock. There were no traffic lights and the pace was, yeah, a lot slower for sure.

01:30 And kids were a bit different. You're used to probably city kids, we're a bit more, kids are a bit probably back then I suppose a little bit more aggressive. I don't know, just seems to be anyway, yeah, a bit tougher for sure.

So were you missing the city for a fair while do you think?

Yeah, I did. I missed it for a long time actually and probably used

02:00 every opportunity we could to go back up there for sure, and I think it's made probably the lifestyle we had up there pretty easy going, and the beaches and stuff like that, you just sort of, yeah, probably a bit hard not to have a good lifestyle there. A bit hard to move and do things, you had your own group of friends up there even though we were still pretty young, but still had the circle of friends and relatives [relatives] about. Where here we came to sort of virtually knowing

02:30 no one, but yeah. You try and make friends and keep going with it.

Did you let your parents know initially that you weren't too happy about being out here?

No. It wasn't even an issue I think. I don't think that's something we even spoke about. Just carried on with life.

Sounds as though sport as always been a big part of your life. When do you think you really started to get particularly interested in sport

03:00 **in general?**

Probably when we were only five or six and seven, probably around that area. Probably just something you grow up with. As I said I had uncles that played footy and swam and surfed and stuff like that. So I suppose you look up to someone and try and emulate them and think that's what you want to do with it. You know, growing up around the water, I learnt to swim early and you just

03:30 get a competitive drive I suppose and want to get into it that way. I was never a great footballer, played footy okay. I hated cricket. Couldn't see the point in standing around in the hot sun and I still can't. If you're not near water or something like that, standing around the cricket pitch.

I believe you used to play a bit of basketball?

Yeah, we played basketball here and while I was in the army and stuff like that.

04:00 Just played with different teams here. It was just a school comp, and indoor comp and town comp they had, get involved with it. Same thing, nothing flash, but run around the court and yeah, well, while I was in the army I played a bit there and then came back here we used to play up in the early, while we were still doing Nashos we'd dive back and play a couple of games here with the boys and drive back to Wagga [Wagga Wagga] again.

So you started playing basketball at school at Condobolin?

Yeah, played at school, yeah.

04:30 Yeah, played at school.

Did basketball have much of profile back in those days?

No, not really. It was just probably a sport, it was an alternative back then to playing cricket, which a few guys just went and played. Yeah, it didn't have the following that it had, but it was still town comp. It was still pretty strong cause all the, like schools around here and school visits and stuff like that always had basketballers as well so you got involved

05:00 in that.

And when did you start to be involved in water skiing?

Not until I was about 18 actually. I started going out with a girl from Forbes that could ski and it was sort of the thing you do I suppose. To stay with them you've got to fall into line and her brothers taught

me to ski and had a bit of a joke about the whole show. Set us up a few times and stuff like that, but yeah, skied ever since pretty well.

05:30 It's been a good sport for myself.

So you took to it pretty well?

Yeah, we did actually. I was probably lucky that I knew people that had boats. We couldn't afford one of our own but had friends of mine, older people that had boats and got involved with. You know, their kids my age, and just tagged along with them and we'd probably, three of us, John Le Strange and Al and myself sort of were pretty

06:00 firm friends, so we used to ski with their families and we'd go away with them up to Wyangala [Dam] on holidays and stuff like that, Lake Cargelligo. Then during the '80s we built our own creek out here and used to ski on it. We started, back then barefoot water skiing was sort of a big in, just started to grow a bit, so we all taught ourselves to barefoot. Then thought well, we might as well go and have a go at

06:30 competing. So we all trotted off to Manly Dam in about '68 I suppose and entered our first ever state titles down there. We did all right. All the blokes had been in it probably a couple of years earlier than us probably showed us up a few different things, but we came back and learnt a few more tricks. It was pretty good. All of us were in the Barefoot Association then. I was reading a book not long ago

07:00 we're in with like a 300 membership, under the 1,000, very low numbers. So we were in their pretty early really. So yeah, went from that and competed at state level and Australian level at that in it. Ran into a few places every now and then in different disciplines with it. Then when Nashos, 12 months

07:30 or two years pretty much virtually out of the sport sort of made it pretty hard to come back and get back into that level, so we swapped codes and sort of went back, started ski racing which was good fun, and the same thing, we had a guy come here that had a good boat and used to work two jobs to afford to do that. We used to work at home here and repair cars here and work for the County Council at the same time

08:00 so you could afford your sport. Yeah, and eventually got, you keep going with it and made the state side a few times and competed at Australian level. Some good rewards, met a lot of people, got a lot of friendship out of the sport and I think that's half the thing with it, and also excel at it a little bit, but you need the drive and the discipline to do that

08:30 with it, which some young kids today are getting there, but it would be nice to see a few more of them apply themselves a little bit better. It would be good. We've stuck with it for a lot of years actually. We only pulled out in the early '90's. We stopped racing and that, and I think mainly family commitments and also the expense of it was just getting higher and higher. Other priorities come around in life. We still socially ski now

09:00 and taught my kids and I do a lot of coaching and that now still for different people and different kids. We're still heavily involved in it for sure and weight boarding is the latest trend. I can weight board. My son has great delight in doing it better than me, but I can still do a lot of things better than him. He's beat me on one thing but, I've never won an Australian title. I've ran seconds and thirds, and his first outing at an Australian Championship and he wins it.

09:30 Anyway, it's one of those things, I'll let him have that one.

So apart from the drive and the discipline required there's obviously a need for a bit of natural ability. Did it seem evident to you from the early days that you were quite good at it?

I don't know about natural ability. I think a lot of it is probably more your discipline and your drive. If you want to

10:00 strike to do well at anything you've got to apply yourself. To be, like any guy will tell you, to be top of your sport you've got to train. No sense turning up there thinking you're going to beat the next guy if you haven't been training because he's probably put a little bit more effort than you into it and he'll beat you every time. I think that's how you apply yourself through life, the same thing. If you want to get somewhere with it you've got to put in the effort and I think it stands with anything you ever do.

10:30 You won't get anywhere if you just sit on your backside. You have to apply yourself, set yourself a goal and work towards it or just follow the mainstream and not do anything. I think, to me that's always probably been my drive. I've really, the only time I get to sit around is Sunday afternoon to watch the car races.

11:00 I think most of the time I'm on the move doing something.

We were lucky to pin you down for a few minutes of your time.

You are actually. We've got a workshop full of work and a job away yesterday. Yeah, yeah, 15-hour drive yesterday. Yeah, I did think about cancelling it there for a while.

I'm glad you didn't. We're going to go easy on you today?

Yeah, you're right.

11:30 **Just going back to when you left school, when the time came you were 15, was there any shadow of a doubt about you leaving or was it just evident that it was time to leave?**

No, none whatsoever. I wasn't a brilliant scholar and in those days you got an Intermediate Certificate which was, the next one was a Leaving Certificate after that, and that was another two years and

12:00 I couldn't see myself doing another two years there. I was nothing flash at school. So yeah, an opportunity came up for a job and back then to get an apprenticeships it's pretty hard, and even it is still hard these days for kids to get apprenticeships and back then it was probably a little bit harder. There was no doubt, just took it and went with it.

So how long was that surfing safari before you started?

12:30 Just school holidays virtually, five weeks we were away.

So mum didn't give you too much of a break?

Not really, no. We started January that year. Well, December school holidays, we would've started work in January. A bit similar to what they are now, the terms, and a five year apprenticeship. Four years of tech and experience and another year after that of practical experience before you get your trade.

13:00 I think nowadays it's three years. So it's a pretty long haul.

Pretty rigorous?

Yeah, back then. We had a pretty, we worked at the County Council and had a couple of good old guys there that were pretty good mechanics and back then we used to do all our own reconditioning vehicles and nothing was let out pretty well. It was all done in house and it was in the days when they were pushing power lines through

13:30 to Lake Cargelligo, Tottenham and all different towns around here, and back in the days when the old Land Rovers to go to work in, the guys would turn up on Monday morning, they'd have all their camping gear packed, jump in these old Land Rovers, two in the front and three or four in the back with just a rag top on them and away they'd go and they'd camp out. You wouldn't see them until Friday afternoon. They'd come back and you'd either leave that vehicle or repair it for the next week and they'd take another one.

14:00 It was probably a pretty exiting time, and when I look back on it now, I can drive on properties and say well, I was here when they pushed the power line through there, and it's not that long ago really when you think of it that the place became electrified all around, and a lot of it wasn't back then. A lot of, and also country, where we'd gone through and cleared country with power lines, before we just used to cut a narrow track, well all

14:30 those paddocks now are just wide open. The amount of land clearing that's gone on, some of that is pretty amazing to actually do and see.

So it was a real time of expansion and development out west?

Yeah, development and expansion. That's right, it was actually. Yeah, probably lived in part of that era, just like when the guys before me were horse and sulky men. We're into the motor car age, and watch electricity get spread around the

15:00 countryside. It was very interesting actually. Some good characters from work and stuff like that.

So did you feel from the word go you didn't mind the work and becoming a mechanic wasn't going to be a bad thing?

No, probably not. Sometimes today I think about it. Especially when you get diesel all over working on a stinking rotten diesel engine or something like that, and

15:30 yeah, but no, it's been good fun. I've enjoyed it, probably got a lot out of it actually as far as that goes.

Did you enjoy just the basics of learning how an engine works and all that sort of stuff?

Yeah, yeah. Oh no, it's interesting and it's good. You get a lot of satisfaction out of building an engine and putting it back in a car and seeing it drive away and the customer comes back and says yeah, we've done a good job. And even now doing NRMA road service now,

16:00 and getting that job in the early hours of the morning and stuff like that, you get out of bed, go and do it, and the person says thanks, that's good enough. Away you go. It makes you feel pretty good. It's worthwhile in the long run.

So in the County Council at the beginning of your apprenticeship how many blokes were involved in the mechanical side of things?

There were two other guys worked in the workshop with us and I was the only

16:30 apprentice, and we had another older bloke that was only there for a few years. He was actually a fitter machinist with us, but just two of us used to, like two guys and myself, the apprentice, and I probably spent the first year of it sweeping the floor I suppose, and the guy they had as the boss, Ernie, would make you, if you swept it once and it wasn't good enough he'd make you do it again, and all the, everything had to be clean,

17:00 all the compressors and all your gear had to be clean. Yeah, it's probably instilled a good thing into us. As far as that goes I try and keep a workshop reasonably tidy and just some order in your life as far as that goes.

So it was a pretty tight ship they were running?

Yeah, a pretty tight ship actually, yeah. Yeah, we worked pretty hard and pretty long days and it wasn't until the later years we were sort of, both them, they got a bit older and started to slow down a bit and slacken off, but then the apprentice is the guy that started

17:30 to carry the whole show then. You'd have to do all the work.

So how many vehicles were in the fleet that you were responsible for?

With the council back then probably, we'd probably have 30 or 40 vehicles I'd imagine, somewhere around there. From trucks through to Land Rovers and bigger trucks and small power saws and chainsaws and all that sort of stuff. I sort of learnt to work on a lot of

18:00 equipment from really big equipment to down to the smallest lawn mower and chainsaw pretty early in life, and we used to do a lot of our fabrication work like structures for the substations and poles, we used to make all that. So you got a really good grounding in, we built our own trailers and all that. So a fair bit of experience in my time with them actually.

18:30 A good organisation to work for back then?

Yeah, it was back then, yeah, yeah. It's going a bit of a circle again now. They eventually decided they could do without mechanics and a lot of other staff and that as well, and you can see that cycle coming back where they're re-hiring guys again and they're still subbing out a lot of their vehicle work, but a lot of their other stuff they're looking for more blokes to go back working for them out there. They realise that the whole show, and I think it's state wide, it's that big, all these wooden poles still

19:00 and they're still going to fall over if they don't get treated. It's quite interesting talking to some of the older blokes like myself that have been in the game, involved in that game, you know, sit back and, "Oh yeah, I can remember when we put those in and they're going to fall down, they won't listen." They're pretty right, it's happening. We had storms recently where they had poles over, only a very small crew to go out and work on it. But yeah, it's called progress I suppose.

So did

19:30 the apprenticeship mean the end of the job at the cordial factory for you?

Yeah, pretty well. Still did a little bit with it on and off mainly cause I knew Jeff really well. He was the owner's son and that, we were pretty good mates. Weekends we'd go and help them out and do things. We knocked around together and wrecked cars together and stuff like that. Got smashed up a couple of times as you do when you're a boy growing up.

So when did you get your first car?

20:00 Not until I was probably 18, yeah, would've been. Bought a Morris 1100. My mother wouldn't let me buy, MG Midgets were the go then. They were only a two door, they were the same money actually but only a two-seater car and Mum wouldn't let me buy one of them. She made us get a four-door car and bought a Morris 1100 back then, and being a mechanic and apprentice and silly you go around hotting them

20:30 up the same as the kids do these days. Yeah, we had a lot of fun with it, and that got us away. We used to go away competing barefooting and throw a couple of us in the car and away we'd go to Leeton or anywhere where there was a tournament on we'd choof off and go to that. Leave here Friday nights and come home Sunday nights and go to work on Mondays. Yeah, good times.

Before you had the car it sounds like you were pretty busy.

21:00 You were doing the apprenticeship which meant not only the practical stuff but making the trip to Parkes and doing a fair bit of study, doing the cordial stuff as well, did you have much time for a social life at that stage?

Yeah, you'd have the odd tennis club dances and stuff like that here which they don't have any more. You'd cruise down there and check out the girls. Yeah, that was probably

21:30 the social event of the weekend pretty well then.

So that was the best place to chase girls?

Yeah, probably the best place. Then you got a car and you had a bit more freedom, you could go and chase them in Forbes and Parkes and anywhere else where there was a thing on a Friday night or Saturday night. Over in Trundle and places like that and further afield, the Lake.

So what sort of music would you be dancing too, say pre 18 before you got the car?

I can't recall.

22:00 If I listen to the stuff now I can, you can bring music which springs back to mind then, but as far as naming tunes and that, I haven't got a hope in hell. Quite amazing.

Would there be a local band playing or something like that?

Yeah. There used to be a band kicking around when we were around and I can't, there were three guys and two girls in it and I can't even think of their names, what they were, but they were the group that came out of West Wyalong. They used to

22:30 do all the local circuit and that around the area pretty well. Yeah, they were pretty good from what we recall anyway.

Do you recall the sort of steps that you were doing back in those days? Was it sort of formalised or was it more sort of grab a girl and improvise?

Yeah, grab a girl, improvise I suppose. Although I had been taught to ballroom dance because my mother was a ballroom dancer actually and she instilled that

23:00 into us, and we were taught the steps she used to do when she was younger. She taught us all to dance pretty well as far as that went, which came in handy later on when you start partnering girls to make their debut and go to the deb [debutante] balls and stuff like that, and even these days it's stuck with us as far as they went. I can get around the floor all right. It's an old tradition that's probably long gone really.

23:30 **Were you a fan of music back in those days?**

Probably like most kids I enjoyed music, but I can't, it's only if I hear something now that I can, yeah, we used to listen to that or say to my kids and that, "Yeah, we used to listen to that years ago." Then you listen to some of them and say, "Why did we listen to that? It sounds terrible." It's quite interesting, just your taste,

24:00 the way it goes.

What about movies back then?

Yeah, we had a picture show here now that has been closed for a lot of years. When we first came here had an outdoor picture show which I can't recall going to actually. Maybe I could have, I really can't place it, but they had the Renown Theatre there and the people that owned it then still own it now. Old Emmanuel Fatzees, and it's

24:30 defunct now, but I can always recall going to the pictures there on Saturday nights and you'd cause commotion as you used to do rolling Jaffas [lollies] down the stairs and things like that that the kids did back then.

Would you go with a group of mates or would you take a girl with you on a date?

No, you'd probably always go with a group of mates and hope there was a girl there and quietly try and sit next to here or something like that. I don't think it's changed that much. I think it has, yeah, it probably has actually. It's a bit more

25:00 adventurous now than what it was back then. The interesting thing, and the lot of us are the same, alcohol never played a part in things. It was quite amazing and a few of us have said the same thing, it wasn't until probably after the army or during that I really drank a bit, but previous to that we probably didn't. I think mainly because we were still, we were playing

25:30 of lot of sport and competing pretty hard and I don't think it was an issue then. It was quite amazing really, until later in my 20's when we really were a bit grown up as far as that, you wouldn't even think about it. I found out with my mates the same age in that era it wasn't until a bit later on we started to go to B&S Balls [Bachelor & Spinster Balls] and stuff like that, but even then they were better. They were a real formal affair and you

26:00 didn't get to one unless you got an invitation anyway, and any of the alcohol that was there you drank it. You didn't throw it at someone, compared to the ones now. I work for the B&S Committee here now. We go and serve at the bar at the balls now and it's good fun, but they waste a lot of alcohol.

It gets pretty messy.

It gets pretty messy. It's still good fun. It's quite amazing, one on one talking to different kids, they keep coming to you to get served and stuff like that as the night goes on, and they're all basically the same as what

26:30 we were. They're all out there to have a good time, good fun, and you find them pretty polite. You get the odd one that's not, a bit of dickhead, but yeah, just the odd one, but basically they're pretty good kids.

Did you hear much about what went on in the Second World War as you were growing up? Was that something that you were presented with at school or talking with your parents or their friends?

27:00 Yeah, a little bit at school, but not, probably not that aware. My Dad was actually drafted into the army early in the piece in the Second World War, but he was discharged. He had tuberculosis apparently at one stage of the game and he was only in there for, I think his discharge papers which I have show about 90 days or something like that, but he stayed on to work as, because he was a builder by trade they classed

27:30 him as essential trade and he stayed on to work for the army in the civilian part of it and did a lot of work in Newcastle at Fort Scratchley and also which I found out a bit later on, at Canungra, the jungle training centre up in Brisbane, he actually worked up there and built a lot of the stuff up there. You know, he worked with guys up there and we got posted there for our bloody, before we went overseas that's the last place you go to. They send you there for your jungle training. A bit ironic I thought.

28:00 But I didn't find that out until years later about that. Mum was talking one time and she mentioned that was he did, he did some work in Newcastle and actually worked up there. I was a member of the RSL [Returned and Services League] club here from when I was 18, as a young kid mainly for somewhere to go and drink. I'd just go up there anyway, but probably

28:30 I wasn't that aware of, I knew there'd been the Second World War and stuff like that but never really got into that much of it, and the same thing like when we got drafted in at Nashos. To me it was just another, pkay, we've just had five years of an apprenticeship, I might as well go and do something different. Yeah, I didn't worry about it at all. Mum did, she was pretty upset about it.

29:00 I suppose all mothers are the same. But myself, no. Just okay, away we go.

Mum wasn't happy about you having to go?

No, no, not to go overseas and stuff like that. I don't think any mother would've been, it's one of those things. Your only son, something could happen. It could happen here too. I give her enough grief to start with. We rolled a car, or two cars within a matter of two weeks actually.

29:30 It was when we were growing up. Walked away from them, but anyway.

When did you roll those cars?

Only when we were 18 and 19. Other guys driving them, but just being with them at the time and yeah, boys will be boys. Rolled one right in town pretty well, as you do. No one out the road. A couple of guys got killed in one of them but just unfortunate.

30:00 **So when did you first become aware of National Service being something you'd have to do?**

The possibilities were there. Like we'd heard about it and had to register and stuff like that, and because I was doing an apprenticeship I knew that I'd get an exemption until it was finished anyway if I did happen to get called up, which I did. I got called up mid, the ballot came out when you were 20, and so

30:30 my birthday was in July the previous year so it came up then, and I didn't go in until January, sorry, July of the next year. So I had a deferment.

What year was that?

1969, went in on the 7th, 7th of July 1969 and turned 21 on the 21st, same day man landed on the moon.

So '68 is when you finished your apprenticeship?

Finished, yeah, I

31:00 finished at the end of '68, yeah, and then they moved us from there.

Did you have much of an awareness of what was going on in Vietnam through the early '60s?

Not really. I think being a country bloke, a little bit isolated from it. I was aware some that some blokes from here had already gone in. I think we had about 14 or 15 from Condo go

31:30 actually, and we'd had some. I was a little bit aware that way, but not, it wasn't a conversation point that I can recall, that we sat down and said, "Oh no, I don't want to go there," or, "I don't want to do this," as far as that went anyway.

Did you know much about what the war was about in Vietnam itself?

Not really, no. Not that I can recall, but no. Hadn't even heard of the place probably.

32:00 **Do you think at that stage you had any sort of opinion as far as whether you thought Australia should be involved in that war or not?**

No. I had no opinion whatsoever. A little bit aware of the boat, the wharfies wouldn't load stuff and things like that, only because I had an uncle that was a wharfie and that was one of those things little bit aware there, but I didn't understand

32:30 the politics of it. Just one of those, as I say, still just a kid growing up and not really, even though at 21 you shouldn't be, but still probably not, not really worried about life that way.

So you had a vague appreciation that some people were protesting against what we were going over there, that's about it?

Yeah, a little bit, a little bit of it, but locally here nothing really. Yeah, quite surprised,

33:00 and even when we came home we were welcome back here as easy as pie. Yet some of my other mates have got horrific stories and which at that stage of the game I really didn't know until I spoke to them like years and years later. They didn't do too well out of it. We came back here, came back and straight into the Royal Hotel at 10.00 o'clock in the morning and were getting shouted beers by the locals.

33:30 **We'll talk about that time in a fair amount of detail. So you got to 18, you got your car, the apprenticeship was going well, you became involved in the water skiing. Obviously, yeah Michael, I was in the middle of saying**

34:00 **around the age of 18, 19 you had your apprenticeship going well, you had the car, you were getting involved in the water skiing which sounds like it opened up a nice sort of social world to you as well. Did the water skiing become a source of friends and a social life?**

Yeah, it did actually. Getting away from like involvement, being away from town,

34:30 like leaving Condo and going away for weekends at different places around the state and pretty well around Australia actually just at those times, and you'd go and compete against guys and some of those guys you saw at the next tournament so you got involved with each other and years, and we're still good friends with lots of them even now a long way down the track. You build up that group of people that you've known for a long time. It's quite amazing really.

35:00 **Had you made a circle of friends through the apprenticeship, through the study side of it?**

Yeah, through guys that we were doing tech with in Parkes, that worked up there, actually worked in Parkes as mechanics, we're still mates now, from tech college and stuff like that, Bookie Page, you seem to run into them every now and then, and blokes I know and different guys that have actually been mechanics and now run their own business in Parkes similar to what we've

35:30 done sort of 30 years down the track or something like that or a bit longer really. Yeah, you've still got those blokes from about. The fellows I work with on the job, not too many of them left actually. A lot of them were a fair bit older than me. Axel, my boss, he's still going pretty well, Ernie, he'd be too mean to die, Ernie will be. One of those sort of blokes, but the other fellows are a bit older. Yeah,

36:00 they've sort of gone from the organisation.

So just prior to National Service coming along for you, how were you feeling about your life in general?

I think we were going pretty good really. Sort of, we had a good time, I had a car, could get about. We were involved in a sport that we enjoyed, meeting people

36:30 around and earning money I suppose. I think life was pretty cruisey for a young guy growing up back then. We were going out with the odd girl here and there with it. I met, we were involved with people in Sydney we'd ski with. We'd go down there and ski on the Hawkesbury quite a bit, so we'd already developed even at 18, 19

37:00 a reasonably large circle of friends even outside of Condo actually, plus what we were still doing back here. I still used to work for the County Council and of an afternoon knock off and going and work, a mate of mine used to work another garage and we'd combine and work at his place then and service vehicles of an afternoon and weekends. That used to make money to pay for our sport. We'd work probably until 10.00 o'clock at night. That's where you get your extra dough to

37:30 be able to afford to go and do things. We worked pretty hard, and John, the guy I work with, he still does the same now. He still works pretty hard as well, so involved with it.

So when you found out that you had to do National Service and the time came, how did that make you feel?

I really, I can't recall, but it was never a worry to us. It was just to me,

38:00 what I can recall of it, it was just okay, we're finished that apprenticeship, let's go and do something new. Yeah, probably sounds exiting, a bit of an adventure. Yeah, the thought of going overseas or anything like that probably hadn't entered our head too much. The thought of being killed hadn't worried us too much either because just prior to that I'd been rolled over a couple of times in cars. I was probably thinking we're bulletproof at that age.

38:30 Pretty invincible, so it wasn't really, wasn't a concern.

You realised that it was a likely outcome that if you did do the training with the National Service that Vietnam could end up being the next stop?

Yeah, that's always on the agenda, but still you need to volunteer to go to Vietnam still. Guys say that they didn't, but you really needed to sign a bit of paper to go. Yeah,

39:00 it wasn't a worry to us at that stage of the game anyway.

Had you had a chance to speak to anyone else you had already undertaken the training?

No, we hadn't actually. Some of the guys from Condo were still in there and over there, and a couple of the others I didn't actually know that had been there and been over there early and had came back, and a couple were already regular soldiers and they were actually on their second tour when I was across there. So

39:30 I hadn't, it just wasn't one of those things that really hadn't worried us actually. We were probably too busy with everything else to worry about it.

So after you received notice I assume in the mail that it was going to start...

Yeah.

what was the process from there?

They gave you, and it's funny, one of those things you probably should've kept I suppose. Yeah, you got a letter in the mail to say

40:00 you've been called up for National Service and they give you a date to which I had to report to Sydney and I can't recall where we went. I think it might've been Vic [Victoria] Barracks. I just really can't pick up, I just, we would've went out on the train to there. They give you, they give us a rail pass to get there. Went out on the train to Sydney and I think it was Vic Barracks, but I'm not 100 per cent sure there,

40:30 and just a whole heap of other blokes there as well that all sort of lobbied in from all over the countryside and then they just processed you there, and then eventually later that day shipped you out to Wagga by busses to Wagga. Went to Wagga or up to Singleton was the other training camp at the time that I can recall. We actually got shipped down to Wagga which was pretty good for us. It's only sort of two and a half hours from home, and I knew people in Wagga. We'd been down there ski racing

41:00 like skiing over the years and stuff like that. It wasn't a big, yeah, pretty good for me actually to get shipped to there.

