Australians at War Film Archive

Barry Laverty (Bazza) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:37 **OK, Barry, we'll make a start. If you can just give us an introduction to your life story.**

My name is Barry John Laverty and I am 63 years of age. I was born in Brisbane at Sandgate in 1940. I am the eldest of four boys and all four have served in the army.

01:00 I was looked after by my grandparents from the time…To understand this, my father left, deserted my mother many years ago and he left us with a…I was seven years of age and my youngest brother was one, and I went to live with my grandparents for a number of years at Bowen Hills while my mother worked out on the Roma Palato line. We grew up,

01:30 eventually my mother came back to Brisbane with the three other lads, my three brothers, and we went to school in Brisbane. We went to St Patrick's College, the three of us and my mother worked as a cleaner there to pay for our fees through school. Eventually we went to St James' College, Lionel, Trevor,

02:00 and Steve, and we stayed there until we went to Grade 8. When I was 13 years of age, because of the fact of being the eldest of four boys, I went out to work to help my Mum. I worked at Wallace Bishops in the watch room there and I used to earn £4/9/6d, and my Mum would give me

02:30 10 shillings pocket money a week, which was great in those days. I stayed there until I was 17 and then I joined the railways and I passed an examination for signalman when I was 17 and later on when I was 20 I sat for my (UNCLEAR) which I passed. At that time I had two brothers who were in the army,

03:00 Trevor and Lionel. They said to me at the time, "The army is a pretty good life. What about coming into it?" I was at the stage where, to gain seniority in the railway, I would have had to go out into the bush and I had just been married and my wife Sandra was 17 and I was coming up for 21. So I thought to myself, "Rather than take a young girl

03:30 out into the bush, I will join the army and it will be better for us." But lo and behold, I found that out of six years, I spent over three years away from my wife. I joined the army in 1961. I retired in 1967. I went down to Wagga [Wagga Wagga] for my

04:00 corps training. Then I went to where we did our service training. It's on the tip of my tongue, but I just can't remember the name of it. When I went through, they have a sort of a grading in your platoon and I was fortunate enough to be thought of as the best bloke

04:30 in that platoon, so they said to me when we went up for our corps enlistment, "What corps do you want to do, Barry?" And I said, "I want to be a regimental drill instructor"; so quickly the major said, "Good. Infantry is your go." I ended up being posted to 3rd Battalion [3rd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (3 RAR)] up here in Queensland in 1961. I stayed with them until 1965.

05:00 In that time, we went to Malaya in 1963 until 1965. We also went over to Borneo – we did two operations up onto the Thai border at that time, and it was then that Malaysia had the confrontation with the Indonesians there. We had beach patrols

05:30 where we would patrol the beach to stop Indonesian forces from coming into Malaysia. You might notice sometimes I say Malaya and Malaysia. Well, it was Malaya when we got there but they had the federation and changed the name to Malaysia while we were there. In 1965…My wife joined me after about five or six months in Malaya.

06:00 When I went over there wasn't enough for housing, and my wife came over after about five months and stayed there until the end of my tour of duty. We were away mostly on operations. We were in a camp, Terendah Camp; it was a task force [28th Commonwealth Brigade]. There were the Brits [British] there, there were the Kiwis [New Zealanders] there

06:30 and there were us Australians and we took it in turn to patrol the place. In 1965 my wife and I returned to Australia to Brisbane. I got a posting here rather than go to West Australia with the 3rd Battalion. But lo and behold, I had about a month in Queensland and then I was posted to 5 Battalion [5 RAR] in Sydney where

07:00 they were getting ready to go to Vietnam, as the second battalion into Vietnam. My wife was in Queensland. I had the five months away from her; I visited her occasionally and she came down for a couple of weekends to stay with us. We went into training for Vietnam and at that time we were all young fellows, we were very excited about it, it was a great adventure and

07:30 we were right and ready to go. There were quite a lot of national servicemen around at that time. In my section, there was only two regular army personnel, which was my 2IC [Second-in-Command] and myself – I was a corporal then – and the other five or six men within the section were all national servicemen and they were only 18 years of age.