And those blokes that you went down to Wagga with, did you know any of them prior to that?

No, I didn't actually. A guy from Forbes, Peter Burke, and there were some guys from, Pete Gissel from up Cobar way, which I got to meet after, but there was no one,

41:30 anyone that was there I hadn't met them before, and some of the guys that we did meet down there actually went into our unit. Burkey is the only one that I've met since then, and others because you all get sent over the place we've never really kept in touch actually. It would be interesting to catch up, but yeah, just one of those things. Burkey and I keep, he's a brickie and that, he bricked a house over the road

42:00 here and we run into him every now and again.

Tape 3

00:37 **Mike, at the end of the, it was a five-year apprenticeship, yeah?**

Five-year apprenticeship, yeah.

What had you actually learnt by that stage? What did you know?

Well, pretty well how to completely dismantle a Land Rover from one end to the other, and I mean completely dismantle from the wheels right through the engine gear boxes and the whole show.

01:00 Just strip it down and rebuild it again and also we did a lot of work on trucks. Every facet, even stuff that we don't even use today. We used to do all our own engine reconditioning pretty well in house, from Honan Bora motors and also to repainting the trucks again, because that's what you did back then, you just repaired things rather than ring up and get a new one, like give them a coat of paint, and learnt to panel beat

01:30 and learnt to weld. Did a lot of steel fabrication to building our own, our big log trailers and any new trays for trucks and stuff like that. We used to do all that. A pretty good, really good grounding actually in mechanic ability. Learnt to use a lathe and all sorts of things that you didn't get these days. You don't get that experience any more.

Is that because they're not studying for as long?

02:00 No, not studying for as long, but it's not necessary that much any more. The technology these days has gone a little bit different. A lot of blokes don't recondition engines now. They send them, just get one reconditioned from, source it outside. That doesn't happen as much, and even I find that. We don't do that many engine reconditions. I think I've only done about three this year where normally

02:30 we'd stick them through all the time. It's just the trend these days.

Did you feel like you found your niche, found what you wanted to do?

Must've I suppose. Yeah, looking back at it now I think it's been a career that's been good to us. Hard work a lot of times, but it's been very rewarding. As I said before, it's really good to be able to

03:00 do something with your hands, fix something and see it leave the workshop going, or have that ability to solve a problem with a car or whatever you happen to be on. It did a lot for us over the years actually just to be a mechanic.

Back then did you feel like you found the right thing? You took to it, you found it easy to learn what you'd been taught?

Yeah, I found it easy

03:30 for my ability I suppose as a school person back then with what I'd learnt got me through all right, my maths and everything else, and you didn't or you don't need much English to be a motor mechanic as far as that goes, and French sort of doesn't come into it either. The other abilities, your tech drawing abilities and be able to read things and follow diagrams, yeah, that helps, and I think you just have that mind that can

04:00 problem sort I suppose, and shift areas around and helps you out. Yeah, I think it's probably maybe the career that I was supposed to take. I couldn't see myself being a bank person, something like that, something mundane that way, not much excitement in it. Plus it is indoors and outdoors as well, and back then it was a lot of outdoor work as well. It was quite good.

You mentioned that you'd been in a couple of quite bad car accidents...

04:30 Yeah.

when you were 18, and you said that that actually made you feel maybe invincible because you survived them? Did it have any...

Yeah, it probably made you think that way that yeah, okay, you're number's not up. See, one of them there was four of us involved in it and two guys got killed in it, and yeah, you just think well, yeah, okay, I'm lucky and two weeks before we were involved in one and there was three of us in it, and one of the guys that was in it was actually killed in the next one.

05:00 So you know, yeah, just one of those things, part of growing up and it's a thing that probably nowadays sits with me a lot. I still drive, I still drive cars fast, but, and still do my kids' things like not wearing seatbelts and stuff like that and just drive it home, any young kid I really, to me back then to know, one bloke was my work mate and another one was my sister's boyfriend actually, and

05:30 to know that there were only 18, 19 and through a stupid fault, it was a waste of life. That sticks with me and now when I go to car accidents and young kids are involved in it, or to an accident and they've walked away from it, I'm the first to read the riot act at them. Just really dress them down badly with it because they have to wake up to themselves because there's

06:00 nothing worse. Yeah, but I think it's a bit like life, it's a bit like that, you're number's up, your number's up, don't worry about it. Just keep, live life to the best of your ability and enjoy it because you never know.

All right, we'll get back to you joining the Nashos, and you were describing quite a funny scene with all the guys lined up at what you think was Victoria Barracks

06:30 **when you got called up?**

Yeah. I wouldn't be dead sure there, but it was somewhere in Sydney. I think we were given a train ticket to Sydney and you took your, they told you to bring a very limited amount of civilian clothes and

things like that, just an overnight bag, toothbrush and not much at all really that I can recall that you actually took there. The first thing they did was process you and we can recall they had these big long huts and everyone's lined up

07:00 outside, and cause you're joking with your new best friend that you've just met, you know, and all in the same boat, probably all a little bit intrepid as far as that went, but anyway we were lining up and I stripped my shirt off and you're getting these medicals and not getting told a great deal. Typical army fashion, you know, line up and queue up and we don't give a reason why you're doing this, and that's what it's been like all through the whole thing, for sure.

07:30 Anyway, you're walking through there and you're getting checked for your health and stuff like that and they're just giving you needles both arms and away you went, and some of the guys were actually passing out because they just bang, just couldn't handle the pressure, and usually the one that was making the most noise and the most jokes was the guy that hit the deck with it, but you'd straighten him up and stand him up and away you'd go. From then on we were

08:00 processed through there. Then we were split up into, and I don't know how they worked out where you were actually going, we were sent to Wagga actually later on a bus. There were several busses actually, and transported down to Wagga which you arrived late that night and you were just lobbed into rooms. You were given, you were marched, you were

08:30 moved into get outfitted out with stuff and you just lined up in the storeroom and the bloke went along and just looked you up and down and worked out you'd be that size, and just kept piling things as you went along, you got your blankets and you got clothes to wear and pyjamas and then the last thing you got was a slouch hat the bloke would just, and I recall this, the fellow was just standing over there and he'd just yell out a size and he'd just look and six and seven eighths and just spin a hat, catch it and bang and it fitted nine times

09:00 out of ten. He was quite amazing actually, just work out how big a hat you were and away you went, and the rest of your gear, there was no changing it. If you got back to your unit you had to swap it with someone else to see if it would fit.

What about your boots?

Yeah, same thing boots. They had, you wouldn't, not that fussy a fitting. You could bring them back later on but they were just thrown at you, these great big hob nail boots that were made for the Second World War. They were still issuing them out, and the same with

09:30 like our uniforms and stuff. When you looked at inside the labels on them, a lot of them were made in like 1957 and '52 and just surplus stuff that they had left over still, and the original great coat was about 1940 something I think that I got. Same with the battle dress jacket and stuff that we didn't take to Vietnam with us, that we left here because it's winter clothing and they're all made in the '50s. It was quite amazing,

10:00 surplus stuff from the Second World War and they were still doing it. It's only I think now that they've upgraded the uniform so much.

What were the boots like to walk in, the World War II boots?

They were terrible. They were really heavy clumsy boots. Your first lot of boots in Nashos were really heavy and clumsy and then your second lot of boots were a lot better. They went to a flasher style of boot which are pretty similar to what they use today actually.

10:30 They were more comfortable and you could run in them a lot better.

So you said you got handed your stuff?

Yeah, you got handed your stuff and then you were allocated like dormitory style, four to a room style accommodation, and you also were told that you had to pack your lockers a certain way, everything had to be folded neatly which to a lot of guys, and even myself, sort of used to living with Mum or home or wherever else, you just chuck

11:00 things in, and the room, the whole room got penalised if someone's was wrong, and the same with making your bed. You were shown how to make the bed and the sergeant showed you how you had to fold your socks up properly and everything had to be stacked neatly in a line and if you didn't toe the line, so a lot of us spent a lot of time doing that, but also in the meantime we had a few guys, and some of the funny things that happened, some of the blokes that we met that were in our unit,

11:30 Paul McNamara, he was a bus conductor in Sydney actually, Paul was, and he decided to do a fashion show because it was cold at Wagga and they gave you winter underwear and he was doing fashion shows up and down the hallway in his winter underwear and so everyone got in the act modelling all the latest outfits that you got. Just a bit of light humour I think just to help fellows settle in to the routine of army life and yeah, it's pretty late and I think they bounced us out of bed

12:00 5.00 o'clock in the morning, some ungodly hour. You had to be dressed, come out in your T-shirt and shorts to go running in and it started.

How did they get you out of bed?

Just yell. Yeah, a bloke walked through, he used to do, eventually got to do it yourself, you'd picket duty of a night and you'd change shift and he had a baseball bat and he'd walk through the room and start just banging the beds all the way through

- 12:30 the room, the louder the better. When it got to your turn that's what you did, just woke them up. No kiss for your mother goodnight or anything, just get out of bed, fly through the showers and get moving for the day, and most mornings started at 5.00 o'clock in the morning and with a run.

Were they cold showers?

Yeah, reasonably warm, not too bad. While we were in the middle of winter it was cold down there, but yeah, it was,

- 13:00 basic training to me was, I was reasonably fit to start so it wasn't a big hassle. We'd been skiing and stuff like that and we were in pretty good shape and it wasn't a great grind really. The discipline of getting up early and having all your room tidy, yeah, that was probably something again, and the hurry up and wait jobs, you know, they'd march you out somewhere and then you'd just wait around until someone made up their mind what to do with

- 13:30 you again, but they were determined to get fit. You did a lot of running, you ran everywhere you went as a group and looking back at it nowadays that was what it was all about, just to teach you to work as a group of people and that anyone that was a bit slack, well you helped them all the time. The weaker guys, you got behind them and kept them up with you otherwise the whole show would get penalised.

How would they penalise you?

You wouldn't be allowed to go to the boozier

- 14:00 or you'd have to do clean up duties or something like that. They'd just find something to do, or have you out on the drill ground longer just making you do drills. So whatever you could, keep the whole squad working together, the less trouble you got into really.

Do you remember any of the slackers in your group?

Oh yeah, we had a few, but still they all, we had guys there that didn't want to be there and they were

- 14:30 like whingers and stuff like that, and some guys went AWOL [AWL - Absent Without Leave] pretty well straight away, took off. A couple of Aboriginal guys went back up to Brewarrina. They brought them back.

They brought them back?

Brought them back, yeah.

Did they get punished?

Yeah, they got punishment, got time in lock up, things like that, and also like washing up duties, stuff like this, things that the army can find for you, anything demeaning to bring you down to their level again.

- 15:00 But basically most guys with out lot were pretty good. We had a pretty good unit really, all worked together pretty well. We got there in the end.

The guys that didn't want to be there, did you guys try and have a chat to them and...

Yeah, you try to have a chat. Some of them got transferred, did get shipped out because they were, they had a few problems and that with them. They probably shouldn't

- 15:30 have got through the initial evaluations I suppose. They did move them out of there. They try and keep a bit of harmony in the place, and some of them, you'd just help. The weaker guys and that you'd carry their packs for them on the runs and stuff like that and make sure that you all kept up together. Some of the guys that were a bit bigger and a bit stronger would grab the packs off the little guys and you'd run with them and you'd pass them around between you all the time

- 16:00 and keep fellows ahead of you. Yeah, but that's what it's designed to do.

To keep you, get a glue sort of happening?

Keep a group, yeah, and that's where it all starts, form that bond with blokes, and that's how the whole machine works.

So it wasn't that these guys would be ostracised like they may have been at school for not being, keeping up with the blokes?

Yeah, it works different now. You bring them up, you try and keep them in your group and

- 16:30 bring them up to speed, and even the worst malingerers, you try your hardest to keep them up there.

So is that like you're talking about mateship here?

Yeah, that's where you start a bond from. As I said, some of the guys from there we're still mates with as far as that goes, and that's throughout the army entirely. The guys I worked in Vietnam with the longest we're still mates. We keep in touch

- 17:00 with each other. Mightn't be every year but there's always a card or something. Every couple of years or three or four years we try and get together and see who's still doing what. All keep tabs on who's about and who's died or who hasn't. Who's still married, who's not and who's psycho.

We'll talk about that later. Did you, while you were in the Nashos in Wagga, did it ever cross your mind that you'd rather be working on cars back in Condobolin?

Not really, no. It was

- 17:30 good fun. As much as it was hard work the best parts I still remember as just having a good time there, having fun with the boys and getting into mischief as you do. A lot of platoon rivalry between the different companies for sure. You're all on different floor levels. Like there's A, B, C, and D companies like all the way up and down the floors. There'd be nothing better to have one unit have all their gear ready for inspection

- 18:00 and then go and trash it all. They'd do it to you. Get involved in water fights where you used the hose reels out of the whole thing and have water running from the top floor down to the bottom floor and have it all cleaned up by the morning. Part of life, part of growing up, part of having a good time with them.

Did that get you into trouble for doing those shenanigans?

Oh yeah, you would. Someone would be out there doing drill. Someone had to get the blame, someone along the line, so it used to happen. But that was just it, if you

- 18:30 started a raid on one room, it was on. Away you went with it.

So you'd turn, mess up all their clothes?

It was just one of those things. They'd do it to you so you'd do it back to them. If they ended up out on the parade ground, well you'd end up there with them, and I think our sergeants and stuff like that and our lieutenants that looked after us that was just expected, and it was just one way of letting off steam sometimes with guys. As much as they probably frowned upon it, I think it was sort of looked upon it as a bit of as the same thing, a bit of rivalry between the different

- 19:00 platoons, because you always strived to be faster than the next group. Nothing better to try and get that coveted trophy being the best platoon on march out day, and I think it's just the army way of life of getting people to their peak performance, is a bit of rivalry and doesn't hurt.

And if you were the best platoon for the day would you get any special privileges?

Yeah, sometimes you would. You'd get some time on and leave, a couple of days off.

- 19:30 And for the first, I think it's six weeks, no, we were there six weeks, it must've been about the first three weeks, you weren't allowed out in town, in Wagga itself. You used to be on base, confined to base pretty well.

Why is that?

Just get you into the way of army life, that's all. Just to get your discipline organised and then you're allowed out on leave. A lot of hotels in Wagga you were banned from because they had an air force base there as well

- 20:00 and the army navy guys, air force guys, rivalry. You get into blues and fights so you had to stay in one pub and they would drink in the other.

Really?

Yeah, that was the trend there. You weren't allowed in the RSL Club. Even being in the army we weren't allowed in there.

Why?

They had fights in there apparently with them and stuff like that. I went to the RSL cause I was a member here and have been since I was 18, and still am, and I've gone there and the guys wanted to kick us out, and I said, "Well, I'm a

- 20:30 member of another RSL Club," and right or wrong, "You're still in the army here but, and we don't let recruits come in here." "Why?" "They cause too much trouble." But that's the way it was.

Would you be in civvies [civilian clothes] or would you have a uniform?

No, you had to wear a uniform, with a short hair cut, so you couldn't. I had friends in Wagga cause I used to go their skiing years ago, and I used to go to their place and get changed into civvies which was

highly irregular, but still you couldn't be mistaken, you had a short haircut so they knew where you were.

21:00 But it was just a bit more comfortable to go to the boat club there and I used to still ski and things like that. It was just a bit more easy for me to go out with them, so we used to just keep a change of clothes at their place and just go and get changed.

Would you be penalised for that back at base?

If I got caught I would've been. Yeah, I would've been doing KP [Kitchen Police] or doing marches around the parade ground for the fun of it.

Was there much of a drinking culture established when you were at Nashos?

Not, no, probably not. I think, mainly for sure,

21:30 We'd go and have a beer for sure but you were only allowed two beers a man at a time. So you had to line up and you had a ticket system and I think there was a limit on tickets, but I really can't recall it now but I think there was, but most morning you were up running again so you could afford to have a few beers because your fitness level was so good you would be too badly off. You'd survive all right, and it wasn't, nights like my 21st and stuff like that, yeah, we probably had a big night out,

22:00 but that was just a one off thing. The rest of the time we'd only go for a couple of beers and I think mainly cause a lot of us were just fitness wise, and also you were so tired and doing stuff at your barracks to keep them clean and polishing floors and everything else in the place to keep it clean, your boots and stuff like that. Everything had to be spotless, your brass and all that sort of stuff for your march out and your belts, army spit and polish brigade.

22:30 **You mentioned the ticket system, what was that? Did you not have cash?**

Yeah, but you bought so many beer tickets and I think there must've been a quota cause that's all you were allowed to have, and you were only allowed to get two at a time actually, pick up two beers at a time. So you couldn't get into a, I don't know if it was to stop blokes from getting into big shouts or whatever. I don't know what the theory was on the game there. I had my 21st there and they fed me enough beer anyway, the boys. I didn't have any worries.

So they gave you their tickets,

23:00 **did they?**

Yeah, they gave me their tickets. They'd get the beers and I'd have the second one and just sat there and drank them. There was a bit of a difference.

What was the pub called that you were allowed, that you used to go to?

It's on base, the OR [Other Ranks] boozer [pub], I can't, I think it might be the Peter Badcoe Canteen [Peter Badcoe Club, a soldiers' club in Vietnam] I think. I'm not dead sure.

So you didn't go to the pubs outside of Wagga, you drank on base?

No, not initially we drank on base. It wasn't, you were only allowed

23:30 out to pubs in Wagga after a while on weekend leave and then sometimes you'd only get day leave, one day, you'd be allowed out then and you had to be in by 11.00 o'clock or 12.00 o'clock at night, back in base again. So you were only allowed out a short time.

So how long did it take before they'd let you out into Wagga?

I think in three to four weeks.

So it was at three to four week, yeah?

Yeah, about, before we were allowed out there and you did six weeks there altogether.

Six weeks?

Six weeks

24:00 I think, or 10 weeks. It might be 10 weeks. Sorry, I think it's 10 weeks basic training.

Did they kick some blokes out cause they weren't just going to make it in Nashos?

They possibly did. We didn't have any from our unit that I can recall. I think some guys would've been, would've got out of there because of some reason or other. Either physically they couldn't make it I suppose

24:30 because it's pretty demanding, the initial stuff anyway. If you get through basic training you're right. After that it's pretty easy.

Why do you say that?

It's the hardest part, first bit of basic training, and once you get fitness up it's not too bad. It depends on what unit you go to whether you work on it or not. Infantry guys, they've got to keep working on their fitness pretty well. Us blokes, we used to drive everywhere. Just jump in a carrier and drive it, so there wasn't much walking involved.

25:00 So it wasn't too bad that way.

So can you walk us through a typical day? Like what, you get up at 5.00 o'clock?

Yeah, get up at 5.00. They'd fire you off to a run some mornings. Then you'd come back and have breakfast.

What would that be?

Pretty well whatever you wanted to try and eat in the place. Typical army food, bacon and eggs cooked badly and cereals and juice and all that. They had a big mess hall and you'd just sort of thunder into there and grab something to it. Then you'd come back

25:30 and then you'd get changed into a uniform and you'd spend the day doing drills, learning to march, formation stuff. Then you might go to weapons training for the day. You'd eventually get a rifle and for the first part of it they just teach you how to dismantle it, clean it, look after it, live with it.

What kind of rifle did they issue?

Had an SLR [Self Loading Rifle], which was still

26:00 a pretty good thing going in those days, 7.62 millimetre, but that's what you were issued with to start with and you were taught to live with it and it's your best friend, don't drop it, don't do this to it and if you happen to drop it or anything like that on the ground, they'd make you do push-ups over it and kiss it and say, "I love my rifle." Yeah, don't ever call it a gun and things like this, a few little things they instilled into you, but yeah, you did, and at the end of the day if they had you out crawling through the mud with it and everything

26:30 else, you'd have to wash it and clean it again and get it back spotless and they'd come and inspect it, and I suppose it all comes down to your life depends on it eventually. Learn to look after things and look after it, but then you'd you do that, you'd do a bit of classroom work sometimes on tactics and things like that, more running.

Jungle?

Not so much that, but they'd give you stories of what's happening over, what was happening overseas,

27:00 what to expect, a bit on tactic work, what they're doing, but mainly just fitness. They'd run you everywhere you wanted to go. You'd spend a lot of time at the gym, our gymnasium there. You'd go to there, spend a 40 minute session there. Then they'd send you for a run after a 40 minute session there. Then you'd be back on the parade ground dressed back in your gear, full kitted out parade ground, spend an hour or two march around the

27:30 drill grounds. Get a break for lunch, half an hour and sometimes if they'd send you on a 20 mile march or something like that, you'd have lunch out on the road. It all works up to the end of the day you're super fit and they march you I think it's 30 odd miles or something like that and you've got to try and do it in record time to beat the other guys. So pretty full on flat out, but after a while you can do it standing on your head.

With the tactic,

28:00 **the lessons in tactics you said that you were getting told a little bit what was going on overseas. What exactly was that?**

It's only on how the guerilla warfare was happening and things like that, and how these people were like trying to fight us as in ambush things, scenarios and things like that. They'd try and teach you how, what the army was doing

28:30 ambush-wise. How to run them and how to do them.

Were they referring specifically to Vietnam when they were talking about this?

No, just general army tactics, Australian Army tactics and that more than anything.

Would they use examples from different conflicts to talk about?

Mainly Second World War stuff, yeah, with it, but we had instructors that were like Vietnam Vets [veterans] that had just come back from over there and things like that, and they were probably the best for you to talk to

29:00 or to instruct you because they knew what was going on, what was happening and how to instruct you more than anything.

Did you talk to any of those instructors about Vietnam?

Yeah, some of the guys, yeah.

Do you remember what you were interested in asking them?

No, not really. No, not overly, just, they were quite willing to tell you stories all the time. They'd get off on a tangent, how good they were, stuff like that. Just part of life.

At that stage did you have in your mind that you would be signing up to go to Vietnam?

Yes.

29:30 No, we had that sorted. We were definitely going to go there.

At what point, when did that happen? When did you actually sign that piece of paper?

Probably not long after we were in there actually you sign up to go there, and it wasn't even an issue what unit we were with at that stage either. You just signed up and we'll do that.

How did that happen? Did they just call you in one day and put a piece of paper in front of you?

I can't recall. Most of it is

30:00 like that though. Just one on one stuff and it's probably during the interview to find out what you want to do for a trade while you're in the army. You know, what you wanted to do, because they did ask you that, what you were qualified as to start with. A lot of us found, a lot of National Service guys were qualified education-wise, stuff like that, you were marked for officer's training if you wanted to, or if you already had a specific field they

30:30 looked at that favourably to where you wanted to go to. If you were already like myself, a qualified mechanic, well they were pretty keen to get you into, instead of putting you into the infantry where you were a bit of a waste for your talents, they did look at that as well and just give you some choices from there, not saying that you'd get the choice, but you'd list a couple of choices to what you wanted to do, because it depended on the vacancies they had in different areas where they wanted to fill up.

What choices did you list?

31:00 Engineers to start with. Engineers and RAEME mechanics like tanks and stuff like that. I think the last might've been infantry if I remember rightly.

What was number one choice?

Engineers, yeah. It was just similar to what we were already doing with it.

Were you doing any mechanical work while you were training in Wagga?

No, just full on recruit training, that's all. Basic training, learn to handle your weapons, learn to march properly and

31:30 obey people without question.

And your other mates there, did they all sign up as well to go to Vietnam?

Yeah, most of the guys that I can recall, yeah. They signed up pretty well. I didn't run into any of them over there I don't think, out of that group. Not that I know of anyway.

And was there much talk amongst yourselves about Vietnam?

No, not really. I think most of us were just,

32:00 more about what was happening the days events, what we were gonna try and do on the weekend and just general horseplay between blokes and mates more than anything. There wasn't that much, yeah, I don't think there was really any discussion what's happening overseas. You know, you're gonna get hurt over there or whatever. I don't think it sort of crossed anyone's mind really.

So once you signed up and knew you were going, you put your name down to go to Vietnam, you didn't sort of read any more, did you

32:30 **read any more papers to find out what's going on here?**

No, not really, no. You just carry on with your training. Eventually after we finished at Wagga and had a march out parade there we got a posting to Bandiana which is a corps, a posting into corps training which then I still had a choice of three different facets of the mechanics, like RAEME, which is Royal Australian Electrical Mechanical Engineers, which is the unit I'd been drafted to, and still had a choice of

33:00 three different fields in amongst that as well. We looked at them and I looked at Centurion tanks and I thought they were too big and didn't want to be working on that stuff, and A vehicles which were just

Land Rovers and all that. I'd already done a lifetime on them, and we looked at some personnel carriers and 113A's and thought they're a bit exiting, something new, we'll do that. So yeah, we put our name in for that and got accepted into the course.

- 33:30 Previous to that they shipped me to Bandiana and the course didn't start for two weeks, so I spent two weeks working just as an instructor with the, on the A vehicle course instructing the group that was already going through on how to work on Land Rovers and could've just stayed there as a career because I knew so much about them and stuff like that. Could've just had a posting spot on there, but to me it was just going to be pretty boring.

More of the same?

Just the same,

- 34:00 yeah. Anyway, we opted out of that and yeah, but could've stayed there pretty easy and never gone anywhere else.

So you were there to do the course on personnel carriers?

Yeah, I'd gone there to do a personnel carrier course and it's mainly, you don't do, you still do a bit of running but not as much. It's mainly just learn about how these things work and how to repair them in the field and basically strip them down to nothing and rebuild them, and go again on the engines, everything

- 34:30 about them. I think it's about three months actually there. I'm not dead sure on that but something like that I think, we spent there at Bandiana.

So what was it about personnel carriers that were different?