08:00 They were great boys and they were all keen to go over to Vietnam. I went over to Vietnam in 1965, ’66 – I can’t remember the exact date, but 5 Battalion then – this was before the Task Force [brigade equivalent] was in operation – we cleared Nui Dat [1st Australian Task Force base-to-be]. I was in infantry and this was an operation

08:30 that took us about ten to thirteen weeks. We landed in the task force centre and we cleared it and we then took over control of Nui Dat. Another battalion came in and if I remember correctly it was 6 Battalion [6 RAR]. We were starting to make up the Task Force. We were out on patrols all the time.

09:00 It was a very hard experience. It was tough, a different sort of terrain to what we were used to and it was hard work but we enjoyed it. And then when we settled at Nui Dat, we had to dig in, as it were. That is the first thing that you did in your lines – you dug in. You dug a pit so that for every tent,

09:30 we had an eight-man tent there and they would sleep eight men to a tent. We had the artillery right next door to us. It was a little bit difficult to sleep with all the firing and that that was going on day and night but nevertheless you get used to it. We used to stand to every morning and every night we would take out our patrols. There were many O Groups [Orders Group] and I can say for the time that I was in Vietnam I averaged about four hours sleep

10:00 a day. I came back to Australia – I was medivaced [medically evacuated] back – I had some injuries and I had some illnesses and I had a nerve problem as well. I spent time in 1 Camp Hospital, many weeks, and when I got out of 1 Camp Hospital the repatriation hospital

10:30 called me in to give me treatment and I was there for over two months. They put me on a kind of shock treatment, an insulin shock treatment, where they put you into a semi coma. A sister sits by your side and they check you all the time for the hour or whatever you are under the sedation. This toned me up, it helped my nerves, I put on about

11:00 a stone in weight and I came back better than ever. I left the army in 1967 and surprisingly enough I got a good discharge report; I was a good soldier. They wanted me to stay on. They came to my wife – I was posted to Tropical Trials Unit, Innisfail, at the time and I know a couple of people from the army came

11:30 to my wife and spoke to her and said, “Look, he’s a good soldier. Talk him into staying on” but I had over three years away from my wife. I wasn’t 100% well and I was only just sort of getting back on my feet and I thought that getting out of the army was the best thing for me. We bought our first home at Mount Gravatt then, and I think I borrowed about $6,000 from the Veteran Affairs ‘Repat’ [Repatriation service]...

12:00 and we were paying about $26.55 a week and the weekly wage was about $40 a week – that was a long time ago. I got a job with Tip Top Bakeries and I did some bread deliveries for a couple of years and then they asked me to take on a role as a trainee there,

12:30 which I did. I went up as a supervisor where you have to know all the runs in your area, and I suppose it is a glorified runner you are, because if anyone is sick you go and take the run on, but nevertheless you got a few more dollars and it was good. I went into the Prisons Department

13:00 when I was 35 or 36 years of age and I served there for fourteen years. I served at Boggo Road and it was shift work all the time but it was good money, I enjoyed the work, and we managed to sell our home and get another home up at Esma Street,

13:30 Rochedale. We moved over to Waterford and at that time my wife was feeling unwell. We took her to the doctors and it was found that she had a brain tumour and also a tumour in the lung. Unfortunately, even though they operated on her, she lasted four months and

14:00 passed away. I am now remarried and I have a lovely wife. We were friends. She was my wife’s friend for many years and I know when Sandra was dying she said, “Ring up Judy” and she said to Judy, “You ring Barry.” Judy has been a widow for over twelve years, thirteen years – her husband also died of cancer – but we have a wonderful life. I am living here at

14:30 the moment in Brisbane. I am on constant medication. I have a number of war conditions that I will have

for the rest of my life. I still live my war experiences; it is something that I will live with for the rest of my life.