They were just something new to me. Well, the old tanks had been around, sense of being around. We did a bit of work on them as well while we were there. We did both types of vehicles and that, but

- 35:00 they'd been around for 100 years and to me they were just smelly, noisy and just didn't look like much fun. I think some of the guys I know that did go and work on them, yeah, pretty horrific stories at working on the damn things. They were around in the Second World War. Yeah, you'd lose spanners down in the hole and you'd never see them again, never get them back out until they pulled the engine out, where the carriers were a lot lighter and a lot better and a bit of fun to drive, they were as well.

What

- 35:30 **was different about the personnel carriers? What were some of the quirks of the engine that you had to learn, that you needed three months training?**

Not so much the quirks on it, but how the whole show worked itself. What made them tick. The motors were just V6 GM [General Motors] diesels which we'd had a little bit to do with already, and Alston Autos, you know, the transmissions in them and they were still pretty simple, but just the other mechanicals about it, you know, it had a lot of little,

- 36:00 yeah, just to dismantle the road wheels on them, just to be able to pull them apart under pressure. They just drill you in things so much that you can nearly do it blindfolded, and that's their idea, that you know them like the back of your hand. If you need to troubleshoot them you know what to look for and where to go. But even the amount of time we did there, even when you get overseas it's a little bit different again, different pressure, different way to do

- 36:30 things and you learn a lot more. You always learn, you never stop learning about them.

How did they put you under pressure when you were there doing that training?

Mainly give you a timeframe to put them back together. Like pull them apart and put them together. The same with engines and stuff like that, sort of so you know, pull the front drive shaft out of them or a front diff [differential] clean out of them and put it all back in again, and you try and do it. "Oh, so and so did that last time and the last lot under a certain

- 37:00 amount of time. You blokes can do it quicker than that." So you just learn to do things like that.

And they were still trying to keep your fitness up when you were there as well?

Yeah, oh yeah, but not as regimented and that, a little bit your own personal thing, but still did a bit of group running, but not as much because you were in a unit then, it didn't really matter. As long as your other skills were brought up to speed more than anything with it.

And what were the blokes like that were on your course with

- 37:30 **you?**

Pretty good, we got on pretty well with them actually. Ironically, none of them got a posting to my unit that I went to. I don't know where they all got to actually. It's quite surprising. Even there were some at Holsworthy when I got posted there, some of the guys were there but some didn't come across with us, come over later. Yeah, I don't know what happened to most of the guys.

38:00 **Were they from bush boys or were they**

A bit all around the place and that, yeah. Down there, I knew people in Albury as well and I used to take off weekends to myself and go water skiing and stuff like that with them. I didn't associate that much after hours with a lot of the guys really. You know, get away from it for a while and away we'd go. We went ski racing there, the Bridge to Bridge actually. Had time off one weekend, took off, went up to Sydney, raced, took off again

38:30 in the middle of it all.

Were you missing skiing?

Missing the sport side of it, yeah. We played footy in the army and that as well, a bit of a game with the guys there. That was a bit like everything, they'd ask you what you played for sport, and if you got on well with the sergeant and said you played Aussie Rules [football] and that was his favourite sport, you played it. Get in good with your company sergeant.

Did you find you

39:00 **mixed in well with the blokes?**

Yeah, I think we mixed in pretty well with guys. I think I'm reasonably easy to get along with.

So after that three months training, where did you go next?

I got a posting from Bandiana back to Holsworthy in Sydney and that's where the unit, A Squadron 3rd Co-Regiment, that's where a posting to there and that just became our permanent base for a while. Like had a barracks and that there

39:30 with three or four guys to a room. Not as regimented but still pretty good. Still had parades of a morning and stuff like that every morning. You had to turn out in your overalls and everything nice and clean which is pretty hard for mechanics, and the CO [Commanding Officer] there was always saying that all the time, "You grotty lot of blokes. I wouldn't have to have you, you can't be like our tanker guys, all pristine all the time." But that's they way mechanics went. Yeah, we used

40:00 to turnout, but we'd just work there the same things. Still working on carriers. We used to send, they'd have training operations with carriers which they'd send up to Queensland and we'd send a whole troop up there, or send guys up to Singleton.

You'd go up with them?

Yeah, we'd go up with them and just operate with them the same. You'd do ambushes in the field, just practise like that, and you'd work on the carriers if they'd break down while you were up there, just do a bit of work and keep them going.

How would they orchestrate an ambush?

How would they orchestrate it?

40:30 **Yeah. How would it be organised to simulate what was actually going to happen to you while you were in Vietnam perhaps?**

Well, they'd have the infantry guys walk into it for you. They'd just show you how to do it in practical terms, like how to hid your carriers in the bush and how you park them herringbone fashion, like fish bone, just park one way one direction so you're all covering each other all the time and stuff like that. Then do circles with them and in groups, you back into groups of three.

41:00 You always back in doors first so everything was always out. You had a field of fire all the time. The teacher set it up on little tracks and just basic stuff that you need to know when you get over there. They'd have infantry guys come along and set them off on you. You'd work with them as well and do set ups, or they'd have blokes dressed up as Vietnamese and they'd come around and set up the ambushes for you either overnight or during the day, whatever the period of time.

41:30 You learn different things. Do a lot of weapon firing and personal weapons, plus the carriers learn to operate all the guns that used to operate on them.

What kind of guns were they using then?

We had a 50 calibre machine gun on ours, which is a really big flug, and personal gear, had an SLR still. In Vietnam I carried a sidearm as well mainly because it was easier for us to work a lot of times and carry a sidearm than it was to carry around a rifle

42:00 all the time.

Were you thriving in...

Tape 4

- 00:33 **All right Michael, I just want to touch on a couple of little bits and pieces before we begin moving along. Can you recall what was happening to you the day that you watched man walk on the moon for the first time?**
- Yeah, I was actually working in the sergeants' mess. It was my, you have duties there and you could either draw, you might be lucky enough to draw the kitchen mess
- 01:00 or something like that, and I was lucky enough to draw the sergeants' mess. So I was only up there just cleaning up in the sergeants' mess and got to sit down and watch it on TV even that day. Still in the army, but that's where I was, and I was also turning 21 that day as well. So it's sort of etched in my mind pretty well. Even though it was the 20th in the [United] States, it was the 21st out here. Yeah.
- It was a big day all around?**
- Yeah, a big day all around actually.
- And if you hadn't have had that job in the**
- 01:30 **mess you would've missed out on seeing it, the whole thing?**
- No, yeah, wouldn't have seen it, no, that's right. Yeah, wouldn't have seen it until the news that night maybe, but saw it as it was actually all happening.
- Thinking back to the training that you did before you went to Vietnam, can you think of one particularly good horseplay sort of a story that you were in the middle of? Any particular bit of mischief that's worth retelling?**
- 02:00 Not any particular bits, but probably all the way along there's always someone acting the goat or doing something silly, and mainly at recruit camp where blokes there get dressed up in all different parts of the uniform and parade around the place instead of it all matching up, and the water fights you have in the place with the guys and stuff like that. Yeah, I suppose like a great bunch of kids playing up more than anything, and you set, sometimes go along and even still do it, set
- 02:30 beds up so they collapse when the guys get into it or short sheet beds. That was pretty standard practise back in those days to do that, or to be real mean to a bloke, you'd just tip all his locker upside down and make him repack it before they got inspected and that. That was a pretty mean thing to do but it happened every now and then. A lot of short sheeting beds went on and balanced the bed so they collapsed every time you'd go to get into them. Just pranks, probably schoolboy pranks and that
- 03:00 as well, still carried on with it really.
- Can you just tell me again who you got posted with when you went to Holsworthy?**
- To A Squadron 3rd Co Regiment and RAEME, what we call RAEME attached to them, light aid detachment. It's sort of, you're still part of the tank unit but you're, instead of being armoured corps, you're actually RAEME attached to armed corps and if you're
- 03:30 attached to that unit well you still refer to yourself as RAEME attached. A Squadron 3rd Co Regiment is still my regiment, but RAEME attached, and that's what would show up on all the records and that as RAEME attached, LAD member, which is just Light Aid Detachment, which is a sort of forward base workshop. We do minor to major repairs and anything after that gets sent back, back to Australia or back to Vung Tau to a bigger, different work, bigger
- 04:00 workplace and that with it, but essentially that's what you were, just sort of get them going in the field, keep them going and if you can't repair it ship it out of the field back to where it can be repaired.
- The personnel carriers that you were working on, was there just a standard model at that stage in the army?**
- Yeah, they were. Just basically they were still doing development on them. Just a standard Made In America M113As I think their correct
- 04:30 name with them. They weighed about 12 tonne. When they were at top speed around about 45 miles an hour or a bit better, some would if you jiggled the governors on them. They'd carry, most of the ones would carry twin 30 calibre machine guns on them. Also fitted out with mortar tracks as a mortar and usually you had a driver and a crew commander and usually one offsider on some of them, and then you'd pick up infantry guys and carry them. They'd either sit
- 05:00 in or inside them or on the outside. They'd affectionately call them the Green Cab Company over there cause the green, get a taxi everywhere, give the 'grunts' a ride if they want to go somewhere and, which the infantry guys are affectionately known as a 'grunt', you call them. No, they were a good thing to work on, they were good fun. We had three of our fitter's tracks which were all fitted out. They were a bit heavier, but they were fitted out with a Hiab crane and
- 05:30 oxy [oxyacetylene] gear [for welding] and you'd carry all your tools and array of spare parts inside

them, and they were fitted with 50 calibre machine guns on them, and normally if they sent the troop out as 20 or 30 carriage you'd send one personnel carrier, one of ours, with them, then two mechanics, one as the crew commander and one as the driver and you'd just work on them in the field if something went wrong, just a minor problem. Anything major, you'd try and ship them back out. If one hit a

06:00 landmine while we were out there, well, if it was only minor damage we'd repair it on the spot. Get the parts flown in if we needed to with it, and if it was too big, major repair, it had blown an engine or something then we'd get it trucked out of there. Get a truck in and ship out or tow it out sometimes. We'd tow it back to where you could safely get access a bit better.

Officially how many grunts were you meant to be able to fit inside?

06:30 You'd get probably eight to ten in them. Stack them in there.

Is the idea that they stand or is there any seating?

No, there's seating along, seats along the side and that, but most of the time they'd sit up on the top and that. Really just perch up on top of the carrier and that.

Were there any particular handles or anything for that purpose or you just improvised?

Yeah, just improvise. Just sit on top of the ammunition boxes or whatever else was up there with it. So like riding around on a pile high explosive

07:00 sometimes with it. Yeah, a lot of times we'd just move them there. We also moved the SAS [Special Air Service] guys, Special Service guys. We'd do operations with them sometimes. We'd move them around too, but then you'd only have, you might have 10 or 15 carriers, but you'd probably have eight or 10 SAS guys and they'd be scattered between all the different carriers and they'd just jump off when they felt like it, and they'd get back on the same way. They'd just climb back on again when they felt like it. Frighten the shit out of you.

07:30 They were pretty good.

We'll took a bit more about those mystery men in a little while. So, in the driving compartment, how many abreast could you sit?

Only sat one in the driver's seat and you steered with a set of steering tillers. They didn't have a steering wheel or anything like that, just had an accelerator and they were automatic, so you'd just auto shift into them and used to steer them by pulling the steering tiller left or right and it would lock

08:00 the wheels up and make it turn whichever way. It took a bit of skill to drive them actually. You'd do a lot of training cause you had to learn to drive them following one behind the other exactly because of landmines. If you got a bit off course and triggered a landmine, well you know, if you were the fifth carrier back and ran over a landmine your driver's normally at error. It's always the first guy that's going to get it. Most of the time you learn to drive them so they sit spot on behind each other especially going down the

08:30 dirt roads and that. They can track each other pretty well. There's only one set of pads being laid down all the time. It takes a bit of skill to do that really.

What was the thinking behind having levers rather than a steering wheel?

I think it's just the way they're built with a track system on them. Yeah, I'm not sure what the set up with that. They'd been around in America for, the Yanks [Americans] had had them for quite a few years. They put heavier body armour on them, the Australians

09:00 did, because the landmines had blown them up and penetrated the whole. So there was a fitment went through there and it started just as I got there of fitting this thicker body armour underneath the bottom of the plate to try and stop the landmine damage with them, and also we were having a lot of trouble with the drivers and that breaking their left ankle all the time from it, from the landmine explosions. So we put a collapsible, made up collapsible foot rests for them so it wouldn't collapse as much. It would take a bit more

09:30 out of it. We found that was a bit of a common injury, broken left foot, and that's what it was. But then after a while we started to look into it a bit better and it was actually from the guys not putting their foot on their rests at all. They were sitting up on top of the swanson alongside them and resting their arm and wanting to drive it and say getting the full brunt of the blast. Break a leg or break a kneecap. Just a concussion of them, yeah.

And from a wheel point of view, did they have a combination of wheels and tracks?

Yeah, had wheels and tracks and torsion bar suspension on them.

10:00 It was quite common for them to throw a track off and then you'd have to go to the trouble of getting it back on or if they hit a landmine they'd blow the track off, and the same thing, you'd have replacement tracks there to put on, and if they lost a road wheel, the same, we'd carry replacement road wheels and we'd just repair them on the spot. They were pretty easy to do so you'd redo them, and you'd do a torsion bar, if you broke a torsion bar you'd change them on the spot as well. Used to carry quite a few

torsion bars with us because it was one of the things they used to break all the time.

- 10:30 They had six or eight wheels I think down either side. I should remember things like that, shouldn't I? Something like that.

How many torsion bars would you have to carry?

One on each. We'd just carry four torsion bars and each would nearly carry another one anyway. Yeah, we actually ran out of torsion bars at one stage of the game and went up to the Yank base up near Saigon and bought a lot of them off the Yanks. Went through their carriers because they used to just, where we'd repair all ours, they used to just trash them and get

- 11:00 another one. They had this big yard full of them. Bought stacks of them and a whole heap of gear for a couple of cartons of beer. Horse trade. You couldn't get them through the Australian suppliers. It was one of those things.

Can you think of any other technical aspects of the vehicle that we haven't touched on yet that might be relevant or interesting?

Oh, well they were Allison, super charged Allison, sorry, they were a GM

- 11:30 motor and that in them that was super charged and they ran an Allison three speed auto transmission and that on them, and some of them we used to, or the ones that we had because they were a little bit heavier we used to spike the governors on them and get them going a bit harder so you could drive them a bit quicker and keep up with the guys on the road, run along a lot better. Yeah, torsion bar suspension, they weighed 12 tonne which is pretty good. They will float. You could actually swim them if you were

- 12:00 really careful in them, but they have sunk a few over the years in the rivers and stuff like that. They'd take a hit from an ordinary rifle bullet and wouldn't penetrate them. You could punch them into them pretty well, but RPG [Rocket Propelled Grenade] rockets used to play havoc with them. They'd sink them through them and hit the fuel cells in them and make a bit of a mess in there, or sometimes they'd just get in there and bounce around inside and fragment up inside them, burn a whole through them. We had one there that took an RPG in through the front

- 12:30 and actually split the engine block in half on it. So they hit pretty hard really. Didn't hurt anyone on board except a bruised shoulder for the driver and deafness which usually goes with an explosion on board a carrier most of the time with it, cause you're issued with driving helmets but most guys just wear a beret and a pair of sunglasses. The driver's helmet would sit in the back somewhere out of the way. See the new blokes wearing them but most of the old blokes there would get rid of them and wear your favourite beret with your sunnies [sunglasses]

- 13:00 and your headset over the top of them. So yeah.

What sort of an average speed would you manage in them?

They'd run 45 mile an hour. Most of the time we'd probably run them about 40. Unless you were coming home somewhere down the highway you'd tend to string them out and get them going pretty well. I've seen like 58 mile an hour in one actually, which is really clacking along on its set of tracks. They were fun to drive.

- 13:30 **You became pretty attached to them?**

Oh yeah, they're a good machine.

You mentioned that apart from your SLR you were issued with a sidearm that you would be using eventually when you got to Vietnam. What was the sidearm?

I had a 9 mil [millimetre] Brownie [Browning machine gun] that we just, that we used to, mainly cause we worked so much without a weapon near us and that, we

- 14:00 had a sidearm in just a holster and used to had our own holster with it so you always had a weapon with you. A few of us carried them, not all of us, but some guys carried them and it just made it a bit easier, especially if you jumped out of your carrier sometimes, saved you going back. So you always had a bit of protection with you.

Did you tend to have yours on much of the time?

Yeah, when we were out in the bush, not around Nui Dat but, we never did. Out in the bush working or in the field, yeah, always carried it with me pretty well. A couple

- 14:30 of things you get attached to I suppose.

When you were still at Holsworthy I believe that you participated in the Bridge to Bridge and were successful?

Yeah, in '69 we actually went and raced, just a break from training and that. Took off and went and skied with a crew from Albury in the Bridge to Bridge ski race and one our class there, sort of fly up, compete in it and then race back to,

15:00 go back to work again the next day. Just one of the things we did while we were still in there.

Nice change of pace?

Yeah, after that we raced in it 13 times I think over the years, and for not that many wins after that either really. A few seconds and thirds but wins are a bit hard to come by now. Just the luck of the day.

So after Holsworthy, what happened then?

This friend

15:30 had, we did a few operations here and there in Singleton and stuff like that and then we, then they give us a posting to go overseas so they shipped us off to Canungra which is the jungle training centre and I think we had three weeks at Canungra actually which they just, you run everywhere and learn more tactics up there. It's all set up like you'd be in Vietnam and you act like,

16:00 you work it as just that your infantry. Over there you learnt to map read a lot better, you know, find your way around. They send you off on hikes and stuff like that with only a compass and map to find all these points around the area. Everywhere you go at Canungra is uphill. There never seemed to be a downhill place. It's uphill and it's muddy. It was pretty hell on wheels actually. It was quite amazing the set up you go to and they reckon if you survive there you'll be right, you'll survive anywhere, and the same thing, you run in

16:30 groups all the time and try and carry the other guys. Keep all the weak blokes up with you or vice versa, just run in a group. Yeah, just a bit more, a lot, well as I say, a lot more, they have live fire up there where they shoot live bullets over the top of you so you know what the hell, get used to it, make you crawl on the ground and fire live ammunition and stuff like that, just so you know what the noise sounds like whistling over your head and also set off a lot more

17:00 mines and a lot more explosions. It'd give you the feel of like a simulated battle so when it does happen you're probably a little bit more aware of it.

Was that effective?

No, it doesn't really. It doesn't equate to the real thing. It is a little bit, but to me, you know, like when it does happen it happens so quick and it's all over so fast as well, yeah. If you're not really

17:30 lively I suppose. All the fire fights in Vietnam were pretty, not too many were sustained for too long. There was no days, anything went on for days anyway. Usually all over in a matter of seconds if not minutes. You know, 40 minutes probably some of the longest what I've read about and recall anyway, yeah. Some of our engagements were all over in a matter of seconds. Just bang, all over in 30 seconds, a minute.

18:00 Hit and run and gone again.

So the training was essentially jungle training. Had they specifically tailored stuff for Vietnam or was it still in more general terms?

No, it's probably more to Vietnam, more jungle warfare cause that's what you were going into, the situation where it was and it was, yeah, it's a bit not unlike it either up at

18:30 Canungra, a lot of dense growth and stuff like that and the humidity is getting up there with it pretty well as far as that goes. A bit of rain while you're up there. It's mainly I think doing the long days, the fatigue factor there, you go into that as well and no alcohol as well. Pretty hard days really and a lot more live firing.

19:00 You get to know your weapon a lot better and use it a lot more. I suppose getting pop up targets where you get first nature reaction so it becomes instinctive after a while not to hesitate too much.

Were they briefing you on the specifics of the Vietnam geography and the particular challenges of Vietnam's

19:30 **jungles?**

Yeah, a little bit on it. Mainly probably to be wary where you're walking in the jungle and stuff like that, what to look for all the time and as far as, you know, to be on your guard a lot of the time, booby trap type scenarios, stuff like that. Mainly they're a bit smarter than what you think they are, the enemy

20:00 for sure, but not, yeah, mainly down that line of it really. Nothing really specific but it was orientated towards that, yeah.

Would they sort of say, "Look, this is the way the Viet Cong tend to run an ambush. This is the type of weapon they're using." Would they get into that sort of stuff?

Yeah, we had a bit of that for sure, what they use. They can use anything you leave laying around, they'll pick it up and use it,

- 20:30 spent cartridge cases, anything at all that you, bits of wire even if you leave electrical wire. Anything like that if we're working in the field, pick it up, bring it home with you, don't leave it. Cunning as far as that went. You know, like they've been fighting a war for 50 years so they'd learnt a fair bit over that time. They beat the French, beat the Yanks as well, yeah. Bit ironic really, but still
- 21:00 blokes just doing, not too many of them, and just doing ambushes, and I think the Australian guys probably learnt a lot out of it as well, but that's the main thing, mainly booby traps, their underground systems, how good they are at digging them, what to go looking for all the time, be careful about what you drop into. We didn't do much of that but mainly the sappers that you have with you, the engineers, that was their game to learn all that more than anything, but you still had
- 21:30 to be aware of what went on. Even though we were going over there as a mechanic we were still in a forward situation so we had to know what was happening and how to survive I suppose.
- And did they brief you into more of the specifics of the political situation behind the conflict, the state of the war at that point, anything like that?**
- No, not that I can recall at all. Mainly what
- 22:00 you probably read about later. I'm probably more aware of it now, the political side, than what I was back then and I don't think we had anything on that. It was mainly just tactics and staying alive over there more than anything.
- By the time you got to the end of that part of the training you must've been pretty toughened up, pretty fit?**
- Yeah, we were pretty fit actually, weren't too bad. We were sent back to our unit again and
- 22:30 then just to wait a conformation date for posting overseas, and just did another few operations, training operations here and there with the unit, but mainly sent back and got a posting date and we were allowed to leave beforehand. Then back on the plane out of there.
- Were you feeling like you were trained well enough or did you feel like you were prepared and ready to go?**
- I think so,
- 23:00 for what I was doing anyway. I was there as a mechanic. I think our skills were good enough at that stage of the game of it.
- How were you going with the shooting side of things?**
- Yeah, no, all right, been a marksman from when I was a kid from here shooting rabbits. That part was pretty easy. Actually that's something that can get you into trouble, if you're that good a shot they make you infantry. Target range at Wagga, when we were there target shooting, we used to just, you'd
- 23:30 deliberately put them on someone else's target sometimes just for the fun of it. They were looking for the best shots. A lot of country blokes were a bit like that sometimes, have a bit of a play.
- So the country background was a bonus as far as some of your skills were concerned?**
- I think so and I think for a lot of guys there. Definitely coming from the country you're probably a bit wiser. Like guys that come off the land and stuff like that, they'd already been around guns, it wasn't knew
- 24:00 cause they would've been shooting their old man's .303 back in those days. I'd been target rifle shooting back in those days so it wouldn't have worried too much at all, whereas city guys probably fresh out, it would be a pretty new experience to a lot of them really. I think it's easier for country guys probably to adapt to the situation.
- Did the country guys used to tease the city slickers a bit as far as being pretty green when it comes to being able to do it tough and be able to shoot a rifle and that sort of stuff?**
- No, not
- 24:30 really. You'd probably, more the regular soldiers than anything, get stuck into them. The saying was they were in there because they couldn't get a job. We were in there to do a job. Called us up to do a job. So that used to always be a bit of rivalry between Nashos and Regs [Regular soldiers] as they call them.
- And you were training alongside the Regs at that stage?**
- Yeah, training alongside them
- 25:00 and that as well. No problem at all, although most of our first lot were probably all Nashos with it but once we got into doing courses with RAEME and stuff like that, you had regular soldiers in there that were doing different groups and some of our, a lot of our guys that we were with, you know, a lot of Nashos, but still had regular soldiers in our unit, in RAEME training. Most of the senior guys were

regular soldiers.

25:30 **Did the regulars like to think that they were superior to you blokes?**

Not really, most of our guys were pretty good. We got on pretty well with each other really. Well it was only a small unit anyway, maximum probably 25, 30 blokes, 13 mechanics, so you really had to get on with each other. When you're living with each other pretty well all the time, you know, there wasn't too much privacy as far as after hours and stuff like that and you only had a little cubicle to sleep in

26:00 and listen to the same music together, drink together, sort of hanging around all the time so you couldn't have too many personal conflicts with anyone really.

If 13 of the group were mechanics what were the rest of the group comprised of?

We had mechanics. Then we had two armourers and they used to look after all the weapons on all the carriers. Any breakdowns or anything like that, any malfunctions, they'd strip them

26:30 and check them, and all your personal weapons. If you couldn't fix them they'd repair them and do mods [modification] to them and stuff like that, and we had radio technicians that used to keep all the radios operating. The same thing, they were always flat out. They were called Faradays actually. That was the nickname for those guys. Had storepersons, had two people in the storeroom and they'd, if you working on a carrier you had a big job sheet and you'd write out a list of parts you wanted and you'd take it to the stores and try and get all the parts if you could get them.

27:00 They were all booked out against the carrier. It was all costed out still to what it cost each vehicle to be over there. It just ran like a normal garage. We'd run something like 1500 man hours a month and all that had to be tallied, like the hours you were working still had to be written down. And that just ran like a big workshop really. They'd do that, storemen. A couple of welders,

27:30 guys that specialised in aluminium welding and whatever else, general welding, and you'd have a couple of, you had your CO that was in charge of your lot and a senior RSM [Regimental Sergeant-Major] which Dennis Argent under that. Then from then on down just corporals, lance corporals and guys, general day to day running of the show, and we were separate to the cab squadron itself. They had their own administration and stuff like that and we sort of just walked across the road to their quarters, to their mess and stuff like that,

28:00 but we actually camped separate to the cab squadron itself.

Did the mechanics have a nickname?

Bluebells we were called. Yeah, if you ever had a problem, had three carriers, 98 Alpha, 908, 98 Alpha, 98 Bravo and they'd just call you up, Bluebells wanted such and such a situation, and yeah, then they'd use your, find out who was on and just use a, mine was just Mike

28:30 Tango, yeah, if they were after you. They'd very rarely use guys' names, always nicknames or whatever and that with it, but we were just known as the 908 organisation, that was our call sign.

What's the origin of Bluebells as a nickname?

Don't know. I haven't been, I belong to the RAEME Association and I still haven't found out where it come from, and I probably have read about it but I just can't even recall it.

29:00 Just the Association, this newsletter that comes out in it it's a lot of old guys in it and I don't know where it comes from. Just a nickname from somewhere I suppose. Stuck with it, I'd say it's probably been passed down from one war to the next by the sound of it.

Did you get a nickname yourself?

No, I was just always, just my name, Mike. Yeah, I've never had a nickname really. Quite surprising, all my life.

29:30 I've just never been a 'Blue' or a 'Curly' or nothing like that really. I've always been just called that.

And it was standard practise that the mechanics were also the drivers of the vehicle?

Yeah.

There was no such thing as just a driver, you had to be both?

No. You had to be both. When you first got into the country, usually they'd give you about three weeks orientation in the camp, like working there, and the first operation

30:00 that's going you send a new guy out, and I like, for instance myself, we were in there only about two weeks and they had an operation going so they slammed me in the carrier and you relearn to drive it again and you have an experienced guy which I had one of the sergeants come with me as the crew commander, and he's also still a mechanic and so you go out and operate with the troop. Usually run second last carrier in the group. They always keep someone else behind you,

30:30 and away you go and just operate and do as your told as far as the whole troop goes, and when you do a

night ambush or something like that you split up into one of the troops as a group and just operate that way until something goes wrong, then you become a mechanic, but other than that you're just another carrier that's there for fire support until something goes wrong. Our first night that we were out and the first ambush we ever did there, the ambush went off.

I'll actually get to that really soon cause I want

31:00 **to go through that in great detail and we're pretty close to there now so we may as well just go through the process of getting over to Vietnam.**

Oh yeah. We flew, I think I had about two weeks leave or three weeks leave, I just can't really recall at this stage, which I came here, back here to Condo for leave and that.

How was mum...

Oh well,

about that side of things?

Probably not impressed actually.

31:30 She wasn't real happy about it but that's just part of life, and we had some, you know, a couple of parties here, things like that to go back, and then we flew out of Sydney late at night and just with, I was only one guy going and that's how a unit operated. They'd only replace maybe two at a time sometimes or only one at a time. There was a continuous turnover of fellows. There was never the

32:00 whole unit shipped out and came home in one go. The whole lot of it was just changeover, you know, one or two blokes at a time or throughout the whole squadron, and when the squadron was there for 12 months we'd just change the name back to B or A or wherever it was, and the name would come back to Australia. We were just shipped across as a replacement.

Was it a Qantas flight?

Yeah, on a Qantas flight we went across on. Came back on the oldest Qantas plane.

What day were you taking off?

32:30 14th, went across on the 14th of May, 1970. Couldn't tell you what day it was but.

No, that's fine.

Flew across at night, landed in Saigon. Actually landed in

How did you feel during, sorry.

No, we landed in Singapore on the way over just for a touchdown and then flew from Singapore into Saigon and landed there at Ton San Nhut Airport there, and from there which was just

33:00 stinking hot, you weren't allowed off the tarmac or anything like that, we were just loaded into Hercs [Hercules transport aircraft], which flew us down to Vung Tau, sorry, into Nui Dat and we just landed on the strip there and we were just picked up in a jeep and this is your new home for 12 months, and the first thing the drivers say to you when they pick you up is, "Nobody's got 365 days," cause there's 365 days a standard tour in Vietnam and the first thing you do is get a calendar and cross off day one.

33:30 And from then on if you ever run into anyone it's, "How long have you got to go?" "90 Days," or 200 days or something like that until you're down to a short time and then you're on your way home, last day's it.

Do you recall how you were feeling when you were on that flight, on the Qantas flight?

No, not really. No, I can't. I can remember being at Ton San Nhut Airport but I can't really, the flight over,

34:00 I can't recall it at all really. Obviously you weren't allowed to drink. I'm sure of it, yeah.

The stop in Singapore was just one?

Yeah, just only brief, it was only get off the plane virtually and then back on the plane again and keep going into there. Yeah, pretty brief. I can remember Singapore as being hot and steamy, that's about all, after jumping, what, May here?

34:30 Going into winter then into summer, and nylon shirts and stuff like that that the army supplied you with because you didn't have your gear for over there, and just what personal gear you were carrying with you as well, which most of it you might as well left at home. It wasn't much good to you really. But only Ton San Nhut is about the only place I can, whatever it's called, Saigon back then.

What

35:00 **were your impressions when you touched down then?**

There were plenty of planes around, all sorts of jets and helicopters, stuff like that. Plenty of that around, and just Saigon, the city itself, seeing it from the air and looking at it and just thinking boy, what a mess it is. Really just another culture completely. Never been out of Australia before. Yeah, something different.

And could

35:30 **you see a lot of damage around Saigon city?**

No, not really. Not till later on when you go up there and have a bit of a look about. Yeah, flying over you could see a lot of bomb craters, bomb holes, bomb marks in the ground, stuff like that and water ditches, but not around the city itself that much. It was just a mess anyway. A harbour full of boats and a lot of old fishing boats and all that sort of gear, and people

36:00 and a different language. Pretty hard to cope with.

So getting to Nui Dat and checking that out for the first time, what were your impressions?

Well, we landed at Luscombe Bowl actually and just, you know, the barbed wire. Everything was barbed wire all the way around it

36:30 everywhere. Yeah, pretty bit shock I suppose. This is where you are in the middle of nowhere and this is home for the next bloody year. Everyone's carrying guns. That sort of stuff, but still yeah, I'm not really sure actually. It's pretty hard to describe actually, but it was,

37:00 I'm just trying to think whether it was the wet season or the dry season there. I think it might've been the wet season when we first put down. Still it would've been really green. All the barbed wire gets all grass over it and it would be pretty green as far as that goes, and then Luscombe Bowl's always full of the same thing, helicopter pad there and plenty of helicopters and stuff around and plenty of blokes with guns walking about and infantry all over the place and everything's all set up in the rubber trees.

37:30 We were in a rubber plantation where we were camped and that. It's all plenty of that stuff everywhere which we hadn't seen before.

The camp was entirely made of tents or were there any huts around?

No, we had, a lot of it was tents and sandbags like a roof and then sandbag half way up and tents, but we were lucky enough to have big long huts which had tin rooves on them and actually had walls half way up and then fly screen

38:00 the rest of the way. So they were pretty open air, like breezeway type things and inside them it just had individual like compartments which you'd make your bed and you had a locker and you had a desk which you could just screen off if you wanted to and put your own stereo gear in it and just set it up as a bit of a like a private study thing, but still the mate next door to you could see straight through. Privacy was just not an issue, just blokes there.

38:30 And that's where you lived.

Did that lack of privacy, was that something hard to get used to?

No, not really, yeah. Your showers and all that were all full of blokes standing in row, and the same with the loos. We had a, our toilet block was just four loos in a row with a bit of partition down one side of and a joke board over there

39:00 and a cigarette box there and, you know, social event.

So you could just sit there and chat to your mate next door?

Sit there and chat to your mate next door, tell jokes. Just a social occasion to go to the loo really. Same to go to the showers. Because we were working most of the time in shorts and boots, no shirts, you'd get covered in grease and you'd go to the shower and you'd always get a mate there to help you scrub the grease off your back or you'd do vice versa for him or just, yeah,

39:30 I think it's just part of, you just accept it, part of life and growing up with it. Any shy blokes I think might've had a problem. Yeah, just the way it went, never took any notice. Probably laugh about it a bit now when you look back on it, don't drop the soap. But that was just part of life. If you wanted to get clean you worked hard, and if it rained you got wet

40:00 and you still worked. You got covered in mud, and you would, you'd get filthy sometimes working on these things, and that's what you worked in, just shorts and no shirt most of the time. It was just so hot.

That little desk space that they gave you, did you end up personalising that?

Oh yeah, I was lucky enough to have, it was just something you made up. I had a bit of glass on top of mine and it had a lot of

40:30 photos from home and everything underneath it, and also on your walls. Then you, yeah, I think it was a

couple of flags hanging up in it and just bits and pieces like that, and your own stereo system. Like everyone had your own stereo, you'd just go and buy them. Go and buy a big flash reel to reel tape deck or something like that and most guys, headphones, just pop your headphones on and just listen to it yourself. I've got my original speakers and original stuff still sitting up in the shed. Yeah,

41:00 reel to reel tapes, probably about 10 of them. They go three or four hours a pop with it, but that's all we'd do. Some blokes, you'd just leave them out unplugged sometimes, just let them play all day, just not worry. But that was just your space, just a wardrobe like a tin locker with gear in it and you slept on the bed with a mosquito net over it to stop the mozzies from eating you to death.

So did the blokes in

41:30 **your unit go out of their way to give you a warm welcome?**

Yeah, we all got on very well actually, all the guys. Even ones I worked with were good blokes. A lot of them I still know today. They're trying to make you feel welcome and like teach you the ropes straight up so you don't fall for all the pitfalls. It's still the same old tricks but, set the beds up so you fall off them and a few little things

42:00 like that just to make you feel at home, and that would happen every now and again.

Tape 5

00:35 **All right, you were the new, first of all what does RAEME stand for?**

RAEME.

Yeah, RAEME.

Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.

Okay, and the symbol? You mentioned you have a special symbol.

It's a little rearing horse symbol it is with it. I don't know the significance of it. I think it's probably from years back with the horse drawn guns and stuff like that, and they were

01:00 part of, I think they were part of the artillery at one stage of the game but I wouldn't like to get quoted on it because somebody might stand on my toes. It would be something like that it is. I'm sure it is actually. The horse probably had something to do with that back then.

Yeah, all right. So you were the new RAEME recruit in Vietnam?

Yeah.

What was it like for a new recruit?

Yeah, for the new bloke you were shown around a bit to start with so you could orientate yourself to the base

01:30 and they drive you around in different areas and where to go and not to go and what to expect around the place. You're shown where you're going to sleep and your gear and where to draw stores from and weapons and all that sort of stuff. Pretty well a basic orientation of the group more than anything on the day, and you're just given a tool box with some tools and stuff in it as well and they're yours to keep for the duration while

02:00 you're there and not many of them actually. It's quite surprising.

What did they give you?

Really basic tool kit, very, very basic stuff for what work you do. You tend to live out of that. It's enough I suppose, hammers, ball peen, one engineers and all this. You sign for all that stuff and you sign it all back in when you leave. So if you lose any of it you've got to account for it. It's quite amazing. Still, the army, the way it is. Just go to the stores and book out another one. As

02:30 long as you sign for it you can have it. You just don't go and take things. Everything over there, if you sign for it you can have it, but if you don't sign for it look out.

Sorry, I'll just ask a quick question about the toolbox. When you first got it and you realised that it was pretty basic as you said, were you thinking my God, this is not enough?

Not really. We worked on them before and that, and yeah, they were only pretty basic and you had a workshop there with other, bigger tools

03:00 and things like that in them, but the basic stuff you use everyday, you'd just have your own personal tools and that would be with you. Compared to like at the moment we've probably got a 2,000 piece

toolkit in real life and over there probably like 50 pieces to do all the maintenance we need to do. That's probably about it really. Yeah, you can just make do with what you've got, and it was just part of you. You took it on every job you went on and if you went on a helicopter,

03:30 you had to fly somewhere, you just took your toolbox with you. Just grabbed our gear and away you went.

What about the workshop?

We didn't have a workshop as such. All we had was a big slab of concrete that was put down on the ground and also doubled as the basketball court and everything else for after activities. Not undercover, out in the open so when it rained you got when. When it was sunny you just got sunburnt.

04:00 If it rained you just worked in the mud and every now and again we had a jeep there with a grader blade and we used to just scrape all the mud back off it and start work again. Set her up and away you'd go with it. Had under, the stores were all under cover, things like that, and we had undercover sort of morning tea area, afternoon tea. You've got to be civilised even in a war zone, an area like that and a small office for paperwork,

04:30 but the same thing, pretty open air. Just a basic window wooden shutter. If it started to rain just pull the shutter down and it blocked all the moisture from getting in the place, and a couple of undercover parks for our carriers themselves, but other than that you did all your work 99 per cent of the time out in the weather. Just everything.

How did you cope with that humidity?

After a while the humidity, you just learn to live with it. You just perspire a lot for sure. You used to just work in shorts and boots,

05:00 boots, socks, shorts. Hardly anyone ever wore any shirts and that. Especially just, away you went, and in the wet season if it rained you just kicked the lid of your toolbox shut so the water didn't get in and just worked on in the rain and not worried about it, and when it stopped you were dry again in no time at all because just the heat and humidity and just, mud was a bit chaotic. Yeah, just scrape it all away again and start again, away you go, part of life

05:30 really. Six months of rain and six months of hot weather. Yeah, just live with it.

So it was two or three weeks as a new recruit that you'd be on base?

Yeah, we'd try, that was the policy over there, try and get new people, as soon as you get there as soon as you could get them out in the bush the better so they know what's going on, you know, out in the field and just get a feeling for the place. It would've been only two or three weeks before we were sent on an operation,

06:00 and you usually send out a senior bloke, someone that's been there a little while to show like the new guy the ropes, and eventually you being the new bloke, you start off driving the carrier and eventually as time goes on you graduate to being that senior guy, that you're passing on your experience to the new recruit, you know, that you're the one that's giving the orders to make sure that he survives while he's there. So it's just an ongoing process, and our whole unit was based on that. You always had

06:30 guys, there was no one, there wasn't a whole lot of senior guys. Everyone just progressively moved up the ladder. The more days you were there the more seniority you got, and it didn't matter too much on rank. If you had some time there you were sometimes sent to jump in a carrier with a guy that might only have been there three weeks. You might have been there six months so you were senior to him, and you try and pass on your experiences to make him so he can survive over there and just learn the ropes again

07:00 and operate in the field, the best you can coach them to help them survive really, and that's what a lot of it was about. The same with any unit there really, was done pretty well the same way. You sort of looked after the new bloke pretty well to get him through his first few weeks in country so he could orientate himself and didn't get out of line.

So can you tell us about your first experience in the

07:30 **bush? Is that what you call it, being in the bush or the jungle?**

Yeah, pretty well the bush we refer to it more than anything. I think it's just the country in me. The jungle's something like Tarzan's been in I think. I dunno. To me it's just bush and a lot of it is just like the bush in Australia, some of the up north country and that, it's just like being here, and sometimes you could sit in your carrier and think that's where you'd be. It's quite amazing really. Yeah, we had, actually my first night we did a operation

08:00 in around the Long Hai hills and actually our first night out what they used to do, they'd go out and they'd already have preselected sights, they'd have information where Viet Cong might've been using these trails to walk through or transport, you know, ammunition or food, supplies. They would've had them staked out early in the piece by the SAS guys. So then they'd get onto the personal carriers and we'd get some

- 08:30 infantry guys with us and we'd go out and do an operation in that area, and actually the first night that we did an operation with them we were either fortunate or unfortunate that our ambush actually went off that night. It was contacted and went off, and it just all happened so quickly and it all, you know, over there you actually slept in hammocks inside the vehicles, just slung a hammock up and slept in it and that was a bit of a novelty as well. So we were trying to adjust to sleeping
- 09:00 in that and in the early hours of the morning someone's tripped all the claymore mines and they've just gone off, and there's just an horrendous noise because everything starts going off and blokes start firing. And I've stood up in the hammock and it had an open hatch cover above you, just stood straight up in it and the bottom's fell out of the hammock so I've gone straight back through onto the floor and my sergeant that's with us all he could do is laugh. He reckons it's the funniest thing he's ever seen, and never fired a shot. I was too busy laying on the floor in the carrier. I didn't know what happened.
- 09:30 The first
- Laughing?**
- Not quite. I landed on all the toolboxes and all the gear that we had down stored on the floor and things like that. I never slept on a hammock again but. I slept on the floor, cushions on the floor after that. Used to just sleep on the floor in the carrier, it cured me.
- So did you do a bit of damage to yourself that night?**
- No, not really just some cuts and that, just one of those things. But it was, you couldn't have got it worse, and Graham Hand who was the sergeant, thought it was the most hilarious thing
- 10:00 he'd ever seen cause he'd been there a bit and had a few contacts. Yeah, but it is pretty frightening first up early in the morning. Your nerves are on edge anyway. From then on but we had a few contacts and ambushes go up and yeah, it wasn't a big deal and as I said before, for us anyway, the ones that we had were all over very quickly, and whether you shot at anyone or not is pretty hard to say. Just
- 10:30 spraying bullets into the jungle and just letting off mines and just wait until, usually then wait until daylight for someone to go and have a look around to see what's happened with it.
- All right. Could you really like walk us through from when you actually left base, walk us through the whole night and bring us**
- Normally you would've rolled out of there with 20 carriers I suppose
- 11:00 and probably between that there would've been probably 80 soldiers, you know, like grunts, a little bit better plus our own men on it, and we
- And that's two to each carrier?**
- Yeah, two drivers to each carrier and some got three, two personnel and some got three on them, like different crews and different ones whichever they are, and probably 80-odd other personnel that we were taking them with
- 11:30 us as well, and they, sometimes, or that particular time we actually dropped them a little bit earlier and they set up their own ambushes. Then the carriers actually make their own ambushes as well sort of separate to them a little bit from it further along.
- How do you do that? How do you actually set up?**
- They've got a plan to start with of what they're going to do in this particular area. It's all mapped out and they'll have where they're going to situate so you know where they are, and you'll set up further up the road, you know, a bit further up, and usually you
- 12:00 pick up these little bush tracks. We try and get in there just on dark and that's the whole name of the thing so the Viet Cong really don't know where you've been or where you're going, and so you try and set up all your ambushes just going into dark, so you can set them up there.
- Is that your cover?**
- Yeah, that's your cover, yeah. Try and just get in there just before dark and then they're not sure where you've gone for the night then.
- Couldn't they hear you?**
- No, not a lot of times. We'd probably move in there sometimes a week before occasionally.
- 12:30 On this particular one but, we've got them on the first night which is really a bit out of the norm actually. They obviously haven't been using the area for a bit and they've come from further away and just using it as a path through there, and that's what tends to happen. People, special service guys tend to watch these trails a bit and try and get a movement on it and see what's happening with it, and even the infantry guys, they might be out there and before they'll ambush them sometimes, just set it up and see how much better they can get

- 13:00 it or how much traffic it's using or where they're going to, but that particular night we were fortunate enough for it to go off pretty early, and it's probably only been set off by two or three people. So it wouldn't have been a big lot cause from what I can recall there was sort of no returning fire. It was only all us outgoing stuff and they would've probably just tripped on the Claymore mines and set it off just on strip wires. So they've instigated themselves and
- 13:30 away it's gone, and even, you know, maybe might not have been any people. Could've been just pigs or something like that doing it to. It happens. Something else, or monkeys run them over.

And who's put the mines, who's actually

We set them up ourselves. You carry them on your carrier and then every night when you do a night harbour you set out these protection anti-personnel mines out in a big area around you perimeter in the grass, all facing outwards and that and you can run all the leads back to your carrier, so the guy that's doing the night watch,

- 14:00 you do two hours on, two hours off all night on picket duty. Just get used to that rotation and if you've got another guy with you it's a little bit better, you get a bit longer. But if there's only two of you you tend to rotate around all the time and there's always someone awake, or more than that awake, two or three guys awake at the one time, and normally if you sense any movement whatsoever or anything the first thing you do is push all the triggers on the mines and that literally sprays all the area in front of you to start with and you start popping
- 14:30 up flares so you can see what's happening. You have all these flares sitting alongside of you and that, and you just start popping them and then you sort of open fire at movement.

And how do the flares show you what's happening?

They just go up in the air, just pop up and they're like a big light, they just glow up in the air and just slowly drift back down to ground level again.

Wouldn't that notify the enemy where you are?

It does, where we are, yeah. But you've got to put them up so you can see what's going on, and they know where you are anyway half the time. Once you start firing

- 15:00 of a night with weapons and that, you get tracer coming out of them. Probably the first night out it sticks with you a little bit for the humorous part more now, because of what happened to us. It was quite funny, never fired a shot and it was all over in a matter of seconds. Then you get to go to sleep then for the rest of the night cause you're up on stand-to right through until daylight again.

What do you mean, you couldn't go to sleep?

No, you don't go back to sleep.

- 15:30 Usually after an ambush you stay awake. Everyone stays awake until the next morning and you go again from there, and we moved positions again then, because that's already been triggered off and you go further out, and we would've spent probably four weeks out before we came back to base camp.

That must've been really tiring?

It is. You get to, you get used to sleeping

- 16:00 short breaks and because if you're in the one position, if you're set up in the one spot for quite a while you'd just sleep during the day and that as well. If you're not doing anything else you just sleep because you're only sitting there watching trying to be quiet. Not great for your nerves especially at night time. Yeah, and through the night is probably the worst thing because everything moves, but after a while you get used to it and you're not as jumpy with it, and towards the
- 16:30 end of it you're probably blasé about it more than anything with it, for us anyway. Pretty comforting sleeping in a tank, four good solid walls around you. Sort of takes a good hit to do any damage to you while you're inside it.

Did you lose any tanks while you were on that?

Yeah, we lost, not on that one, but we have lost them. Lost to mines. I think all the time I was there we lost 13 altogether through mine damage, but a lot of them,

- 17:00 there's only one or two that we actually sent back to Australia that we couldn't repair in country, what we call in country. All the rest were repaired in country which is not a bad testament really. Considering the Americans, if they just blew even one wheel off theirs they'd get a new one. Just take it up to the base and pick up another one. They'd transport one out to them. Whereas Australian guys, we haven't go the American budget and used to fix everything.

So you were involved in firing and

- 17:30 **etcetera as well, not just fixing?**

Yeah, we'd do both. We were part of the tank squadron itself when we were in operations in the field,

but if they broke down you'd just put your mechanic's hat on and you'd become the mechanic, just like the NRMA road service.

Can you talk about the first time you actually had to fix a tank when you were out in the bush?

It was only basic stuff. A tank, a track

- 18:00 thrown was probably the biggest problem we used to have, they'd just throw the track off them. Where guys wouldn't do the maintenance properly, the tank crews themselves wouldn't keep them, you know, the personnel crews, they wouldn't keep them tight enough, the tracks and they'd screw them

You mean by going like one after another in a straight line?

No, just keeping tension on the track properly. If they didn't keep the tension up properly they'd spin them off on corners sometimes. They were a little bit too horrific on them and break them off. Sometimes from driving them across rough ground too fast they'd

- 18:30 break a torsion bar or they'd wrap a bit of wire up around the wheels and just do an internal wheel seal on it and you'd do a wheel bearing. You know, pretty basic repair stuff. Just a matter of taking a road wheel off, split the track, take the road wheel off, change the bearing and put it back on again, just minor stuff like that. It's only when they hit a landmine, then you're sort of looking at major damage a lot of times. We carry some components with them but a lot of it, if it was a front drive or something like that

- 19:00 we'd get it flown in. We'd get on a helicopter and usually send another mechanic out with it and bring out the final drive trainer and we'd change it in the field if that's all the damage was, unbolt the section and put it back on.

So you'd wait for the chopper to come?

Yeah, wait for them to come, and usually then the other personnel carriers would just for up like around the broken down one, just give you a bit of protection in case you got another strike or something later on.

While you were fixing?

While you were repairing it, but it never happened most of the time.

- 19:30 Hit and run and go, or if it was a landmine it would've been set up there a long time ago and someone's run over it, and that's probably the biggest nightmare up there for a personnel carrier driver, and going anywhere, the Vietnamese were pretty smart at that. They'd, if we were using a road they might see us using it three or four days in a row, like running up and down the road, they'd previously have planted say an old disused bomb in it and then they'd come back and it would be in the ground there and they'd have it marked where it was and

- 20:00 they'd, you run over it heaps of times up that particular road, then they'd come back and put a trigger in it and catch you out, and that's where they used to get a lot of guys that way. They were even there once, we had a tank, used to have these special mine clearing tanks and they were running up the road and went over a crest of the road out of sight of everyone, turned around and come back and on the way back had the boom up because he'd cleared the road and run over a mine and blew it up. They'd just come and, they'd watch you.

Had he come out in that time?

Yeah. They were watching it

- 20:30 and just triggered it. Some things like that that they were really good at and pretty dangerous. Yeah, they could lift mines and any disused bombs or anything like that, and that's the worst nightmare to a, driving a personnel carrier over there, was just the mine damage because they could be pretty horrific if you hit a big one. Some, early in the piece before I got there there were guys killed off them. While I was there there was no one

- 21:00 killed actually driving a tank, carrier. A lot of guys were, a few wounds and that from it.

From the landmines?

Yeah, from landmines, yeah.

Were you there when anyone got wounded?

Only once, yeah, in one conflict.

Can you talk about that? When did that happen?

Yeah, they were just running up the road and hit a mine on the back end of it and most of it is just eardrum damage, stuff like that. No shrapnel wounds or anything like that. Not a big hit, they were very lucky really.

- 21:30 Just a minor thing. We had one of our own mechanics got a broken ankle from running over a landmine

in actually my carrier. We did a lot of operations and I'd been out quite a few times and we'd come back and anyway I was due for some leave and I wanted to take it and we had a new guy come in, Wayne Back, actually come from Narromine actually. Anyway, I was assigned to take him

22:00 and I pulled out. I said, "No, look I want some time off. I've did enough at the moment and I just feel I need a break."

How long had you been working at that point?

We probably had six months or better in the country.

With no leave?

Only one day off here and there, you know, and you can have a week's leave and you can have some time off, stuff like that, and we just felt like we'd done, we'd been working pretty hard and had enough and really didn't want another operation at that stage. So anyway, another guy took him. Actually Wayne Scott took him, and yeah, they hit a landmine,

22:30 but you would never know. It could have been just bad luck on the driver or mightn't have just not taken any notice, were just unlucky.