15:00 I am probably mentally in better condition than what I have ever been in my life; I have no worries, no strain, no pressure, and I live life to the full extent. Does that bring you up to date?

That's beautiful, Barry. Thank you very much. What I would like to do now is to take you right back to the beginning and just talk to you about growing up to start with.

15:30 **Can you tell us about your earliest years when your mum and dad were together and you and the boys?**

I can remember back to when we lived at Bowen Hills. I was about seven years of age or a little bit older and my Mum came to Brisbane. I can remember my time with my grandmother and grandfather; they were very good to me they, looked after me

16:00 until Mum got there. As four boys running around, we had mates across the road named Lack, our mates around the corner called Ferguson and we got up to the usual troubles of kids. We would ride bikes down the street and we might have the odd air rifle fight amongst ourselves but we were good mates – we just lived as kids.

16:30 We grew up pretty close. We didn't have a lot; we were very poor but we thought we had everything and we probably did.

Can you walk us through the house that you were living in?

Yes. It was at 39 Jay Street, Bowen Hills; it was a little Queenslander. On the front it had a little verandah where I used to sleep and I think it had two or three

17:00 bedrooms and the bathroom at the back. I know my grandfather built in the bathroom. It had a bath, it didn't have a shower and they used to boil the copper water down in the yard. We had the old WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK pen there and they didn't have sewerage in those days; it was the outhouse there. It was a high-set home and it was…I don't think it's there now – I've gone around within the last five years and

17:30 I haven't seen it there, but this was going back fifty-five years.

Can you tell us what it was like sleeping on the verandah?

I enjoyed it. I had a little old dog and he would come up on my bed and sleep on the side of it. But no, I didn't feel isolated or anything. It was a little bit light at times but I had a single bed out there and

18:00 to my recollection it was wonderful times, the world through a child's eye. My mother stayed with my grandfather and grandmother and went to Victoria Park Housing Commission over near the Brisbane General Hospital at Victoria Park, and we stayed there for a few years and we got a home out at

18:30 Stafford, a four-bedroom home and we thought we were the ant's pants then. The house is still there. I was, I suppose, 10 to 13 then and I helped my grandfather sort of do a little bit of concreting and cleaning up the yards, and I can remember to this day, all around the house he had coleus [type of pot plant] – I don't know, it seemed hundreds to me, but he probably had

19:00 forty or fifty and they were all different varieties and they looked beautiful, you know. As I said, I went to work when I was 13 and unfortunately when I was in the railways my grandfather passed away. I was over in Enoggera one day and I got word that he had a heart attack and had passed away. He formed me as a young man.

19:30 We used to go to boxing, play cricket; he was a mad cricketer and we did amateur boxing all over the place and we had a great life with him and he took on the whole four of us.

How was it not having him around any more?

It was pretty hard. You've got to remember I think I was about 17 when he passed away.

20:00 I know I've skipped a few years and that, but the old memory's not that good. It was hard not having a father figure. I did have further contact with my father. I found out that he was ill, he was dying of cancer so I went and I saw him – this was later on in life but he has passed away too.

20:30 You sort of forgive people; he had every opportunity in life and he just sort of made a mess of it. But nevertheless, when my father was dying, he said he wanted to see us so we went and saw him and made our peace with him.

Was it strange not having… like

21:00 **you had your mum and dad were together up 'til the age of 7. Was it strange suddenly not having him around at that time?**

I suppose it was. I can't sort of go back to it. We thought we had everything. We didn't sort of realise the conflict that Mum and Dad were having and she looked after us. It was hard on her, terribly hard,

because she went out to work she got part-time work at the canneries and whatever. She had it tough, really; she had it tough,

21:30 but we didn't as kids. She looked after us, gave us the best that she could and we had our mates and, as I said, my grandfather was the father figure I think for all of us.

Were you close with your brothers?

My brothers and I are very close; we ring each other continually – when I say that, weekly – and now that we are all in our 60's, we are closer now than what we have ever been in our life.