And they were killed?

No, no, broke his ankle, that's all.

Oh, he broke his ankle, right.

Broke his ankle, and that's a pretty common injury at that stage of the game, it was. If you were actually a driver and you ran over a mine you'd get your ankle broken.

Why is that?

Because of the configuration inside the carriers. The right foot pressed the accelerator and it would bend if

23:00 something went in it, but the left foot had just a piece sitting out off the fire wall which you used to rest your foot on. It was just a solid peg and there was no give in it, and you'd be resting your leg on it when the mine would go off underneath the front of the carrier. It's normally the front wheel would set it off, and just the concussion of it coming up used to just jar your ankle up and smash your ankle for you. A few injuries like that. Then they went to, there was a big modification came out that we actually went through and cut the solid foot pegs off and made collapsible footrests

23:30 for them, and we fitted them up to all the carriers. That was to try and stop that injury from happening.

Who's idea was that?

I don't know, one of the boffins somewhere along the line. Yeah, a few things, used to have to redo the hatch covers so they'd stay down cause they used to fly up and hit you on the head initially.

What would fly up and hit you?

The hatch cover from behind. Catches wouldn't hold and the thing would come over and hit the driver on the head and give him concussion on the head cause they'd be wearing their nice soft berets to look good instead of their helmets. A

24:00 few little things happened here and there that probably, and also as I was saying before about the belly armour, that was probably one of the biggest things that saved a lot of guys lives over there really from mine damage. They just could take a better hit from underneath, absorb it all a lot better.

You mentioned when you first went out bush, the first night and you got a

24:30 **landmine, and you said, you told us the funny part, but you said actually it really did have a much deeper impact.**

It's sort of driving home that it's pretty real what you're dealing with here now and you can't afford to be slack. You have to watch what you're doing, and I think that was probably the thing that drove us home pretty well, that taught us a lesson pretty early in the part, you had to be really careful what you did when you're

25:00 working in the field and watch what's happening, and if you're on night duty and stuff like that don't be a slacker and go to sleep. Every guy learns that somewhere along the line, that it is real. You can get hurt here if you're not careful. You know, just careful what you're doing.

And the noise, that initial noise of the first landmine you heard must've been quite shattering, was it?

Yeah, pretty horrific, yeah. Just the commotion that goes with it cause everybody's

25:30 yelling at everyone and just the noise of firing and stuff like that and you're trying to talk on the radios. In some instances they're calling in artillery support as well, so the next minute you've got shells sort of

starting to land in the vicinity of you as well. So you just hope that they don't...

Hit you.

Hit you. Easy call and sight it to start with, they do. So they can see where it hits and they can walk them up from there.

26:00 **Did that happen? Had you been out bush when you've had to call in artillery support?**

Yeah, they've called in artillery while we've been there, yeah. It's interesting.

Can you kind of describe the scene? What would your role actually be?

Yeah, we were still, in an ambush situation that's gone off and you're not sure what it's about so you call in the artillery. Then you might range them out at say from 200 yards or so from where. Then you'll call in a range to start with and they'll drop one down for

26:30 you. Then you'll either walk them up or what they call walk them up or walk them back.

What do you mean? What does that mean?

You call your figures in closer.

Your figures?

Yeah, you're calling them your grid references, the distances and that. So you either call them in a bit further out or you want them closer to you. They can come in a bit closer because the first sighting one you plot it and tell them where it's actually landed. So you know on the map that that's where it is. This is where you are and it should be in the right spot and with

27:00 a bit of luck they shouldn't hit you. So learning to read maps is really important, and especially knowing where you are exactly. It's just, you know, they didn't have sat nav [satellite navigation] in those days. The big thing in it was actually knowing that.

So you'd have to, every step of the way know exactly where you were on your map?

Exactly where you were, yeah, on your map, yeah. A lot of times even if you mightn't have been, normally the guy in charge of the section of carriers would be doing that,

27:30 but a lot of times you'd even do it yourself so you knew what was happening you'd plot your own. You'd have your maps there and you'd always keep on touch to where you actually were travelling and where you were, and how many, they used to call counting clicks [yards] back then.

Yeah. What would that mean exactly, counting clicks?

Counting clicks. Yeah, it's just a term you used for counting distance. Yeah, might be 40 clicks, 50 clicks which is sort of 50 metres, 50 feet back then I think it was,

28:00 and just sort of, feet or yards, I can't remember now. Yards I think it is, clicks. Yeah, yards. It's just a terminology.

No, all that stuff is really interesting cause sometimes the terminology changes.

I've probably got it wrong, but it was called clicks, and the same, all your radio stuff was never, it was always call sign work. You know, 'Zero Charlie' used to be the headquarters.

28:30 **At Nui Dat?**

At Nui Dat, yeah. It was always Zero Charlie. Then the, you might have the head of, just in our organisation, 908, was our lead carrier in 908 Alpha, in 908 Bravo and in some of the other just call signs amongst the other guys, 10 Bravo, 10 Alpha, Charlie 31, 31 Troop and 31 Alpha. Same thing, they'd have three carriers that made up what they used to call a troop, just

29:00 three lots and you went to the all the mortar tracks which were a different set up again, but they were like 84s and 85s. You pretty well knew when you were talking in the language what you were talking about, whether you were talking about mortar tracks. If you were calling 184 up here you were chasing a mortar track.

What do you mean by mortar track exactly?

They carried a mortar inside them and used to fire rounds out of it. It was on a base like a transportable gun, but just a mortar, and they used to fire it, be able to fire shells

29:30 and carry a fair bit of weaponry on board on it. Probably I think four, five mortar troop, six, eight, seven, yeah. Probably five, I'm trying to think of the numbers.

That's all right. It must've been like, given you telling us how little sleep you got, two hours on, two hours off, 24 hours a day?

Yeah, you'd do it all the time?

For a month at times?

30:00 You could just do it. Even the infantry guys, you could do it after a while. You'd just go to sleep the drop of a hat.

So would a month be the longest that they'd send you out?

No, we had six weeks away on one job, but mostly only three to four weeks. It depends on what was happening or what, you know, depends on what operations they wanted to do, any big long term ones or if you were a fair way from Nui Dat, up on the border somewhere. It depends what, how sustained

30:30 they wanted to do something at the time, that's all, or how involved were some of the infantry guys, how many of them you had out with you as well. How long you could keep them out for was the biggest problem probably because they had to be pretty well self sufficient, where we could, we had the luxury of having plenty of fresh water on board, plenty of clothes, like you carry your personal gear with you and the luxury of having a wash every night.

You had a shower in the tank?

No, we just had a basin

31:00 there, but we had plenty of water which you could do that, but the infantry guys only carried normally what they drank, just drinking water, and the same clothes that they'd live in pretty well until they fell apart and get some new ones.

Would you have much to do with the infantry guys when you were working together?

Yeah, we used to do, if we did, operated out of a place called the 'Horseshoe', which is a forward support base from Nui Dat where, I can't think of the company that was there, but there was quite

31:30 a big infantry base there, and we'd do ambushes out of there with them. So what we used to do with them but, we'd go and pick them up late of an afternoon, then take them out into the field, then drop them off, then come back and spend the night in the Horseshoe, then go back in the morning and pick them up again, and you could take them like 10 mile away. Just run them down the road to billy-oh and that, drop them off, and they'd do that every night, and just bring them back again during the day. The next night you'd take them somewhere else. We did that for quite a while. They were trying to do

32:00 it around one of the villages there, Duc To I think, it was suspected of having sympathisers with the Viet Cong so they'd try and cut them off from coming in there. So they were sort of ringing the village every night and sometimes we might do it two nights in a row and then not do it the third night just to, just try it on and off, on and off, to try and trick them into coming in, make them get hungry and come looking for food. It did things like that

32:30 which, and it was quite interesting to work with. I first ran in, there was a guy from Condo actually had been in regular soldiers and he was posted over there which I didn't know, and we wheeled into Nui Dat, sorry, into Horseshoe the first night and if you can get a free meal at a mess you always went there instead of cooking for yourself, so we've gone up to their mess. Anyway I'm lined up and everything you've got to line up for, and we're lined up and we're getting a meal and anyway this

33:00 voice in the background yells out, "There's some ignorant bastards live in Condobolin, isn't there?" And I'm looking around, and it was the guy from here, yeah, Jeff Boland. I didn't even know he was over there.

And he was in the infantry?

He was in the infantry, yeah. He was on his second tour actually, Jeff was.

He must've liked it?

Just a Reg, yeah. So he come with us that night. He asked us what carrier we were driving and started telling him. That's how he come with us that night, and he, for the next few days he'd jump on with us and we'd take him out.

33:30 It was good really to catch up with guys from home. I didn't know he was there, and the same with another, just going off the track a bit, we were off working on a carrier and you used to, when they'd bring them in after they'd been on operations and you'd service all the carriers that were due for service, the army's got A, B, C, D servicing, like all different aspects of how they like to have their vehicles run, and I was sort of carrying out a service and normally the tank crew, the carrier crew help you work on the carrier. They've got

34:00 certain tasks that they've got to do instead of the mechanics doing it, like all the labouring jobs mostly, like get the tracks and everything off them, get the wheels off them, and we'd do more the technical work.

So what would that service be called that you were doing?

Yeah, that's a full on C service, the whole show.

So C service is like the works?

Yeah, everything, change oils, the whole show on it. A fair bit of major work. Anyway, I'm working alongside this bloke and the same story, "Where do you come from?" "Oh, you wouldn't know this place, Trundle,"

34:30 and I said, "Oh yeah, gee, I don't know about that," I said, "I come from Condobolin, they're not very far apart." And anyway we got talking. I didn't know him. He worked for, actually works on a property, or worked on a property here for Halls and I knew the property, but never knew him at all. He was one of those guys that was quiet, unassuming. He only had about 90 days to go then. Anyway, we got to be pretty good mates over it cause we had a few things in common. I said to him, "Look, when you go home," I said, "go and see my mother at the pub."

35:00 And Dennis never drank, this guy. He was just one of those quiet blokes that never had a beer or anything like that. So he's walked into the hotel on a Saturday morning and asked for a carton of beer, and Mum served him and then he said to her, "Are you Dickie Taylor?" He said, "I've just been with your son over there."

Your mum would've been, she would've been chuffed. Had you been in much contact with her?

Oh yeah, we wrote quite regularly. She was pretty thrilled about it. Anyway,

35:30 I said to Dennis like years after, "What did you do with the carton of beer?" He said, "I just took it home and give it to Jack Hall." He said, "I didn't know how to approach her at all." So he started like that, yeah. That was a neat little thing to do really. Yeah, but you run into different blokes from different areas.

I was going to ask you when you were taking the infantry men out, did you,

36:00 **and then you were picking them up again in the morning, obviously sometimes there were people you were taking back that were injured?**

No, we didn't sort of get any, the few times I had with them we didn't get an incident with them in that area anyway, with any of the guys at all really. They'd set off some ambushes, but nothing become of it. There was no incoming into them. Most of them were just all outgoing

36:30 on their part, and really pretty well any incident that we were involved in we had no injuries at all, except like I said, mainly from just the mines. That's probably where we had most of our just injuries from. That was about it, and one accidental, with one of the young blokes on one of the carriers walked into a helicopter

37:00 blade and that was a bit tragic, something that shouldn't happen, but you know, it does happen. You just get careless. That was a very unfortunate accident actually, yeah.

When you were taking the infantry guys back would you chat about what they'd just done, what they'd been through?

Oh yeah. They were probably most of the time going crook at us for sleeping in good warm beds like in our carriers and they've got to sleep in the dirt. That was always a bit of a one on one banter all the time actually. "You blokes are the Green

37:30 Cab Company," and that's what they used to call us, the Green Cab Company. You'd have little notations on the wall, so much a flag fall, one or two beers or things like this was the going rate, or goffers as they were called, like soft drinks? It's called a 'goffer', and one goffer or two goffers if you want us to pick you up again, things like that, but no one ever paid. It was just a bit of a thing with them. Still I don't envy them, I don't really. I was quite comfortable sleeping in the carrier instead of sleeping on

38:00 the ground.

You say you don't envy them, I mean apart from their sleeping...

Oh no, a lot of respect for them. Yeah, a lot of respect for infantry guys, especially like over there. You're by yourself and you just, you get left with only what you're carrying and if you want, the same with food and stuff like that, and if it's raining you get wet, wet through, and food's nothing terrific because a lot of times they can't heat things up, just cold food, where

38:30 we had the luxury of being able to heat food, and it wasn't until, if they started to heat stuff, well they've blown their cover a lot of time. We'd be away well out of sight and have a bit of luxury.

How would you heat your food?

Had little burners and the infantry guys had little burners as well. Just these things, and you'd heat them up in a pannikin and eat whatever you had. A lot of the food is actually dried rations and you add water to them

39:00 and it's supposed to taste good. Yeah, you get your ration packs. If you were going to go out on operations you'd go and get rations out of the store and you'd go through the packs and throw out everything you really didn't want, and everything you wanted to keep would go in that.

What would you keep?

All the tinned fruit.

Tinned fruit.

Tinned fruit, yeah.

Did you get bully beef or had that passed?

No, not so much that. We used to get a beef of some description in there.

Tinned?

Yeah, tinned beef, but just basic baked beans. No brand names.

39:30 A lot of dried foods that you just added water to and stuff like that. Yeah, you could get to be a bit of a cook if you had this and had that and sort of go all right that way. A lot of braised steak and braised sausages and food like that. That's probably pretty unappealing sometimes, but add something to it liven it up a bit. The Yanks had pretty good rations, they weren't too bad. That's something we used to have, used to pinch some of their packs if you could ever get a hold of them.

How would you get a hold of the Yank rations?

You'd trade them or if you can con them

40:00 into getting them off the blokes sometimes if we saw them around, try and swap them some of yours for some of theirs. That usually, the barter system works well.

Did you have much contact with the Americans?

Yeah, we did a few jobs with the Americans on and off. You know, went to one of their big bases where they had all their gear up at Saigon and we actually, up a Long Binh actually, and we got a lot of parts for our carriers, which couldn't

40:30 get out of Australia at the time, and went up there on a bit of a foraging mission and a couple of the guys and a bit of loot we took with us, like trading them for beer.

They didn't have beer themselves?

They had beer themselves, but not Australian beer.

It's not as strong.

No, it was like having gold if you could get hold of it, so we did some deals with them like that which was pretty, highly unethical, but it worked and we got a lot of parts that we were short of. You know, it's a

41:00 bit crazy that the government's got you over there trying to do something and you can't get parts. But that's the way it was, the Yanks had access to heaps and heaps of things and we didn't.

Were they nice to you when you went up to their base?

Oh yeah, they were all right, they were fine. We had a good time, looked after. We had a couple of days there actually, took us to their messes. I ate with them and stuff like that and chatted to them, drank with them cause you'd drink them under the table. It wouldn't matter anyway. Couldn't let them beat you at anything.

And how did their mess compare

41:30 **to an Aussie mess?**

They're a bit better now, cause they had Vietnamese people looking after them and waiting on them and stuff like that on some of theirs, and all their uniforms and that were all washed and starched where ours were just chucked through the machine and just drag them back on again and away you go. There was no starch or anything like that. So they were always pretty tidy as far as that went. They always dressed up pretty well where our staff got a bit ratty after a while, yeah, but we wouldn't

42:00 have no one on our base that shouldn't be on our base.

Tape 6

00:33 **Michael, you were just telling us a bit about the American mess situation where they would often having Vietnamese serving and it was all a little more luxurious than the Australian circumstances. What were the differences in the actual food the Yanks were eating?**

The food, in our messes probably the food would be compared to it, but they probably had a lot more fresh stuff

01:00 than what we were actually getting really and it looked like a bit better quality than what we were getting, but in saying that still like our cooks that we had in camp weren't too bad. You didn't sort of suffer too much on the food side of things, especially when you were in camp and that, but rations outside of that were pretty ordinary really.

Did it take long

01:30 **after you arrived in Vietnam to really get a close understanding of the state of the war and how well it was all going and to get to the nitty-gritty of what was really going on?**

No. It probably didn't take you that long to get a gist of what's happening there and stuff like that, and how well it was going, well, that's anyone's thing. I don't think anyone knew how

02:00 well it was going. All that the boffins wanted was really body counts. Everything was a body count all the time. If you set off an ambush where you got one or two or three or four in a body count which in the scale of things really doesn't mean much really, and also how well, say the villages were cooperating with them, getting quietened down in our particular province more than that.

02:30 That's pretty well all, like if you had a briefing at any time it was always on an ambush at so an so, there was a body count of this many, or this was successful or we're doing operations around this particular village and we've had no people coming in there for the last say two weeks or three weeks, or they've been doing search and destroy missions and found so many bags of rice, so many

03:00 caches of weapons which could've been buried there for a long time. Might've found a campsite somewhere and all that was there was just buried, everything was buried and stuff like that and that was what a lot of it, just destroying food supplies, destroying weapons that you found and obviously they hadn't been used for a long time, but just coming across that. A lot of your information was all about that and a lot of our work was probably the same way, finding hidden

03:30 rice paddies and then just destroying the rice paddy. A lot of that went on with it.

How would a rice paddy normally be destroyed?

By burning it or just driving all over it in the personnel carrier, just flatten it to the ground so it couldn't be used, bust all the banks.

Did you ever do that sort of thing?

Yeah, we did a bit of it actually. Just drive around in the carrier and chop it all up, bust the banks on it so they couldn't irrigate

04:00 with it any more.

While you were there in the earlier stages that you were there, did you have a sense that there was progress being made in the war and that you were winning the war?

I don't think any of us really looked at the progress side of it or if we were winning or not. That's my opinion of it, but I don't think any of us ever looked at it that way. I think all of us, most of us looked at how

04:30 many days you had left to be there because that was the thing, to be alive at the end of 365 days. I think a lot of guys just treated it like that, just crossed off another day and stay out of trouble for the time you're there.

So no one really wanted to be there?

I wouldn't say wouldn't want to be there, but it was, there was probably guys with that opinion but it wasn't so much wanted to be there but it was just a bit of a thing that when you did get there you started a calendar to mark off the

05:00 time that you were going to go home. I don't think there's a bloke, wouldn't be a bloke there that wouldn't have done it, just kept marking the calendar off every morning.

After you'd been there for a while and you got a sense of how the Americans were going about taking on the enemy and their tactics, did you have an impression of whether they were going about things the right way?

It's always been the impression of most of the Australian guys that were there

05:30 that the Yanks probably did it differently to what the Australians were doing it, and also down in Phuoc Tuy Province where we were located most of the time, there wasn't a big American presence down there. They were doing some operations but not a great deal. We were probably doing most of them down that way, just every now and then we'd combine with each to do operations, probably getting up near the border, but yeah, to me I think the Australian

06:00 guys were probably a little bit better at it. The Yanks in an ambush situation were always very noisy and carried on a bit, where our guys were pretty good at it. I think we probably had a better success rate than what they did.

And getting an opportunity just to mix a little bit with the Yanks and get a feel for them, what did you make of them as soldiers and blokes?

Yeah, some we did mix with,

06:30 socialised, we got on all right with them. Still, without wanting to offend anyone, but still I think the Australian is probably a better soldier in that period of time anyway, the ones that we mixed with. The few that we did on and off I felt that they were pretty, you know, high on life pretty well without too many worries.

07:00 Yeah, to me the Australian guy, especially the Australian infantryman is a bit more settled. I think we're a little bit maybe better trained. I don't know and I suppose having a lot of National Service guys in there, you know, blokes that were there, pretty keen to do a job and get out of there.

07:30 **There was a guy that you trained with who wasn't particularly happy about being involved and he got sent home from Vietnam at some stage?**

Yeah, we had a radio mechanic that was across there, and yeah, we ended up sending him home. He didn't want to be there and in that situation it's not good for everybody else to have someone sort of whingeing on at you

08:00 about it, and I think the guys in our unit, the superiors and that thought it better to move him out and be done with it, when he was sent back to Australia. That's the only one I know of, that in our unit and really, you know, probably when you look back now we were better off without him anyway. We got a better guy come back in and someone that fitted in cause you're a group of blokes living together. Like a big boarding house, you've got to get on, and if you don't get on, well, it's not much chop. So you all, the whole lot of you have got to gel together

08:30 cause you're constantly with each other. It's not that you can't get away. That's the whole thing with it, so if you've got someone in there that's not, it's not so much pulling their weight, but just yeah, rocking the boat a bit, try and move him out, and obviously that's what's happened, they moved him back to Australia.

He was the only one that you had?

Yeah, the only one that we had

09:00 with our unit. All the rest of the guys were pretty good. I won't say all normal, but all pretty good. We all had our little quirks.

So there was a good spirit amongst your ranks?

Yeah, we had it really good, a real good mob of blokes actually. Good to work with all the time and all pitch in when you needed to. Good socially as well, sort of look after each other pretty well. Good to go out with.

09:30 One chance we did have leave and that, a few of us would bum around together. If we went down to Vung Tau we'd knock about together as well. So on the whole, yeah, considering even now, we still, a few of us stick together. We get on well with each other even though we don't see each other very often, it's good to catch up.

Do you recall the first time you went to Vung Tau for a bit of leave?

10:00 Yeah, not vividly. We would've, I can recall they had a, you'd go down there and stay in like motel type units which were a bit better luxury than what we were used to staying in, and they had a pool there. I think it was the Badcoe Club down there actually it was called, and a beach right, frontage right to it. Went swimming there and they also had boats there you could go, pretty old ones they were, but we did a bit of skiing there with them, that as well. We sort of got a few of the guys together and

10:30 were actually water skiing there on the South China Sea which is pretty exiting, but most of us just sort of sat around the beach, and if you wanted to go up town then you'd go up the bars and drink, pay high price money to drink with the girls, stuff like that. Yeah, you had to be back in at curfew which you had to be back in to barracks by 10.00 or 11.00 o'clock at night it could've been. Normally you'd only get one or two days off at a time. That's about all you'd get. Maybe three,

11:00 but mostly just one or two days, probably two days, or sometimes you'd get a day off. You'd all just whiz down for a day which wasn't that far down.

How long would it take you to get there?

Less than an hour, it wasn't very far at all really. It's just a bit more removed from the situation you were in really. You're a bit more relaxed. You didn't have to carry a weapon around with you. You could walk around in civvy clothes, shorts and shirt, a bit of gear like that. Save your, yeah, just get away from

11:30 the army for a little bit.

Did you generally go with a couple of mates?

Yeah, you usually went down with a couple of mates. Not very often guys went by themselves. It was usually with a couple of the other guys. They'd all get together and away you'd go.

Would you end up mixing in with other Australian troops or American troops?

Yeah, there'd be other, yeah, the other guys down there. Plenty of Australians there on leave and you get drinking with them and they'd have shows on down there, like song and dance shows and stuff like that. Some of the touring troops would come across from

12:00 Australia. They were playing down there, you'd all go and sit and watch them.

Can you recall any of the shows you saw?

Yeah, Little Pattie, she was over there and Lorrae Desmond, they were there. Actually a few of them, Lucky Grills, he was there. We saw them a few times actually. They played up at the Dat a couple of times as well, Nui Dat, at Luscombe Bowl. It's pretty good there, you'd just cruise up in a carrier and stop the carrier and watch all the,

12:30 watch the show in Luscombe Bowl. Take your deckchair along and sit down and watch it. All the girls were always a big hit. Yeah, they were good entertainment really, and they'd have some Vietnamese ones come through there occasionally. You'd watch them, they weren't too bad. They'd try and sing. I didn't see any Yanks, any of there stuff that they had there.

How often would you get a show at Nui Dat?

Probably saw

13:00 maybe three all the time we were there at Nui Dat, three to four. When you watch some of the videos I've got it seems more than that. They were good entertainment at the time. It's a bit hard now with silent movies, you can see the actions, not the words. But it gives you a bit of a look at what was happening.

And going out at night in Vung Tau was a bit of fun?

Oh yeah, but you only, I think curfew was 11.00 o'clock. You had to be back in by then. If you got caught with the MPs [Military Police] out

13:30 after that you'd get a fine or reprimand. Yeah, some guys would stop out and sneak back in the morning, but yeah, mostly they'd just go and have a drink with the boys and play up in the bar for a while and head back.

And did you spend much time with the bar girls yourself?

A little bit, but I never got too involved with them but. Sort of too big of a worry, no, no.

From a health point of view?

From a health point of view, yeah, too big of a worry.

14:00 Took it on board I suppose, a naïve young bloke, but yeah. But to me just having a beer was, probably got into enough strife doing that with the guys.

How would one of those girl bars work?

They'd always just come up to you and want you to buy them drinks, and they'd be drinking watered down tea or something like that and it would cost you a lot of money, and you'd be drinking beer and that as well, and they'd try and take you out. Stuff like that, yeah.

14:30 But some of them got, like if you went down there on and off, you'd get to know some of them pretty well and they'd leave you alone. They'd just go and have a beer. A few of the guys we'd just sit around and have a beer together, just a bit of quiet time.

Could you actually have a decent chat with any of these girls?

Yes, some of them. Some of them had very good English actually. Yeah, you could, get to know some of them all right. They're all the same, just wanted to try and get an education to get out of the place and that's all, circumstances, and some of them

15:00 are really sort of well educated because the French had been there a long time. Some were French taught.

Did you find the local girls attractive?

Yeah, some are really attractive, yeah, no problem at all. Cause some of them are actually French descent as well, and actually in Vung Tau in its day it would've been a very pretty place cause it was a French resort apparently years back, and some of the houses and stuff on the headland when we were there were

15:30 pretty startling homes really and a lot of the plantations and things like that, even where we were doing

operations, would've been pretty grand places in their heyday for sure. The French were actually in there occupying it.

So just on a day to day basis back at Nui Dat, what would you do just to sort of wind down?

Of a night?

Mmm.

Most times, normally as soon as you finished work you'd just dive,

16:00 you know, head for the showers.

That would be around about what time on an average day?