22:00 Lionel, Trevor and myself were in Enoggera from 1961 to '65. Lionel and I were in the same company; we were in Charlie Company, 3RAR and we stayed there for about three years. We were in different sections

22:30 that I remember. We used to play football, tennis. We all represented the army in some way or form and we enjoyed our sport. My brother Lionel was a great footballer and he went on to represent the army in other fields.

What about discipline growing up? I know a lot of boys in one room can be a bit of a handful.

23:00 Yes, I suppose it was. My grandfather was a stern disciplinarian but he loved us dearly, and, you know, when you look back on it there were some silly things you did. Like, I can remember I'd seen a war movie about them parachuting in, so Lionel and I got up on the roof and it was a high-set house and we'd made ourselves a parachute and we were going to jump off the top of the roof – we would've broken our legs and probably killed ourselves you see –

23:30 but, lo and behold, my grandfather Johnny on the spot come and seen us. Well, he poked his head out the door and he said, "What are you two getting up there? Get down here," and he gave us a bit of a talking to, but he was never…it was just verbal discipline. I suppose we got our smacks as children and that, but I don't recall them.

24:00 We had our mates there. We used to go out after school we would play in the street. You didn't have the cars around then and we had a little bit more room to run around, but it was a different sort of life style to teenage children now.

What about the air rifle? You mentioned you had air rifles.

Oh yeah, like every kid. We never knew the dangers of air rifles as we do now.

24:30 Every kid had his old little Daisy air rifle and we would set up target range and practise on it and whatever, and sometimes we would have a little war amongst ourselves not realising that we could get hurt, but it would've been about fifty, sixty, a hundred feet separate from one house to the other firing at each other, and I don't suppose anyone would have been hurt, but

25:00 we used to have these little friendly war games. I had a mate – his name was Barry Lack and he was a six-footer, and we used to go out together and enjoy our walks and our games and that, but mainly we stayed around our home areas. We didn't venture out like you do today, going to different suburbs and going to different places, like Tambourine or Toowoomba or

25:30 whatever; there were no cars and we couldn't afford one. I can remember we didn't even have refrigerators in those days. We had an icebox and the chap would come around with the ice and you would buy your full block or a half block and you'd put it in and it would cost you maybe 2d or 3d or something like that. Things were tough. They were just after the war, and I was

26:00 born in the war years in 1940 but we've progressed since then and it hasn't damaged us by having it tough as boys. I think we're better disciplined for it and going into the army certainly disciplines you. It changes you from day one and it either makes you or breaks you – they try to do that.

26:30 **What kind of chores and things would you have to do?**

Well, we'd chop a little bit of wood, we'd feed the chickens, maybe go down and get the chokos for tea – we had that many chokos I got sick of them and even today I never eat them – and we'd make sure we put our toys away as kids but it was a great old time.

27:00 **Can you describe your Daisy air rifle for us?**

I forget the name of it but it was one that you broke in half, put together and you put the air pellet in through the front. It had a little wooden handle and it was probably about two feet long and it was propelled by air. You just put the pellet in, cock it and just press the trigger.

27:30 I think it was a brownish blackish colour and it just had a little sight point on the front. I know later on they brought out some stronger air rifles than that but, no, we just had the first ones. That was all right.

And were the Daisies quite a common air rifle or was it a prize possession to have?

Yeah, of course it was a prize possession to have. If you had a Daisy air rifle you were king and

28:00 you'd sleep with it under your pillow, sort of thing. You wouldn't let anyone touch it and you'd oil it and you'd clean it and look after it, and we all had one. People then didn't see anything dangerous in it. They just said to be careful and most of our times we used to just shoot around at targets in the backyard, and then we'd play cricket – my grandfather was a cricket fanatic

28:30 and we used to play a lot of cricket. We'd bowl and we'd bat and it seemed great to us. It was only just a small backyard when you look at it now but to us it seemed quite a big backyard. And the old Grandfather was there saying, "Now, when you bowl, Barry, bowl at their feet. Make them move their feet. Get them off the wickets," and we had some great games. Eventually we got a couple of old bicycles.