Yeah, average day we'd normally start around 8.00 o'clock and break for morning tea, raid the kitchen over there every day for morning tea. Have salad rolls and all that sort of stuff and tea and coffee and have a good half hour break for morning tea, just like an average shop. Then an hour off for lunch, that with it, and then the same thing, go across. Then finish probably around 5.00 o'clock.

Would you

16:30 **have a hot meal at lunch time?**

Yeah, just go over the mess and, you know, depended what was on sometimes, salads and cold meat or a hot meal, whatever was going. Usually a couple of choices of food, it wasn't too bad. Then break about, usually have afternoon tea, pull up for a bit of afternoon tea as well. Then around 5.00 finish up and go and have a shower. Then you'd have, the boozer would be open usually from about 6.00 till

17:00 7.00 or thereabouts or a bit earlier and you'd go there for a little while and a couple of beers, and then they'd have stand-to which was just on dark and you'd all, it was your job to man the perimeter line at all, so you'd do that after stand-to. Then you'd come back and go and have tea. Then you were quite free to go to the boozer and either go there and play darts or cards or pool or just sit around and

17:30 listen to music, talk to guys or just zip out and have a beer. Beer was cheap, 10 cents a can. It might be on special, have a 5 cent night if someone was going home, have a bit of fun there. But mostly that's what most guys did of a night. We'd go back to your lines, or either write or read books or just listen to music, just relax, not too much at all. Do you washing, there was always

18:00 probably something to do to keep you out of mischief. Sometimes you'd have to work. If we'd got a few carriers in there and we've got problems with some of them and stuff like that or we'd been hit with mines, you'd usually work, go and have tea and come back and work non-stop till the job was finished and then you knocked off them. It was not uncommon sometimes to work straight through the night until the job was finished, and if you were working on it sometimes other boys would come back to give you a hand

18:30 to get it down. Sometimes you had a motor change to do. It takes you eight hours to do a full motor change in one, usually three guys working on it flat out. If you get it done and you put it in it and ran it up the road and the damn thing didn't perform properly you'd have to change it again, so you'd get stuck back into it again and re-do it. So in that situation it's important to have everything on the road all the time, so we'd just work straight through. None of that just saying, "We can't, sorry, we'll leave it till tomorrow." You couldn't afford it, so we'd just

19:00 work straight through the night and re-do it again with it, and the same if we got stuff, maybe you got hit during the night in an ambush and they bring it in, we'd start working on it straight away, assess the damage and start working on it to get it back on the, back mobile again as soon as we could. Yeah, a good mob of blokes to do that with.

Did you find yourself in that situation very often where you did have to put in a whole night?

Yeah, not very often, but it did happen on and off throughout the year we were there. A bit more pressure and

19:30 you just work a bit harder to do it with the guys.

When you were standing-to, how long does that process take?

Usually just through to, just on dusk through till it's dark, three-quarters of an hour sometimes.

And the idea is just to be on alert at that time?

Be on alert at that time, yeah. Then you might be, some nights you were actually rostered on to be on duty that night. You might

20:00 be, some of the mechanics might be on, so we had our own gun pit we had to man, and you'd have two blokes down there all night, and what you'd do, you'd swap over every three hours or thereabouts with it. So you'd go down and one bloke would stay there while the other bloke walked up and woke the next bloke up and you'd have to wait for him to get out of bed to make sure he was up, and he'd walk down

to the gun pit, and so on. You'd just

- 20:30 do that through the night, so there was always someone manning in the gun pit all night, and you had the forward base, Zero Charlie would always call you up every half hour and you'd give him a cigarette. He'd just make sure we were awake and occasionally they'd send a bloke around to walk around and make sure you were awake, make sure things were, you were watching the wire and that used to, they didn't come around that much, but if the troop was out, all the troops were out you'd get it a bit more because we were
- 21:00 short on guys that were in the base so you'd probably get, drag a bit more of it, but if everyone was in the base well usually the guys that were in they'd stand them down and you'd probably get three or four nights off. You wouldn't have to do it, but yeah, you just got used to doing it, just give up sleeping, walk down.

There were rosters for doing that?

There were rosters for doing that, yeah. The same with work, we'd program who was going to work on what carriers

- 21:30 for the day, who we had, what carriers we had booked in everyday. You'd work out who was going to be working with who, and who gets on well with each, so you pair them up and let them go. If you only need one mechanic on the carrier you only put one on. Work with troops. Some of us walked around and supervised and just pitch in here and there and help and just make sure things were getting done.

How many carriers were you working on all up?

70 something they had, yeah.

- 22:00 It was be nothing to have seven or eight, up to ten in there at a time especially if they'd all come back from operations. They'd fill out a list of repairs they needed to them. The guys would sit down and write out a list and then you'd sort through the list and get the ones that you really needed, that were major, get them in first and get working on them, and then the minor stuff. Some stuff you'd just tell the driver to go and fix it himself, just sort it out. "We're not going to go and put new tracks
- 22:30 on that, see ya, keep going." They always want new tracks. It's like a bloke with new shoes, you always want them. So you assess that and see what you're going to do there, and some guys always complain the motor's not running properly and things like that, so you test drive it and see what you thought yourself. If there was a problem with it you'd do something about it, you'd repair it. But they were all the same thing, they just had their service schedules which they had to do anyway. It's done all the time, basic maintenance just carried out at
- 23:00 different stages of it. Some easy work, some would take you all day to do the job. It's just like running a big garage, enormously big, but expensive machinery.

Would it often be the case in most situations you would have two mechanics working on a carrier at a time?

Yeah, most of the time you would have two at a time on, yeah, and even now if we're doing an engine change we try and get say three guys onto an engine change,

- 23:30 if we had the manpower anyway, and that's it, if you weren't, if it was a quiet day and you weren't rostered on even, you might be having a day off which you'd get rostered days off, you'd pitch in sometimes and give them a hand to do things. You wouldn't just sit around, lay around, and most guys did that. They'd just get in and work there as well just to make it just a bit easier on everybody else. Even though you might've been on your day off, but still. But sometimes on a day off
- 24:00 you might grab a chopper ride somewhere and go and have a look at something, do that with it, and even in the field we used to, if we had a big problem in the field where we needed more manpower and more parts, we'd just go, because the RAAF guys used to use our loos and showers, they'd fly up from Vung Tau and just camp behind us and just use our facilities. So we used to be able to get a chopper if we needed a job somewhere. So we'd just walk across there and say, you know, "We need to go so and so."
- 24:30 "Yeah, we'll take you with us." So we'd get a ride out, drop our gear off and they'd come back and pick you up later on. Either that or you'd come back in with the carriers, depends what happens.

So if one of the carriers was broken down too far away, you'd jump in a chopper [helicopter]?

Yeah, and if we needed more, you know, more parts out there and more blokes to work on it, send another bloke out to give them a bit of a hand. Usually if we're sending more parts we'd always send another guy with them anyway so they could help do things.

And also as you were saying, if you had a day off you could

- 25:00 **often just jump in and sort of go wherever they were going and have a look around?**

Yeah, they used to do a lot of work with the SAS blokes and if they were doing SAS drops you could jump in and go with them, and fly out while they dropped the SAS guys off. That was pretty interesting

really. They'd probably take five or six of them out in four helicopters and you'd just fly along in one of the gun ships and they'd just drop them in the middle of nowhere and leave them there and pick them up later.

25:30 **Would you get much out of the SAS guys?**

No, not really. No, they're just average blokes but. You wouldn't get much out of them. I've got a lot of respect for them. We did a lot of operations with them with the carriers as well. We took them up into some of the hills and that. They'd come with us and you'd be just driving along in your carrier and you might have only one or two to each carrier. You'd spread them out, and they'd just step off the carrier and you'd keep going and we'd do our ambush things

26:00 and they'd stay out there two weeks or something like that. Then you'd come down the same road and they'd step on board out of nowhere. You wouldn't know unless the bloke in front of you said, "Someone jumped on your carrier." They'd just materialise, pretty smart, they were very good.

They had a good reputation.

Good reputation, yeah. Yeah, no, they'd get a lot of information, and that's what they were doing all the time, just gathering information. They'd

26:30 initiate contact sometimes but only if they really had to. Most of the time they would just information gather to what's happening and just watch, and we'd send all the rest of the guys back up there later on to try and do something with it.

Just going, sorry?

Yeah, go on, you're right.

Just going back to the boozier, was that connected to the mess or was that separate?

No, a separate thing altogether.

Shack?

Yeah, separate, yeah,

27:00 shack is right, a separate shack. It was just a big, couple of big rooms, a pool table in there which is always biased to one direction with pretty rough top on it. It sort of saw a lot of years of blokes playing on it and peach canvas to where the billiard balls used to drop in, the pockets and that. They knew when you made a shot all right with that. Yeah, just chairs they got from somewhere.

27:30 Nobody knows where they came from, and a bamboo bar and a bit of decoration and a stereo blaring flat out all the time and a couple of dart boards because that was the big sport was to play darts and that was always constant, you know, constant happening all the time. So if you were a good dart player you'd go pretty well. Never for any money, normally just for beers with it. Yeah, and just go and sit around and talk to guys, and also we'd get movies pretty well every night as well. Sometimes the same one on and off, but

28:00 most of the time you used to go outside and they had an open air screen and you'd sit there and watch the movies, take a few beers out there with you and sit there and sit on your deck chair and have a couple of beers and just relax, see what's going on.

Who'd be serving the beer at the bamboo bar?

They had designated guys, that was their job to actually run the boozier and keep the books balanced and things like that. Yeah, that was what they did and that's their night time job, and day time they were just another troopy.

28:30 Usually one of the carrier drivers or something like that, senior guys, just seem to be handed on from one to the other.

Which sort of beer would be available?

VB was, green cans, white cans, Carlton was the go, and yellow cans, which was XXXX back then still, and that's all you'd ask for, usually green, white or yellow. Never asked for VB [Victoria Bitter] by its name, drinking green or whatever.

29:00 They used to pull the lids off and you always had these plastic lids with you and you'd pull, had to flick the lids off them at the bar because you were only allowed six at a time or something, so you'd smack all the plastic lids back on them and always had can coolers to keep them cold and cart them off to the movies and sit out there to save walking back and forwards. A few drinks, it wasn't expensive to drink.

And it was pretty much the done thing for everyone?

Yeah, pretty well. I think most guys had a beer over there. There wasn't too many teetotallers in the place.

29:30 Probably if you weren't a drinker when you went over there, you were when you got there. I never

drank very much. I was pretty quiet actually until I got over there. Probably learnt to drink beer with the best of them then. Part of Australian tradition I suppose pretty well.

So if there was no work on it would be pretty much a nightly event?

Yes. No work on it's a pretty nightly event. Just go across, a few drinks. Sometimes you'd sit and write letters first and wander across later on, just see what's happening in the place.

- 30:00 Sometimes you'd just play cards back in your lines with different blokes there. They might have a card game going there. Just sit around and play cards with them.

Were there spirits? Michael, were there any spirits available at the boozer?

Not at the ORs' boozer, only at the sergeants', but spirits were still available like after hours. You'd either buy it when you were at Vungers [Vung Tau] or smuggle it back

- 30:30 up or you'd con someone else into buying it for you or buy it off the Yanks. After hours you always had spirits in our lines, but the same thing, if you got caught you'd get in a bit of strife over it, but no one sort of, it was just pretty well the norm occasionally. Probably a bit heavy on the spirit drinking, most of us. Drink it in pint mugs with a dash of coke, vodka and Bundy [Bundaberg] rum, Baccardi rum I mean, was the flavour of the

- 31:00 thing, and scotch and to this day I really don't like Baccardi rum any more. I can't understand why, but it was, normally on going home nights or something like that, you partied on somewhere a bit later on. Someone always found somewhere to go for a drink, if you hadn't had enough beforehand.

And there were quite a few parties and events here and there?

Yeah. I think in our unit nearly every Tuesday night used to be just about welcome the new guy in and

- 31:30 you'd fly home on a Wednesday morning. There was always someone changing over. If it wasn't one week it would be the next week that you'd be getting rid of one guy and getting another one in. So there was always some excuse to have a few after hours' drinks.

And you were saying earlier that you never really struck anything else like drugs, no marijuana or anything like that around the place?

In our group of guys I can pretty safely say that no one in there

- 32:00 was doing drugs or anything like that. I think most of us just were pretty high on life and were getting enough kicks out of what we were doing as far as alcohol and stuff like that. That's amongst all the guys that I worked with, which is pretty good really, and I think it's a bit of a trend with, more so probably some of the Australian troops. You might get the odd one, but in our unit I can speak for them pretty well there. They're a good mob of blokes. Yeah, we always, we got up to enough mischief I suppose to get

- 32:30 through life with over there without that.

Did you ever spot the Yanks messing around with anything like that?

Yeah, I could smell them, you could smell them. Yeah, a couple, did some work at a little place called Xuyen Moc and we were out there for a while and yeah, the boys out there of a night having drinks you could smell it when you were sitting around. Yeah, each to their own.

Apart from

- 33:00 **Vung Tau, was there anywhere else that you travelled to for recreation?**

No. I went, only with our ordinary out of country leave which I ended up flying to Hong Kong cause I figured, a lot of guys came back to Australia, had leave here, and I thought well, I didn't go on leave until February I think or thereabouts and I was coming home in May. So it was pointless coming back to Australia then.

- 33:30 So I decided we'd go up to Hong Kong. There was 14 of us went up together which it worked out most of us were mechanics of some description, all different units, and a few other guys thrown in, and a couple of Yanks on our flight as well, and we all booked into the one. They used to book you package deals in the Hong Kong Merlin Hotel actually, and it cost us back then, you had to put down \$1,000

- 34:00 US [United States], that was your payment to cover your time while you were there at the hotel for all your accommodation and food and stuff like that. Then they also booked you packages where you could go touring the countryside with it, and night time tours and day time tours. We got to a lot of the night time ones, but the first ones in the morning we didn't quite make it to them. I think we were a bit slow getting out of bed, the boys, but it was good, it was a good time.

- 34:30 We had one floor of the hotel to ourselves and all individual rooms, and what we'd do would be, you might have breakfast in a room, a whole heap of us in together and that guy would pay for breakfast and the next morning you'd move onto another room and he'd just sign the tab [bill]. We all had money, just sign the tab, and the same thing, you'd come back in of a night after being out all night and you

might have a party in say my room, and if it was in my room you'd drink the bar, the mini bar dry,

- 35:00 and then ring up and get more and that was up to you to pay for the tab on that, so you'd just sign the tab, and so on down the line. You'd just go to the next bloke's room. That was just part and parcel, it was good fun and we had a great time with it. It was good. I enjoyed being in Hong Kong and now when I look back at photos of Hong Kong and what you see of it, like being there in the '70's, it's incredible the way it's changed and even over there we had a great time there. We went up to the New Territories,
- 35:30 places like that, and went on ferry rides and just cruised around and started taking out some American girls that were on a cruise ship there and they fell in love with all us mad Australian guys. It was a good time. We had a great time with them up there. Yeah, and out of that one of the girls I was with we wrote to each other for quite a while after we went back to Vietnam and there was all indication, talking later in history, that she was all keen
- 36:00 to come back to Australia and settle down with this Australian guy, but anyway she went back to the states and got tangled up over there and eventually stayed there. Yeah, we met each other again like probably would've been 20 years down the track. Got in touch again and came out and saw her, met her. Yeah, it was good fun, a good reunion. Yeah, but some of the Yanks that were there with us we've kept in touch with them a little bit on and off, and I tried
- 36:30 to see one of them while I was in America a while back but we couldn't get together, which was a bit unfortunate really, but we'll try again and soon get on to him, but he was just a guy who made a big impression, good fun. Yeah, we had a good time over there. Then we flew back into, which is really scary, you go from a battle zone where you're full on alert into mixing with people, real people, then seven days out and then you're flown
- 37:00 back straight into it again. Yeah, in some of the situations it really doesn't happen that often. And the same like the guys that were returning to Australia and coming back. I feel for them. It would be hard to be over there and come to Australia and go back out again. Where to me, like to fly into Hong Kong it was just not that big of a deal, and to fly back out. And when I flew back in again I knew that I really didn't have that much longer to go before I was on my way home anyway,
- 37:30 which is probably the whole thing that you look at all the time you're there, how much more time have you got to spend there with it.

Did you mix with any locals in Hong Kong?

No, not really, only like I said the Americans that we met there. No, just only where went and ate and dined and stuff like that, caught buses around the place sometimes or caught cabs and 15 blokes trying to get into a few cabs used to cause a bit of fun occasionally, or even catching a

- 38:00 bus. You'd jump on a bus and only get half on a bus before they'd take off and leave you behind. We had a good time. We had a tourist guide, that was about the only local that we had. She was a Japanese girl that was assigned to us, and like we had a bus they'd pick us up in sometimes and cart us around. She was good fun, she spoke really good English, yeah, and got into the spirit of things with all of us. I'd say she was a bit lucky with 15 blokes carting around. She was pretty attractive actually.
- 38:30 Didn't come to any of our parties and that. She sort of drew the line there with us, but used to drop us all back at the door and made sure we were heading inside and we'd all bolt again once we got rid of her.

Did you do any shopping over there?

Not a great deal because we could buy it all back in Vietnam anyway for the same sort of money. So only a few little odds and ends. We didn't buy much at all actually. Mainly just sort of ate good

- 39:00 food and beer and relaxed and more than anything just looked at the sights. That was more the thing. Yeah, rang home form over there. Actually rang Mum at the pub, had a chat to her for a while. Yeah, that was a bit of a novel thing to do because you couldn't do it out from Vietnam actually. So just rang there.

You can't do that from Saigon?

No, we couldn't ring out. No, not that we knew of anyway.

- 39:30 But probably didn't even think of it. It was just one of those things there. Yeah, we thought we'd do it while we had some money left over still. I think all of us, we had to put in \$1,000, I don't think any of us got much of our money back by the time we paid for food. We didn't wreck anything which is really good, but. Yeah, cause we lived pretty well with it.

Did you end up spending any time around Saigon?

- 40:00 Not very much really, only just a couple of days. Just sort of went up either buying stuff or picking up gear from different places up there. Just drove up and drove out again. We didn't spend a lot of time up there.

So that's where you'd buy your goodies whenever you needed them?

No, you could buy them in at Vung Tau. They had what they call a PX [Post Exchange - American canteen unit] there. Sorry, at Nui Dat itself, had a PX and if it wasn't there you could order it in, but you could go there any time you liked and buy stuff duty free pretty cheap. We thought it was anyway

40:30 back then. You could order in stuff out of catalogues and wherever else you wanted and just buy it and it would be delivered right there, pick it up. You really didn't have to go anywhere else to buy it.

What would be popular stuff?

Mainly stereos, they were really popular back then. You know, like a good amplifier, everyone had the biggest amp and good speakers, and reel to reel tape decks were all the go then, massive big four inch reel to reel tape

41:00 decks, yeah, they were the go. All of us pretty well, nearly every bloke, had bought something like that. Then buying movie cameras and cameras, you know, watches, always buying new watches to send back home and stuff like that cause they were pretty cheap, all your name brands. Seikos were all the go back then. Would've liked to have kept some of them that we've had now. Seem to have wiped them all out over the years.

41:30 **So your policy the whole time was to avoid hanky panky over there with the local girls?**

Yeah, pretty well, yep, pretty well actually. You get it drummed into you enough anyway really, and yeah, I dunno, it's one of those things. Just tried to stay out of trouble.

Were your mates the same?

No, I can't speak for all of them. I wouldn't go dobbing them all in, but I can't speak for all of them.

42:00 But really most of us guys, we were...

Tape 7

00:31 **You were talking that it was really drummed into you obviously what STDs [Sexually Transmitted Diseases], the girls in Vietnam might give you, if you were to have one of them as your girlfriend or you were with them.**

Yeah.

What exactly did they teach you?

Well, from even when back in Australia, horrors of gonorrhoea. They showed you slide nights and films and stuff like that of those, syphilis and stuff like that, and that was one of the things they always stuck into you, if you were going to go and sleep with any of the girls and that wear protection

01:00 and this is years ago. So, and the horrific things that can happen to you, and if you've got a girlfriend, if you're going to come back home you don't want to come home with this, and all sorts of things, and also penicillin needles really hurt as well. Yeah, that's probably, I'd say a lot of guys probably heeded it. There's probably a lot that didn't. If you're lucky, you're lucky and yeah, just one of them things that I probably took on board and yeah,

01:30 just tried to behave myself anyway.

You weren't completely naïve when you went over there.

No, not really.

You mentioned you had girlfriends and thing like that.

Yeah, I had girlfriends here and stuff like that, yeah. Yeah, I'd actually met the girl I eventually married. I met her before I went overseas as just a young girl at a tennis club dance here and we had nothing to do with each other again for years. She sort of went away to uni and college and stuff like that and our paths didn't cross until I actually came home from Vietnam, the first party I went to.

02:00 She was there with her boyfriend. As you do, cut him out. Yeah.

So when you went to Vietnam, did you go with a girlfriend, did you leave a girlfriend behind?

No, I didn't, no, no. Didn't leave a girlfriend behind. I went, yeah, on my lonesome. I wrote to a few people, a few people I'd met over the years in different places, and actually, a girl I spoke to on the phone on the last day here, I rang one of my mate's in Sydney. I just rang his office

02:30 and just tell him that I was on my way out of here and stuff like that, and she said, "Question to ask you, where are you going?" I said, "To Vietnam." "Oh, do you want someone to write to you?" I said, "Yeah, if you want to," just like that. We wrote for quite a while back and forwards. Nothing come of it, just someone to write to which is probably, I never wrote a letter in my life until I went overseas, and that

was probably an outlet for a lot of the guys because it's good to get mail. There's nothing worse than standing there and the mail has come in and you're the only bloke

03:00 didn't get anything. So that part was really good, and we also got, our local RSL Club here had a sport soldiers type fund, and they'd send you over fruit cakes and you'd get a package with fruit cakes and lollies and things like that in them, and not too many of the other guys used to get them. Just one of the things that our town was doing in supporting guys and that, and the boys used to always go on about the fruit cakes and after a while you'd get sick of fruit cakes. You'd get one

03:30 of these nearly every month or a bit more often. They were a good thing from home, there was always a letter in it from different people, and a few different people wrote to me, and that was a pretty highlight. Even if you'd been out in the bush and that and get back in first of all, get the mail and go through your mail and see who you got letters from and that was a big highlight, was receiving mail, and I suppose these days of texting and phones and that, where there it wasn't, purely what you could write on letter,

04:00 yeah, it was a good thing to do.

Did you find you were a good letter writer yourself?

A pretty untidy writer, but yeah. When I did read some of my, when I did first come home I could hardly understand them. I couldn't read them myself most of the time, but yeah, I think I turned, I could write out a few pages. I corresponded here a while back to a girl in America and I could, Kim, when I first got back with her again. I was talking to her and we used to ring, but I could sit down and write and I could write a few

04:30 pages without too many hassles and that really. Once you get into it it's quite good, but yeah, it was just a thing to do over there just so you got mail from somebody else.

We'll talk about writing. You did a lot of paperwork while you were over there. Can you tell us what that involved?

Yeah, I eventually got to actually run the workshop, which was coordinating all the work that was going on in the day, and typical of the army, the way things operate if you want to get something from the store, you've got to sign for it.

05:00 So you'd have a part number, say you want a road wheel seal and you want something like that, they'd come to my office and then you'd have a list and you'd go through the parts book and you'd write out all these part numbers and you'd authorise it, give it back to the mechanic. He'd take it over to the storeperson. They would have a look at it, they'd write on that they've allocated five to a particular vehicle, say 3 zero, alpha, and sign for it again and bring it all back to me

05:30 signed that they've actually got it, and you just file all that stuff, and everything was allocated to a vehicle. Everything that went in and out of the store had to be allocated somewhere. The army just had to track it. We also had to just work out, track the man hours that we were working all the time that the guys were, who was doing what work on what vehicles and fill out their time sheets. You still ran it all the time and every little item was tracked, all the paperwork, any parts you put on the vehicles, the whole show. The army just loved paperwork, even in a

06:00 war zone. Just couldn't grab it and use it. You had to sign for it if you wanted it. The same to go and get ammunition, you had to sign for it. If you wanted food, the same thing, you had to go and sign for it first and you could take what you wanted as long as you signed for all the stuff.

How many hours a day would you spend on paperwork?

You'd spend most morning just sitting there, like when we were working. We did three months pretty well working as the duty sergeant, like the duty officer on the thing, and you'd spend most of the mornings filling out paperwork for stuff.

06:30 Then go around the yard and make sure all the jobs were going properly and all the job cards were getting filled out and parts were allocated. Yeah, it would take you a while to do it. At the end of the month you had to tally everything up, what parts you'd used and make sure it all worked it out, and allocated all your hours that the guys were doing. Where it went after that nobody knows. Just be in a big whole somewhere I suppose.

Were you elevated to lance corporal?

07:00 Yeah, I eventually got to a lance corporal and I was actually getting paid to do a sergeant's job, so I worked there. Promotions we could've had in the field but we didn't sort of worry about them too much. You got paid for it on paper money-wise so that was good enough I suppose.

So when were you actually promoted to lance corporal?

Probably four months there I suppose. Just not dead sure. I didn't look it up actually.

Is that normal, is four months, or did you do pretty well being promoted

07:30 **like that?**

It was reasonably normal. Depends on your aptitude I suppose with it. Some guys probably didn't get anything at all in promotions. I don't know. I just, yeah, may aptitude, how you apply yourselves, qualities, I don't know. Must be something somewhere.

How much were you getting paid when you first went in as a private?

I really can't remember. I can't, I just couldn't even pluck a figure out.

08:00 Even though we used to sign for our pay slips and things, I think we were only drawing probably \$25 US a week. That's about all, like drawing of our pay, but I really can't. I can't even find a pay book actually.

But you came home with some money in the bank?

Yeah, we came home with money. I sent, paid off my car while I was over there. Like money was just put in an account for you. You only drew

08:30 on it when you really needed it. You'd just go to the pay office and just sign out some money if you needed it. Our biggest would've been if we were buying stuff and things like that, but really you never really had that much cash on you anyway. You'd just get what you needed from week to week.

You had some sort of your own form of army money, didn't you?

Yeah, we had military payments, the currency, yeah, which you could buy and sell on the black market and that as well, but that was a form of currency that you used there at the Xs [PXs] and stuff like that. Australian money wasn't any good to you really. American dollars

09:00 were, they still are. Seems to talk the language all around the world, but they were few and far between, but most of the stuff you'd buy in MP [MPC - Military Payment Currency] and you could trade it on the black market as well. Sometimes get a better exchange rate for it on the black market, but you had to be a bit careful you didn't get short changed changing money. Seems to happen all around the world.

Did you spend much money while you were there or were you pretty frugal?

09:30 No, I don't think I was frugal with it. We bought stuff as we needed it. You know, you buy all the latest hi-fi gear and video cameras, not video cameras, Super-8 cameras back in those days. Everyone had a camera and all still cameras. Polaroids were all the go, Polaroid cameras.

You took a lot of footage yourself with your Super-8?

Yeah, we took, we've got a lot of footage, Super-8 footage there. Probably around 40 rolls or something like that.

Where would you take your Super-8?

Just when we were out, if we were out

10:00 on operations with it. Usually run footage while you were just driving around, from the helicopters if we were out flying a bit, choppers, you'd take it with you then. You usually tend to take your camera everywhere you went. That was part and parcel.

So you'd have your head sticking out of the armoured carrier?

Yeah, the armoured carrier, yeah. Just as you were driving along, just shoot it down the road. Did a bit out of helicopters with different guys that were flying you somewhere. They like to show off so you get some good footage with it. Yeah, just

10:30 everyone had a camera.

Did you actually take footage of people, you know, landmines going off or the bang bang kind of stuff?

No, no.

I guess you were working then?

Never did, I've got nothing of that. I've got footage of carriers that had been blown up after they'd been blown up, but nothing happening at the time. The only footage I've got of action is when we were doing tests like demonstrating fire power to different guys and stuff like that, what happens and what can happen at the time, and it's just the only time I'd take

11:00 footage of that sort of stuff, yeah.

And your nights out, did you used to take a camera with you or video camera?

No, a the boozer I've had my camera. I had it over there one time on one of my nights out and there's some good footage of guys there running amok, but no, not really. And a bit when we were in Hong Kong on leave, took a bit while we were there, just roaming around over there. Came out okay. But yeah, other than that not really. As far as action stuff, probably never, I dunno, we never worried. I

never took time.

11:30 **Did you get any footage of the locals while you were over there?**

Yeah, quite a bit as you're driving down the road you'd take, just run movie footage of them with them, or around the villages sometimes, just take movies of kids and stand around. A lot of times they put their hand out and want you to pay for posing for them for money.

Would you have to be careful that they perhaps might think you had a gun in your hand when you had that camera?

Yeah, not too bad in around Dat. We had a couple of little villages close to us.

12:00 It wasn't too bad in around there, but we never had that mistake with it really.

Tell us a little bit about your relationship with the Vietnamese children?

Yeah, kids, they always came around. They were always chasing like food off you and some of the villages that we used to go to, yeah, it was fine, you knew it was a friendly village stuff like that.

Do you remember the names of them?

The kids and that? No.

No, the villages, the friendly villages?

Oh, the villages. Yeah, Xuyen Moc is one that we did a bit of work at actually.

12:30 I went up there quite a while. The Americans were in there and they put a generator in for the village lighting system and not long before I came home the generator blew up and they wanted someone to go out there and repair it and do work on it, and I was the silly guy that volunteered to go and do that cause I reckoned I had the experience. So anyway, they flew us out there and I spent a matter of a couple of weeks back and forwards and repaired this thing. Wouldn't stay out there of a night but, we used to fly back and forwards all the time with us.

13:00 And when we did get it fixed they put on a big celebration and stuff like that actually. It was pretty good actually, but it was just another Australian PR [Public Relations] job. You know, get it fixed no matter what the cost is, stuff like that. So it would've been an expensive little exercise actually.

What do you mean an Australian PR job?

Well like, we were doing things for the people. Got their lights back working in the town and all this sort of stuff. We fixed their generator for them.

13:30 So yeah, actually the Australian government, well not the government, but the army went out of its way pretty well to make sure it was done because it's not cheap to have someone fly back and forwards in helicopters just to be working on a generator out there.

Is that what the soldiers used to call little jobs like that, the PR jobs?

Yeah, yeah, some of the orphanages and that there, they did a lot of reconstruction work on them. A lot of little schools

14:00 around the place, you'd try and help out there where you could. But yeah, a lot of it PR for the villages. Some little, the other one, Dat Do near the Horseshoe, it was a reasonably friendly little village as well really, wasn't too bad, but some of the other little ones you had to watch what you were doing all the time going through.

With the children?

With the kids or with people in general going through them. You were always very careful and very sceptical

14:30 cause you hear stories of what happens, so you always watch what you're doing.

Did you have any face to face contact with the children, like where you had to maybe be careful?

No, we didn't have any dramas and that with them, but you were always a bit careful with them, that's all.

Did they try and sell you...

Yeah, always trying to sell stuff or buy stuff off you or, "Have you got any food or rations?" Things like that, chocolate bars and stuff like that. Yeah, nearly always chase you for that, just kids in general

15:00 all over.

You said you went to a feast after, a party for the...

Yeah, they put on a party for us, for the guys that were out there, a few of the blokes. That's Americans there as well. Yeah, they just put on a bit of a spread in appreciation of what was happening.

Did you eat some local food?

Yeah, yeah. You always try the local food. Sometimes it was good, sometimes it's not. Yeah.

Was there dancing and drinking?

No, no, just all sitting around and

15:30 having beer and local brew and food and, more like just a dinner more than anything. There was no dancing or that, no, and we took off out of there before it got dark as well. They might've carried on in the night but we didn't stay there after dark.

So you got in the chopper to go home?

Yeah, flew out, yeah.

Did you feel good doing that kind of work or were you a bit cynical about it?

No, it was quite good to do really. Yeah, no, it was all right, just another

16:00 job. But the only thing I didn't like doing it was I was on short time, I wasn't that much too long about going home, and it's in a place where anything could've happened there. It wasn't that friendly, you know, over friendly place, and we've had problems there before, but anyway, it worked out all right. So that was my only thing about it really, yeah, just didn't like to be in that situation but

16:30 we were there anyway, and that's why we wouldn't stay there of a night. They'd fly us back out.

Did you have any face to face contact with what you knew were Viet Cong?

Not really, no, no. Only a couple of night ambushes that went off, and even then you're not sure what set it off or what went off. You see tracks or shoes or whatever else if they've taken off, but no real straight on bang bang, there's someone there.

17:00 None of that. We did a quite a bit of operations as well.

Any dead Viet Cong did you come across?

No, no. None at all. The infantry guys they'd do all that before we'd get there, clean it up.

You lost one of your friends, didn't you? One of your friends was killed while you were there?

No, one of the troopers were killed while we were there and we knew the guy, yeah.

And you knew him, yeah?

Yeah, oh yeah.

17:30 Well you get to know them anyway through working on their carriers and stuff like that. Yeah, and it's pretty hard losing blokes like that especially accidentally.

Are you talking about the one in the chopper?

Yeah.

Was there anyone killed in action?

Not while I was there, no.

Right, okay.

No, no. We were just in that period where it was relatively quiet as far as that goes. Lots of things happening but no one actually getting killed. A few wounded in it but no one, you know,

18:00 which is very fortunate. But the whole unit in all the time I was there only lost 13 all up, which is not a bad percentage really considering the amount of blokes that went through the unit.

Which would've been about how many?

There'd be 200 there while I was there. So they changed them from when they were there from, I think the unit were in country from maybe '66, some of them. Yeah, somewhere around there, the first ones,

18:30 through till end of '70, nearly end of '71 they pulled out I think, something like that. So it's not too bad for the gauge anyway.

Was there any talk about communism or the fact that you were trying to stop the communists from coming down?

Well that's what it was all about to start with, yeah.

Did you talk about that?

Not really, and probably not until you got home and years on that you read a bit more or

19:00 followed it up. I really can't say we sat down and one on one chatted, "This is what we're doing here, we're stopping these guys." I can't recall any time at all sitting around over a beer saying, "Jeez, we're not winning here," or, "We're losing the show." It was never ever, it's quite funny, I don't think it was ever ever mentioned until we come home and the majority of the guys we knock around with now, nearly, "What a waste of time except jeez we had a lot of fun with mates."

19:30 Yeah, that seems to be to me with the group of guys I knock about with seems to be what comes out of it.

While you were there did you, what was it that kind of inspired you or kept you to be there? Like you might talk to some guys and it was like nationalism, we're fighting for Australia and that kind of keeps you going. What kept you going while you were there?

I don't think any of that. I think just,

20:00 just the mates that were there and the work side of it and you know, it's pretty exiting as far as that goes, and work, what we were doing. There was probably never too many dull moments with it, as far as even just guys go. You know, just the characters that make up your unit and people that are there. There's always someone that's causing a problem to make you laugh. There's always a clown. No matter where you go there's always someone that does

20:30 that, and as far as being nationalistic, I don't think we're, we're not like the Americans in that way, that we're there full on gung-ho. Yeah, to me I don't think we're tarred that way. We're just out there doing a job and that and that's probably the basic thing of it, doing what the government asks you to do, right, wrong or indifferent.

21:00 Back then you never questioned why. Why are you doing it? And probably now but you can question it and say why in the hell were we there for what's come of it? And my own way at the moment is saying even though, digress off it, like what's happening in Iraq, yeah, it's been a good thing. They've stopped one but then again they've just opened up an ants' nest to me of problems

21:30 which is just gonna keep happening and happening and happening. Although I suppose in Australia you do feel a bit isolated from it but still, to me it's just a scenario like the Yanks went into Vietnam and gained nothing, and the same thing over there now. They're fighting hard to try and gain for people which even when they self-govern it's probably going to go back.

22:00 Depends on who gets in there, similar things. I don't know, I'm not quite politically that way, but standing back looking, yeah, interesting in 10 years time to see where it is, or even like now we're 30 years down the track. It's just back, you know, Vietnam is a stable country. Communism is no closer to Australia really. They're staying where they are,

22:30 not doing anything. Yeah, it'll be interesting.

I guess you see a lot of parallels between Vietnam and Iraq having been in Vietnam?

Well they probably aren't, but to me they are, to me they are. When you're seeing, like we're supposed to have stopped fighting there and instead of seeing the loss of life through the smart guerilla warfare and which these people like they did in Vietnam, like the small groups were disturbing some of the biggest armies in

23:00 the world. Just small groups of people were causing havoc all the time and just being a nuisance factor in the situation, and that's what's happening in Iraq. Small groups of people are going to keep being a nuisance and causing that problem. It's only one or two people that they're knocking off at a time, but that one or two people ties up like 50 people at a time and it just keeps tying up people all the time. Like they're not killing very many but it'll just keep doing it and doing it and eventually it just harasses people,

23:30 and that's how terrorist cells and like even Vietnam, that's how it was worked. They just, small groups in cells all over the place. You might only just blow up one tank or personnel carrier or wound say one soldier and away they go, but they spend the entire force then trying to find one man or two men and away they go again, and they move quicker, faster.

24:00 They're fighting just their belief and that's what it is, and the same like in Iraq, just their belief in it. That's just my view on it.

Did you have, you mentioned when you were in training you had a fair idea that the Viet Cong had underground tunnels and you were learning about those in training, did that translate when you were in Vietnam,

24:30 **were you coming across those tunnels?**

I only ever went, I looked at one tunnel complex and didn't go down in it cause it's not our job. They have sappers, what they call sappers which are mine engineers and they go down and sweep that and

do all that sort of stuff, but their engineering feats are something unbelievable for someone that's digging with their bare hands and a bit of bamboo stake and things like that. It's just what man can do it he really wants to, and some of that stuff was quite unbelievable, that they

25:00 actually, and some of the tunnels they dug and seeing some of the stuff now, even now, well you've probably got to take your hat off to them a little bit.

At the time did you, when you were over there did you have any idea how extensive that tunnel network was?

Not really, no. We'd been, we'd seen stuff of it like at Canungra and different lectures like you go to and stuff like that, but until you see it, it changes your attitude, give them a bit more respect

25:30 with it, and also the way used to do, as I was saying earlier, they'd blow up one of our carriers and we might have used the road a dozen times and thought it was safe and the next minute, bang, lose a carrier on it because there'd been no fresh marks, but it's just been, excuse me, put a detonator in it and away it's gone. It could've been there for ages. A bit of that stuff and the same with they blew up a tank carrier, a tank launch in the blink of an eye without even, right in front of everyone pretty

26:00 well.

So you have a respect for Viet Cong as fighters?

Well, in what they were doing, yeah. Taken a lot of people and so few are men, and you believe in something I suppose you fight hard for it.

How did you actually come to terms with the concept of killing being over there and killing? Was that something that you had to deal with?

Well we didn't kill anyone.

That you knew of, yeah.

That we knew of, yeah,

26:30 and that's probably, and also when you're at idle times when you have an ambush situation go off you were just firing blind into the scrub level. It's not the like the guys in say the Second World War where they could watch a guy running towards them and pull the trigger and actually shoot them. But in saying that you're training in the army gets instilled into you, it's either you or him. You don't have time to put it in your

27:00 brain and think is this the right thing to do or the wrong thing to do. They get you that way that you have to react instinctively for preservation of your own life, and I think that's where, I think most blokes would be the same, even now in civilian life you'd probably do the same thing. If it was protect your own life you would do something and sort it out. But yeah, as far as lining

27:30 someone up, no. You wouldn't know.

You mentioned before that there were a few operations you went on that were less than perfect.

Yeah.

Can you tell us about one of those?

Yeah, we had a, we were doing a lot of work on what they call the Song Rai River, and we had some carriers up there and the boys decided to ford the Song Rai River which was, these carriers would actually swim and you could put them across it and you put the loading board down and drive down into the creek, into the rivers and you can actually just, they will go across without any worries

28:00 at all. Anyway, the boys got a bit enthusiastic with the carrier and the next minute it's gone underwater and all we can see, and I've got photos of it, are the two aerals sticking up out of the Song Rai River. It's half way across the thing and it's gone under, and of all things it was one of the crew commanders' vehicles and that and he's on the top of it swimming around. Anyway so we had a rescue operation there to get it out, and while we were there then because we'd blown every bit of cover that we had cause everyone was around the place, we

28:30 started popping hand grenades into it and blowing the fish up in it and getting fish and having fish dinners, and then got smart and put landmines in it and let them settle and little things like that, just blow them up and away they go. And New Year's Eve over there, Christmas, they went around and told us not to, you weren't allowed to let off flares. "We know that you've got 30 flares on your carrier, we'll be around in the morning to check that there's 30

29:00 flares there and boxes of flares." But everybody was stacking up flares from months previously and when New Year's Eve come it was just like daylight around the area, just flares going up. For miles up the road you could see the camps up there, flares going up and all around Nui Dat there were flares popping all over the place. We were pretty right the next day when the head count came. It was just a funny situation with it, just little things with it. You know, on operations

29:30 part of it we also used to get a ride, you'd get a ride in the helicopters if they were doing a SAS drop or something like that and why in the hell you'd bother to do things like this, I don't know to this day, but a bit of fun, a bit of excitement. So you'd jump out with them and they'd probably take five helicopters and half a dozen SAS guys and they'd fly along and keep dropping out of the sky and up and down, up and down all the time and then when sometimes they'd just hit the ground and blokes would jump out and away they'd go. They'd keep doing

30:00 it that way and the Viet Cong wouldn't know where they actually got out at, and they'd just keep popping out of the sky. That was good, you'd fly around with them and they'd go up later on and you'd get to pick them up into a clearing or they'd walk back or we'd go out in the carrier sometimes and pick them up.

What kind of state were they in when you picked them up after being in the jungle?

All right, just filthy dirty, same as normal. They'd have three weeks or four weeks out there. You wouldn't know where they were. You've really got to admire them for what they do, yeah, yeah.

Would they be mixing with the

30:30 **locals much or would they just be hanging back?**

No, no, just hanging around by themselves. They just cruise around the scrub and watch roads and watch villages just to get a feel for what's happening around the area, whether that area's worth doing an ambush on. Try and pick up something, just watch movements, how many people are moving here and there or whatever with it. Yeah, just poke about with it. Yeah, live by themselves and on their own. Just live off the land

31:00 pretty well. Not carry much kit with them when you drop them off. So yeah, they were interesting and even the chopper guys were good to knock around with and get to fly with.

Did many of the Aussies try and pull rank over in Nui Dat?

No, you had a bit of respect for rank I suppose, or a little bit of respect for senior guys. Even with our stuff, blokes had been there a bit longer than you

31:30 even though you might outrank them sometimes, you'd still take notice of what they say. We didn't have too many dramas with out lot in that way, and I think even our officers, we did have, even this Captain Tunbridge I know very well even now, just one of the boys, pretty easy to get along with and he'd appreciate what you were doing and I think that was pretty good. It was good to see like some of the regular soldiers that had a bit of rank still

32:00 got on well with you as far as that went, as far as having like Nashos work for them as they used to call us all the time with it, but yeah, you still needed a bit of respect from guys but it wasn't, you didn't have to bash people to get them to do things for you. Most of the time blokes would jump in and away you'd go.

Was there still rivalry between the Nashos and the Regulars?

Yeah, it was still there a bit,

32:30 but you still like with our guys they got on pretty well, but still you'd always have a bit of a dig, just as you do. Just couldn't resist the temptation to do that.

Were the Nashos better soldiers as a rule?

I wouldn't say that. They make good soldiers for sure, yeah, a lot of the Nasho guys. I think a lot of them are probably a bit more

33:00 mature. In saying that, like 20s, where a lot of the Reg's were 18, things like that. So they had a few more years on them. A lot of them were in their trades, a lot of guys, and yeah, being that bit older I think probably made a bit of difference to a lot of guys with it, if you can be a bit more mature at 20, 21, where a lot of the Regs probably in there at 18. Like joined early in their life and we might've had a bit more experience, but maturing

33:30 into it might've been a different story. I don't know, it's a bit hard to say really.

But even so, from what you were saying the Nashos that were there, they all had to sign a piece of paper to say that they'd go so most of them wanted to be there?

Yeah, most guys.

None of them were forced?

No, none of our, in our unit and stuff like that, and that's the understanding I had, that you had to be signed to go. I'm not sure on the infantry side of things but I think it's still pretty true that you had to sign and volunteer to actually be over there. And yeah, all our guys

34:00 wanted, did want to be over there and were working there to do it, and I think for a lot of guys it was just a different place to work for 12 months, have a bit of fun.

You had some fun you mentioned on Sundays at Nui Dat?

Yeah, Sundays used to, you could either, on some Sundays there you could drive around Nui Dat and I did a video on a bit of it one Sunday afternoon. There was a gun club there. You could actually go and shoot shotguns at Nui Dat Gun Club. You could go there for

34:30 that. There was go cart racing on there with guys from, one of the engineering places had a construction. They'd built a go cart track so all these sort of hand-made, home- made conglomerations, whatever you could get there and drive for that. You could go to it. We had a spot down the big dam there we used to take our carriers down and wash the carriers down there, so there was always a bit of mucking around down in that area, or you could just go to one of the music things at Luscombe Bowl or just sit about and play cards

35:00 with the guys, but there was Yanks playing a bit of baseball. You could join in with them. There was always touch football or volleyball was a big thing, into volleyball if you were real keen. You always had something to do, and then other, in the wet season we used to have this little vehicle called the mule. It was a four wheel vehicle and it just a flat tray on it and a steering wheel and a seat, and the sporting thing was you'd get a bloke to stand on the back of it and you'd hoon around on our big

35:30 cement pad out the front all around the track and see if you could throw him off and take turns at doing that.

Did you manage?

Oh yeah, he'd do it. How we didn't kill anyone I don't know. But yeah, tip it over and throw everyone off and stuff like that. Never seem to, I don't know, must've been invincible back then, never seemed to hurt anyone.

Did you have any kind of injuries when you were there at all?

Yeah, I've got a gun blast in my left ear and a bit of deafness in it, that's all.

How did that happen?

Accidentally actually.

36:00 Firing pistols, just practice firing cause you do a bit of weapon practice every now and again, and just being a bit careless and standing alongside the carrier and the muzzle blast echoed off the carrier into my eardrum. Just careless.

And so what happened, your eardrum burst?

Yeah, I found I lost, just a constant ring in my ears and tintinia still, lost a bit of hearing in my ears and that, yeah. Also what

36:30 I do for a living as well is not helping much.

Does that drive you mad?

You just live with it. You don't really notice it until someone mentions it and then you hear it now and it's four times as loud as what it should be, and it doesn't help probably if I my truck last night. I tend to put earplugs in it and it slows it down a bit, you know, like just get rid of that constant noise a bit the next couple of days, but like a lot of guys have got it, any background, any loud noise at all. If you've been

37:00 near guns that have been firing constantly. Artillery guys probably suffer from it.

You mentioned that you had a great night out in Saigon, can you tell us about that particular, or that couple of days, was it?

I just had a day off with some of the local boys from here, Steve Doyle and Michael White, and Mick I played footy with, you know, as a kid and sort of grew up here and he got drafted at the same time and they were both in 17 Construction Squadron and we just sort of got together one time and

37:30 Steve had to go to Saigon to pick up some gear for one of the jobs. So we all got organised and went up together and just had a day out up there and just walking around looking at things and went to one of the big flash buildings there. I got some photos of them up on the roof, one of the headquarters I think, army headquarters.

What was your impression of Saigon?

Hey?

What, at that time, what was Saigon like?

Pretty rough looking place. You know, a lot of military

38:00 traffic everywhere and people still tearing around the place, but heaps of military everywhere, just all Americans. Pretty dirty and dishevelled as far as that goes from what we could remember. Even the

harbour and stuff like that just in around there, rubbish and stuff in it, and all the way up it you can see just where it's been bombed out, all up the highway, things like that, Highway 1, just all the bomb craters everywhere

38:30 with it.

A lot of girly bars?

Yeah, a lot of girly bars there, a hell of a lot of that. All chasing the American tourist dollar with the American soldiers up there cause they had a pretty big presence in Saigon. The Australians were up there as well, but not as big. Vung Tau was mainly the headquarters for Australian troops and that, down that way.

And you had a pretty interesting journey home?

On the plane, yeah. yeah, we actually, once

39:00 we got up in the air and were flying the captain announced we were on the oldest plane that Qantas had, the old 707 [Boeing aircraft] back then that they had in the whole fleet which was a bit interesting, but the boys, we all sort of were drinking pretty heavily because that was it. We were finished and we were on our way home. We drank the plane out of beer and booze. Most of us were carrying spirits to bring home and stuff like that, so we ended up selling the spirits back to the hosties [air hostesses] on the plane

39:30 and the stewards and stuff like that, then buying it back off them at twice the rate of money, but it was quite good. We landed at Darwin on the way back. Our plane first touched down there, but we weren't off the plane, only, I'm not sure what they did there. I think they only just fumigated the plane. They might've let guys off. I just can't remember, but it was pretty good and then flew from there into Sydney, and then the same thing, as soon as I hit the ground everyone was pretty relieved to be home.

40:00 I came, Mum come down, my sisters and her husband and a couple of mates of mine met us at the airport and a bottle of beer was a bit of, you couldn't get it over in Vietnam. They brought some beer out and we sat around the car park for a while and had a few drinks and decided I was supposed to go to Coogee and stay with the boys over there. We headed across there and got over there and by then it's probably 1.00 o'clock in the morning. So then I decided I didn't really want to stay there, so we hopped in the car and drove straight back to Condo and come home.

40:30 Yeah, got home in time to shower and change and meet the 10.00 o'clock opening at the pub. That was pretty well my welcome home.

Everyone was at the pub in the morning?

Yeah, there were people out there. Yeah, a bit of a blur for me, but yeah, it was good. Some of the other guys reckon that they didn't have much of a homecoming but I was treated pretty good actually. I didn't have too many dramas, but just, I suppose being known in the community well and truly beforehand, stuff like

41:00 that, and not having the city influence with a little local town, and all there are is just someone that's been away and come back and you had all the Second World War guys that were pretty keen to see you back. It was good.

So there were lots on slaps on the back when you got to the pub?

Yeah, plenty of that. Plenty of slaps and plenty of drinks had by all with it, and yeah, I had a bit of leave. Had to go back to Sydney because while I was over there

41:30 they ask you what posting you want, like when you come back, if you want to be posted, we could get posted pretty close to home if you wanted to or they'd try to post you somewhere. It depends on how much time you got to have and we elected to get posted back to my old unit in Sydney which they normally wouldn't do, but under the circumstances better off going back there and we can go back and start training guys again, go back to teaching and stuff like that.

42:00 So we did that. They sent us back there and that's what I used to do. I used to just turn up of a morning.

Tape 8

00:34 **So when the time came to leave Vietnam, Michael, you were well and truly ready to get out of there?**

Yeah, we'd been there six days longer than we should have. My orders, my replacement came into the country and usually your orders to fly out come in as well at the same time and most times you only do 365 days and you know your going. Anyway my orders to fly out

01:00 didn't turn up so I couldn't fly out. I sort of sat there another week before my orders came through

again for us to fly out.

Was that a tough week?

Yeah, it was actually. It was a bit rugged, especially yeah, you knew you should be home and things like that. It was probably the longest week I've had for a long time. We didn't do any work, we didn't do anything, didn't go anywhere. Just eat and just go over to the, you know, didn't do any work

01:30 for anyone or anything like that. Just really just tried to keep well and truly out of trouble. No, but yeah, we had the big night's send off was always on the Tuesday that night, and the Wednesday morning you were up early on a plane from Luscombe Bowl back up to Saigon again, and there were a few other blokes going back with you from different units and you'd just get up there and there was just a whole plane load of guys going back.