29:00 They weren't brand new like you get today; they were just second hand, and they were probably a little bit too big for us – they might've been a three-quarter size or a full size and I was only a little fellow – but we would ride it around the place. Sometimes it had no brakes and whatever. We had a great time.

You mentioned the chokos and how many of those that you had.

29:30 We probably had them every night but, you know, today if you have a roast beef meal you just have it and it's gone, but my Mum and Nanna and Grandad used to get silverside and they would, what was left over, they'd make it into rissoles or they'd make it into a cottage pie or something like this because things were tougher; your food had to sort of

30:00 last longer. Vegetables were expensive. I know Grandfather used to have a few tomatoes and that, but chokos was our prime fruit and whereas it's quite nice, you do get sick of it if it's just cooked in the one way – it's boiled. Now you can sort of put sauces with it and all these sorts of things and it's better for you, but I haven't had a choko since I was seven or eight years old.

30:30 No, it's one thing I…I suppose I could eat them because I eat generally anything. I'm not fussy with my food. The army teaches you that. The food is a lot better in the army today than it was in 1961. They've got messes now and kitchens and whatever, but it never hurt you.

Tell us about your mum because she had to go out and work at Roma, didn't she?

My Mum was a station mistress out at

31:00 Roma and Palato and my Dad then, he was also in the railway and he had a couple of businesses at that time, a couple of racehorses and whatever and, unfortunately, drink and women. My Mum, she worked in the railway for many years before she came to Brisbane and when she came to Brisbane she went to work part-time for the cannery and then she went to work for the Post Office

31:30 down at Stafford and she worked for maybe twenty or thirty years of her life – she had it hard. She didn't have much but she's a great mother, even to today. She lives on a pension. She's got a little place over at Gaythorne and that, and she thinks of us, she loves her boys, she's proud of her boys and she misses Trevor, who passed away –

32:00 that's a grievement that will never go away from her, but she's quite proud of all her three boys, as we are proud of her. I know there must have been a little bit of interference sometimes living in the one house with your Nanna and Grandad and your Mum over things. They were looking after me and my Mum come to live with them with the

32:30 other kids there and I'm sure there was a little bit of conflict sometimes as to what the kids do or what they should or should not do, but nevertheless we had a wonderful life.

What did you know about the war growing up, either during or just after?

We were always aware of the war. I had my grandfather and

33:00 my two uncles in the army and they fought in the Second World War, and it was always something there, never forgotten. We had photographs of them in uniform on the sideboards and whatever, and coming up in my family we were Australians and

33:30 Australians went out and fought in the First World War and the Second World War and it was something brave. I know when Darwin was hit, my grandfather was home at the time and my two uncles were up in New Guinea and people got really scared and I know my grandfather said – I don't know whether he said it to me or whether in a group, but he said, "We were going to grab pitchforks – we had no rifles or anything to defend ourselves, but we were going to

34:00 grab spades and pitchforks and go down if they had invaded Australia," – they were that fierce on Australia. My grandfather went to the rank of sergeant, and then I think he got into an altercation with someone and got stripped down to corporal. He was a great man. Different sort of living, those days. Men were men and boys were boys. Army life

34:30 was always something that was instilled in us as something to aspire to. That is the reason I feel that my other three brothers and I joined the army. Between the four of us, we have got over twenty-odd years of service. Trevor was the first in and Lionel was the second and I was the third. Just to give you an idea of how

35:00 close we joined, within months, my brother Trevor's regimental number was 15816; my brother Lionel's regimental number was 16000, and my regimental number is 16389, so within a period of about six hundred blokes in Queensland, we all volunteered and joined the army and we all were in infantry.

35:30 Lionel played a bit of sport and he got out of a few exercises and whatever because he had to train for the army and whatever. It was a great time and when they said, "You know, you might go overseas", we thought that it was a great adventure and we looked forward to it. We were young men,

36:00 not old like now – mind you, I don't feel old. If I was wanted now, I would go back to Afghanistan or wherever Australia was fighting. I love my country and I am a proud Australian and so were all my brothers.