Full plane?

Full plane, yeah,

02:00 yeah, flying out of there. All changing over and back into Australia.

So you got back into Sydney to Holsworthy?

No, you actually land in Sydney and you're free to go home.

When you eventually had to go back?

After, when we came back, when we eventually came back we were actually posted back to B Squadron Co Regiment back in Holsworthy. That's where we were originally. We had a posting back to

02:30 there, which I knew the CO. He'd been posted back there, a lot of the guys. So, and our plan was and what we did do was the new mechanics that were coming through there then, just teach them a few of the methods we used overseas, what to expect while they were over there. We practically did that, just sort of became an instructor in the situation and just helped guys to understand a bit more. Not that too many more went across really because the unit was getting close to

03:00 pulling out then at that stage of the game, but yeah, I spent a pretty easy last probably month in the army. Didn't do much at all except instruct and come home here and I used to come back here a lot of weekends. We'd just go skiing down on the Hawkesbury there, have weekends away from the base, a few extra days. So it was pretty cushy.

Did it take long to sort of settle down from being

03:30 **in the intensity of Vietnam?**

No, not that I recall. I think I was, you know, pretty well back at work again after probably only a month off if that, a month's holiday. I don't think I recall going anywhere or doing anything. I didn't think I really wanted to go anywhere. Looking back in life now possibly you should've went overseas for a while, while we had money, just looking, never did that, jump away and travel. Yeah, no, just,

04:00 yeah, come back home and started just going out and back skiing and different things and full into work. They moved me, I had to actually work in Condo for a little while, then they had the pressure on us, so I had to move to Parkes actually. Had to work up there, started work up in Parkes for the County Council there.

Did you consider staying on with the army?

Yeah, I did. I give it some pretty good thought actually mainly because some of the fellows that I knew in there were a bit keen for

04:30 us to stay on and when you look back at it now, yeah, maybe it could've been a reasonable sort of career there really because we were pretty well respected in it amongst our unit and amongst our peers as far as that went, and we'd already been teaching at Bandiana and back at Holsworthy again. So we'd fit into an instructor's role somewhere. It would've been pretty easy for us to stay on, but I think just the mentality at the time that you have is you're only in there as a

05:00 Nasho and your two years are up. You might as well get back out and back to the real world again. Yeah, so we did. I think a few guys did stay on with it, but yeah, early retirement if you had've.

So you pretty much went straight back into the County Council?

Yeah, back into the County Council as a mechanic working for them, and because I already did a five year apprenticeship with them all I had to do was another at least two years with them. We ended up doing another

05:30 five years and I had ten years sort of long service leave up and only my two years of National Service actually count back towards your long service leave. So really three years after that and I was due for long service leave. We actually took it and bailed out of the job then. You know, quit for a while and went and worked at another garage for a while, just 18 months working there with that.

06:00 Yeah, and in the meantime I met the girl I ended up marrying with it and we sort of went our for a long time, just generally going around. We used to, I was bike racing during the winter and water skiing during the summer months. Kept chasing tournaments and chasing ski racing around the area with it. Yeah, just kept probably full on keeping busy, keeping it up to the lifestyle we had.

06:30 **You had a couple of kids?**

Not for a fair while then. I didn't get married until about '76 before we got married. So yeah, and still the same thing like when kids come along, we were still, back, yeah, I was back working for the council again actually back here in Condobolin because the position came back up here, so I took the job here and started work out back there again and

07:00 yeah, we were still madly into ski racing, travelling around New South Wales and part of Australia with that. Then we sort of got into a bit of motor sport work where we sort of, there was a car rally come through here and they were looking for mechanics to go with them to go through to Darwin. I thought this sounds like pretty good fun so we put our name down and ten days flat out intense all the way to Darwin.

07:30 So I did that the first year with another guy from Sydney. Anyway the next year the management who were running the show rang us up said, "Would you like to be the guy in charge of the mechanics and pick your own crew and take over that role for us?" I said, "Oh yeah, we'll do that," which we did. We picked all local blokes from Condo to go with us the next time. We did that then for about the next six years. It's just all part

When did you start doing that?

08:00 In about '87, yeah, we probably got into that with it. Yeah, and just did that pretty well until about into the '90's, '91, '92, '93. Just every year we'd take off and chase cars around Australia and my wife ended up coming with us and then we used to fly our kids up to Darwin and pick them up and drive back

08:30 down either the west coast through Western Australia or back through all the middle. Just give them a little look around the countryside. Just spend, have a holiday sort of coming back home again and just show them a bit of the country at the same time. Did that for a lot of years actually, and through that sort of picked up another mate. He was an ambulance driver, or supposed to be, driving the ambulance in the rally and keeping things going, and I met Graham and he was into actually

09:00 racing rally cars and asked me would we join the team there, cause I came on board as a mechanic with them. So we did that and yeah, with him we sort of got into the world of rally cars and I went to Tassie and raced down there a bit, and sort of all the ones in New South Wales, did all the rounds there, and then eventually went to the World Championships over in Perth. Worked over there with them. Had a couple of trips across there with him and also with other guys. We got a bit of a reputation as being a reasonable sort of

09:30 mechanic so they rang us and wanted to know if we'd come across. Worked over there with that. We were heavily involved with it for a long time, and then Graham decided to quit the rallying and racing cars on the circuit. So we switched to that. We've been involved in that pretty well ever since, racing [Ford] GT production cars, go to Bathurst and things like that with it, and when they started the 24 Hour he said, "We're going to be in that too." So we've gone to the last two 24 Hour races and worked down there as well. It's all good

10:00 experience and good fun. A good mob of blokes, we've got a good team to work with. It's a bit like life everywhere, you just meet these mates and all gel together and all work well together and party hard after it as well. We're all notorious for doing that. We're a good team that way, but yeah, it's been a load of fun with it, and it's been life for us still pretty well. I've been racing bikes still during the winter

10:30 as a winter sport. Come summer I still ski. I spend quite a bit of time on the water. I spend a lot of time trying to coach now. I do a lot of coaching for kids. Try and put some back in what I got out of it. Yeah, but still

Keeps you pretty busy?

Yeah, still kept fairly busy actually with my business and work. It's still a busy lifestyle. I'm on a few committees around town. I've been in the Fire Brigade for 22 years as a fire fighter. So

11:00 that's twice a month we're down the station for drill and anything else that comes on, and we don't have that many fires a year but we have a few. We were involved with them for a long time. We used to go to a lot demos and stuff like that, and go away and compete, but I've pulled out of that in the last ten years. As far as competing goes it hasn't been as much, but it's still, involved with it pretty well, but I'm getting near the end that we should be out of it soon because in the next couple of years we're getting a lot of young blokes coming through now that

11:30 have a bit more experience, and all that top end now is getting, has probably got, the captain has got probably 40 years. Another guy above me has probably 25 years and we've got another couple of 20 years. So a lot of us have been there a long while and I just feel at the moment that you should move on a bit. I probably should've done it ten years ago really.

You found that satisfying work?

It's good fun, yeah. It is good fun and the same thing, just the mateship with all the blokes with it and

- 12:00 also like I went to America a while back and it was a good opener into a lot of fire stations over there because it's a common bond, you're all fire fighters and it was good, easy, like to walk into a station and meet guys and get friendly with them, all over America. Anywhere I went and there was a fire station open I just wandered in. Yeah, it was an easy thing to do really.

And what's your business at the moment?

I run the NRMA Road Service in Condo, just called Taylor's

- 12:30 Auto Centre. It used to be full on marine. I had two motorbike franchises, the lot, but we scaled it back here probably about six years ago. It got a bit, it just got a bit much work-wise, stuff like that, so we scaled it down. We got rid of the bike franchises and then decided we'd run with the NRMA Road Service side and the contract towing which was a good sideline and it meant that I didn't have to work in my workshop as hard and I
- 13:00 could work back by myself again without employing people, just an office girl and a couple of casual workers when we needed them, and then the ski season, the skiing stuff, I was heavily into it and we got out of it a bit, but the demand was still here in town. There was another shop started and they didn't sort of run with it as much as I hoped they would and we're still getting people pestering us for stuff because we had so much experience with it. So I decided okay, we'd ramp it back up again for the summer months. So we've done
- 13:30 that. We've gut full back into it again. Yeah, so it's sort of turned back on its head again, but it's keeping us pretty busy and the same on boat work. I used to do a lot of outboard marine mechanics, I'm a qualified mechanic that way as well, and we used to send a lot of it away but we've sort of taken on a bit of that back on again now, and mainly I'm mainly doing more inboard work. I'm sort of stepping around the outboards if I can, but it's pretty hard to say
- 14:00 no sometimes. We have a pretty full on workshop. We work from 8.00 until 5.30 most days, and sometimes a bit later. I try and have Saturday mornings off now. That sort of thing, I'd had for years, you know, I just try not to be there on Saturdays if I can avoid it, but I'm still on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week unless I don't want to be here which is not too often, but still it's very rewarding. Your own business is a lot of hard work sometimes but it's only
- 14:30 what you make it, and I find dealing with the public quite good. I don't mind helping people, it's pretty good. It's good satisfaction. Yeah, we helped a lady from South Australia here last year sometime, you know, got them back home and she walked back in the shop the other day just to say thanks. Yeah, that was a pretty good buzz actually. You don't expect it, just called in to say they got home all right. They were going back through again, pop in
- 15:00 and say g'day to you. Yeah, that's good.

You said that you had a pretty good welcome back home here, and that you sort of managed to slip back into civilian life quite smoothly. When you started to see that some of the blokes in Sydney, the bigger cities, started to get not such a good welcome home,

Reception, yeah.

How did you feel

- 15:30 **about that?**

It wasn't until really the welcome home parade that we actually probably all got together in Sydney, and it wasn't then until you talked to guys then that you realise that some blokes didn't have it as good as what I had. I just walked back in to a town that new us and any guy that came here was the same. You'd go to the RSL Club and you were shouted a beer. You were made very welcome because the club supported you 100 per cent while you were overseas.

- 16:00 And even the older guys and stuff like that really give you 100 per cent support, and I really didn't even realise, like naïve to the papers, I don't know what it was, but until I started to talk to some of my mates that they didn't have it as good, and some of them really health-wise weren't probably travelling as good either. They were pretty knocked around by the experience and that of it. Had one guy actually, Mark Brown, committed suicide which is just unbelievable.
- 16:30 You know, just no rhyme nor reason for it not long after he got home, and one of my best mates who shot himself, same thing, young Jeff. Yeah, just no reason, and it's all, they said that's what it's from but I don't know. But myself, as far as I know I've got nothing wrong with me. You have your moments and I probably,
- 17:00 I'm probably more emotionally now, I think to myself and this is what the explanation I've been given as to why I probably fitted in pretty good. I came home and met a girl pretty well straight away and got into a relationship and stuck with that, and all the good things just were the good things, and all the bad things were put to one side and just shoved there and left there and never had to worry about opening that box up, and that's the theory

17:30 I've been given in the game. Till the traumatic thing, we got divorced, and that blew us apart badly, really knocked me around and since then even I've been probably a little bit more emotional than what I would normally get from most things, and I think that's just the part of you, you've let down all those walls, and this is the explanation you get. All the bad things that happen to you, you've always suppressed them and then they

18:00 come to the top and explode up in one big hit, and I think that's where some guys probably haven't coped as well with it, and also I probably keep myself busier than what I should do as well. So you're flat out doing things and I think that's some way guys actually compensate or cope for what it is. We're always doing something, always on the run going somewhere cause that's the way I probably like my life

18:30 really.

So when was the divorce?

Yeah, probably be 10 years maybe, six or ten. I can't think of a date, it's not a date you remember. Took me long enough to remember what day I got married let alone when I got divorced.

When you did catch up those blokes, did you

19:00 **talk about, did post traumatic stress syndrome come up?**

No, not really.

Was that something they bandied about?

No. We were all, pretty well all of us were still together with our wives at the first one we went to and the remark was, we all went to the march then. After the march we said we'd meet up and take them all to dinner and they all went, "Ha, ha, ha, you just wanna do that," and we all turned up and took our wives out for dinner and they reckoned we all must've matured a bit.

19:30 But yeah, nothing came up about it then. It was only the fun things we did and stuff like that. There was no, "I'm having this sort of problem," and stuff like that, and it's probably only for me, and even now over the last five years, where some of the blokes I've spoken to I can't believe the tablets and the problems they've got. I just go, "Shit, I'm only on blood pressure tablets. There must be something wrong with me." I don't know, but yeah, like our storeman, he's on that much medication it's not even funny, and I'm going,

20:00 "Well, you didn't go anywhere but, you were just handling the parts all day." I suppose it just effects guys differently to other blokes, and that seems to be a bit of a trend with, and I've even seen infantry guys here in town, and I would say we've seen probably, spent a lot more time in the bush than what they have had while we were in country over there,

20:30 and they're affected badly by it, and I'm not saying that I'm not affected by it either, but still probably suppressing it better or handling it better. I don't know, there'd be a reason somewhere along the line for it.

How do you think you are affected by it?

Part of your life that in some ways you look at it and think, okay, I wasted 12 months or two years of it,

21:00 and you've got to draw that fine and say well, I didn't really waste it. I got a lot of experience out of it, met a lot of great guys, and you've got to put it in that perspective. Even though when you look back and say, okay, we virtually lost what you were doing, what you were over there for. The politics away from it, I think that's the way you've got to look at it. I gained this much out of it and it probably outweighs the bad bits that you've got, all the good things, the friends

21:30 you met and all the good things you done, the opportunities to do stuff. People you just met around the world, the contacts you've got and things like that. I think it outweighs a lot of it by a long shot. That's just for me. It probably got us a little bit more, I wouldn't say maybe sense of adventure out of it, because that's probably what I thought about it to start with. You get someone at 20 and there's the chance to get out of the country and away you go.

22:00 I regret I never ran with it when I come home, sort of took off and do what kids do now. Like the boys next door to us in the 20's, they're off tripping around Europe and stuff like that. We're e-mailing them all the time and I always say to them I wish I'd done it 20 years ago. That's fun, and I think all young kids should do something like it if you can afford to do it. Even if you can't afford to do it, get yourself out of the country anyway. You'll survive once you get away.

22:30 And have a look around at the world, the world's a big place. Even Australia, get out of your own town, go, have a look around other places. It's good fun. Get to meet more people outside your comfortable circle and what you knock around with. It is, the world is just a big place. The more you can get of it the better.

How do you think your experience in the war

23:00 **changed you as a person?**

I don't know. People still think, or guys I've known before and after reckon still the same sort of bloke. Like probably taught us to be, maybe a bit more self sufficient, know what it's like to be independent and make your own decisions

23:30 to do stuff. I wouldn't say it's made me a better business manager or anything like that, cause I'm probably running my business for the fun of it half the time, when you do your tax records and stuff like that. But yeah, it probably matured us a hell of a lot I suppose as like a 20 year old, 21 year old compared to say like a 21 year old these days, and in saying that compare myself to my son who is now

24:00 22. At his age, where he is now and where I was now, he's travelled quite a bit of the world, quite a bit of Australia and that as well. Yeah, had some pretty good opportunities. In my position now I wouldn't like to see if they conscripts to go to Iraq. Yeah, I wouldn't like to see him do it,

24:30 and it's interesting talking to him about things like that, cause I put him on the spot. I say, "What would happen?" He said, "Just go." "Would you object against it?" Yeah, "No," and talking to the boys next door in a beer situation when we've been sitting around having a few drinks and they try and get a bit of info out of us and stuff like that, I say to them, "You're 20 Dan, what do you reckon? How do you think you'd go? Would you or would you not?" And they all play rugby and stuff like that and,

25:00 "Yeah, that would be good, yeah, we'll go, we'll do it. If the country wants us to do something we'll do it." So it's interesting to see just in a situation what would actually happen. Not that I'd wish it on anyone as far as conscript goes and stuff like that, but it's nice to have, there's still young blokes there that would step up, even though they know the consequences

25:30 still of what's happening around the world.

How do you feel about National Service these days?

Yeah, in some ways I think it would do a lot of kids the world of good. It would teach a bit of discipline to some kids that really need a swift kick up the backside, and that's probably, I don't know, I might be old fashioned, I don't know, but I think I'm still

26:00 someone that likes to see the car door held open and stuff like this. You know, just a little bit of courtesy shown towards the opposite sex is really good, and I think that's a bit of a problem. I think guys really need to take a good look at young blokes anyway. It's probably changing values. It's just life as it goes, but somewhere along the line, and I don't think it would hurt some fellows, it really wouldn't, to have to toe the line and get up at 6.00 in the morning or 5.00 in the morning and be regimented

26:30 about something for once in their life. But then again the other guys might rebel about it and not like it. I don't know, might be just a generation that's going to be different.

How do you feel about the fact that it took so long for your first march to come along and also after the Vietnam Vets had just been treated so badly for so long?

27:00 It wasn't a good thing. You know, like the government, in hindsight we will never know why they didn't. There were some parades held for guys, like some of the battalions when they came home, they actually marched as a unit in different places, where guys like myself that really was a pretty well transit unit where we all flew home at all different stages of the game, I suppose it was really hard to get us all together to march us down the street to get that recognition,

27:30 where some of the battalions did, like I think up in Queensland, stuff like that. They came home on a ship. They all unloaded off the ship and they marched down the street and probably got a bit of recognition and stuff like that. But yeah, for us guys, no, and maybe it should've been something that could've been done a lot sooner, to just give you that recognition. Although in saying that as well, I've marched here pretty well every Anzac Day I've been home, and if I haven't been home I've marched in Melbourne or somewhere

28:00 or tried to have gone to a service somewhere that we've been, and I suppose that's, you know, you get recognised for that and it's probably some way of doing it. But in saying that, even the Second World War guys, a lot of those didn't get any recognition. They did march through the streets and stuff like that but there would be a lot of blokes that were independent, you know, just came in and hopped on a train, came back to home wherever it was.

28:30 I think that's some of the ways where the government possibly went wrong, was like, we landed in an aeroplane like 10 hours ago we were, you could've been in the jungle. Some guys were literally still there, had a shower, changed, jumped on the plane and were gone. At least we'd had a little bit of time to wind down. We'd ceased pretty well trying to do operations outside of Nui Dat in the last two weeks. Like, hey, and this is

29:00 what we did to most of our guys, okay, you're going home, we'll keep you, cotton wool you. We don't want you getting bumped off or something stupid happening to you like you roll a vehicle or something like that. We'll cotton wool you, try and keep you in around the Dat doing stuff around here for your last two weeks of your time in country. You deserve that much, and so you probably got in a little bit of a wind down mode before you got on the plane to come home really, where some guys didn't. They were

just straight out of, pretty well just straight out of the unit

29:30 and bang, shower, change, jump on a plane and you're out of there. And which for blokes like that is pretty hard to take. You land at an airport and then you're put in a cab or whatever and home, where to me maybe they should've been, not locked up for a bit, but debriefed or something like that. Sent to Holsworthy or somewhere or back to your unit where you could normalise yourself a little bit, then be allowed back in. Yeah, I dunno. There's a few different

30:00 theories in it I suppose. Then again it depends how good blokes do cope anyway with a day to day situation.

Looking back at that war now, do you feel like Australia should've been there doing what we did?

You look back and say okay, we did some good things for the people over there, built some good roads and

30:30 maybe did some good things for schools and villages and stuff like that, and if that's helping people, yeah. But as far as trying to free them from what they were, did they want to get untangled from history sort of. It's proven that we've wasted our time as far as that part of it's gone. My own personal stuff, yeah, it probably has been a little bit of waste of Australian

31:00 life, but then again at the time, the government of the day, they're just going on what they get told on what they're doing, and probably at the time and at the day, hindsight is a good thing. Yeah, you can always look back at a lot of things and say we shouldn't have done this or shouldn't have done that. Just part of Australia's history. It's a bit like saying Gallipoli, they shouldn't have went there. You know, when you look at history no way in the world should that beach been tried to remotely

31:30 been anywhere near. So there's been a lot of mistakes made where Australians have been at war, even back to the Boer War where they shot 'Breaker' Morant. Should never have happened but that's just history again. You can always look back and say things are right or wrong and you find that no matter what happens, even today's soldiers still do what the government tells. You don't get paid to think.

32:00 Paid to do, you just do as you're told. Follow the orders from the next guy and that's what makes probably a pretty good soldier. Do that and you'll survive most of the time.

You've done some talks here and there, different situations about your Vietnam experience. Can you tell us about those talks and what you try and get

32:30 **across when you do that?**

I've spoken to the school kids and the first one I did was quite interesting because when I did it I can remember old Len Craft coming to my school and giving a lecture and he was a Second World War Vet and I can always remember him being there talking about being to the Second World War and stuff like that and various guys over the years

33:00 have come while you were going to school, and I said to the kids, little did I realise that I would eventually be, excuse me, that old guy standing up there giving the lecture. I was actually that soldier that would be doing it. Never in a million years would I thought that, and that was a pretty good felling and I spoke about my life as a recruit and being, how regimented

33:30 it is and if you think like training for a sport is hard, it's nothing to the way the army teaches you. You run somewhere up a hill, and you get to the top of the hill and it just starts going again and you just keep progressing and progressing, and I just related it to life for them. If you don't strive to do something you'll get nowhere, and just spoke about things like that. Not so much from my experiences overseas but just

34:00 what life in general did for me then, and to survive is the same thing. You really need to set goals, achieve them, work out where you want to go with your life, and I pretty well spoke about that. Not the horrors of war or anything like that, there's not much point in that really cause they can see it on TV these days. But that's all I did,

34:30 just some of the light humorous sides of life in it, what it was really like and how much fun we did have, and probably the times we didn't have it either. But still that was the main thing, was just try and point to an area that no matter you just keep striving and do your best all the time whether you swim, run or you try and do something for your country. You just push, do your best with it, and that's with pretty well my life all the way around.

35:00 Just enjoy it.

Are there lessons that we can gain from the Vietnam War?

You would think so. You would think, like the latest thing, and terrorism is a big thing now and really probably the only thing that has affected us in Australia has actually been the Bali bombings and one of the guys from there I knew, knew him, and you don't think,

35:30 and that's probably made Australians gear up a little bit and say let's get into Iraq if that's where it's

come from. I still, my own personal opinion is I still don't think it is the right thing to do. I think it's always just going to be a hornet's nest but I know terrorism has to be stopped somewhere in the world. No matter how good our borders are and stuff like that, it's going to happen. I think religious groups were getting

36:00 into Australia. We've got to have some sort of, not so much curb on it, but I think they've got to get a grip on it that this is a pretty safe country and leave your politics overseas when you come in and it will always be a safe place. It will always be a place to be respected, but and still I'm probably old fashioned in that. I still see that we are having problems with some of our, with those sort of groups and we're still having problems with

36:30 our local groups as well, but not to the stage where they want to shoot you and burn your houses down and petrol bomb each other and things like that. I think it's only a minor thing as far as that goes. My personal opinion is I don't think we should be, our troop commitment to Iraq and fortunately we haven't lost any men over there which is a good thing cause I'd hate to see guys get lost over there for

37:00 which it might be a legit reason, but yeah, and watching the young guys on TV and stuff like that, yeah, they're the same young blokes, you know, all those years ago.

How do you feel about the protest against the Vietnam War that occurred in Australia?

Well surprisingly, they didn't affect

37:30 us that much at all because we didn't know much about it. Even overseas, like we didn't take any notice, just the symbols. Yeah, I've got one inside and it's a great big one and it's got Participant, South East Asia War Games on it. It was just a joke thing, but yeah, I didn't have any problems with it. Like it wasn't, it was just one of those things that I suppose back then you didn't take any notice of. Even now I think

38:00 it was probably foolishness on some peoples' parts. I don't think it did anything to bring them back. Maybe it did, I don't know. Gough [Whitlam] come to power I suppose at that time and shut it all down, but then again it had probably run to the end of its tide anyway. It wasn't gonna happen. They weren't getting the result. All the money and the millions and I think even the States were starting to feel the pressure from internally. Okay, let's get out of here.

38:30 I think the Australians probably just got out just before them at the right time. As I said, if you go back in history books the French were in there for 50 years and didn't beat them. It cost them a lot. They've had quite a few people try and go through the place.

Have you got a message that perhaps we haven't touched on yet that you'd like to get across, just a reflection

39:00 **on war or your experience? Anything that you'd like to get across at this point?**

Not really, but only probably being around to see First World War Vets. Like there was First World War Vets here in Condo when I was first starting to march and stuff like that. Then Second World War guys,

39:30 then Korea blokes and Vietnam blokes, probably being in that period of time where I've seen most of the major wars that, we saw the results from it that we've actually fought in, it's no good for anyone. Yeah, if you can avoid well and good, it would be a good thing, but there's no such thing as a perfect society. It will never happen. We will be at some point in time, always have a force that, either overseas or

40:00 serving overseas, and we do that and with the government that we have of the day, no matter who it is, I think the Australian people, if we're committed to something support the guys 100 per cent and just give them the support as well cause there's nothing worse than being away doing something knowing that you're not getting any thanks for it whether you think it's right, wrong or indifferent. It's not the individual's fault, it's the government that's

40:30 saying, okay, we are going to send you. You joined the army to do a job no matter where it is, whether it's peacekeeping or just to fight a war, and the government asks you to do that and that's your commitment. So you're over there doing that and you just hope that back home that you do get 100 per cent support, and that's probably the disappointing thing for even the guys these days, they pick up a newspaper and it's not being thanked

41:00 for home. We should be doing this, we should be doing that, and that's about all. That and life is very precious. Just treat it with the respect that it needs. It is. There's a lot of kids that, a lot of people that die very young and never get to see or do half the things in a lifetime. Not that I've done, I wouldn't say that much of a life, but

41:30 for a fair bit of it I enjoyed it right to the fullest and I think everybody should try and do that. Just enjoy life. That's all.

Excellent, Michael.

INTERVIEW ENDS