Why the army? Why not navy or air force?

Well, I suppose we thought about it at the time

36:30 but I think army was the easiest to get in at that time. I wasn't interested in going on ships. You get bombed out in the water, you're down and you never get out. If you're up in a plane – and I've had a few helicopter rides and 'plane rides in the army – once you're shot down it's not the fall that kills you, it's the sudden stop. But in infantry, in army, you were on the ground

37:00 and you had a chance. If there was a contact, we had set routines to go through if the enemy contacted us to get out of that ambush. You are on terra firma; you are on the ground itself. We were all army mad, probably because of the grandfather and the uncles and whatever, but I never thought of anything else and I joined up in

37:30 Brisbane – I think it was in Mary Street. They used to have the old recruit station down there and I went down and I joined up.

You mentioned your feelings of being a proud Australian. At that time were you considering yourself Australian or part of the Empire?

Look, I have always been Australian.

38:00 I think Britain has been great to us and good to us over the years. I feel as though we should have the White Australia Policy here. I'm sorry – the white and brown will never mix. There will always be tensions between the two of us, between the different countries whether we talk about Malaysians,

38:30 Vietnamese or whatever. They live to their own rules. You have got the Muslims here – they live by their own life, they congregate in their own little communities, they don't mix. I think Australia should be for Australians. Don't get me wrong – I've got a couple of nice Vietnamese friends and Indian friends, business people who are great and they live for Australia too, but I think that the majority of people

39:00 don't mix as well with Australians. I think with the 'boat people' [asylum seeking refugees] they are right the way they are stopping them from entering into Australia. It costs Australia a hell of a lot of money. We have so many different

39:30 things or ways that we can…and poor in Australia that we can sort of help them rather than help other people. I'm sorry if I'm so straight in my view, or so bitter – maybe it was the way that I was brought up but I take myself…I am a Christian and I live by that, but I do feel as though mixed races

40:00 don't assimilate and they are just proving this all over the world today. Australia is a wonderful country. We have one of the highest living conditions in the world. America is our ally now and we should lean towards America. They are the greatest power in the world. They control 70% of trade throughout the world. With regards to France

40:30 and Russia not helping overseas at this present moment, I think that's terrible. America and other countries that are overseas at the moment are having a terrible fight with guerilla warfare, and see, this was in Vietnam and Malaya.

Tape 2

00:32 **Barry, you mentioned that you actually met up with your dad a few years later. Did you ever ask him or find out why he left?**

Well, at the time I had word that he was ill, but he was with another woman at the time and they had a couple of children, my step brothers and sisters, and he was out at Malvern and that's on the western line, and

01:00 they said, "Look, he's very ill. Would you go out and see him, he's calling for you," so I did, and I stayed there for a few days anyway – this was in my twenties I went out to see him – and from there on, whereas I didn't keep contact with him I knew through relatives where he was. Then, as I said, he

contracted

01:30 cancer and he was brought to Brisbane and he went into the PA [Prince Alfred] Hospital and after that he went to palliative care at Mount Olivette Hospital until he died, and I saw him not on the day he died but the day before.

02:00 I was going up to the hospital when he died; he just passed away. He asked to see my mother and he did ask her forgiveness for what he did over the years, and he did see Lionel and Steve, so we just sort of… Whereas he was not a dad to us, whereas there is no feeling of a fatherly love,

02:30 at least he was a human being. He did sire me so I owe him that. Mind you, I have a different sort of view. I've got a son; he is 28 and I believe that if a child is born you owe them everything. The parent owes them everything. You've got to look after them. But anyway, getting back onto my Dad, we went and saw him when he passed away and we buried him

03:00 and my mother is still alive. They fell out of love. It was a very bitter situation. Alimony in those days, you just didn't get a court order. If they stopped paying the money, you had to take them to court and they would say to the judge, "Yes, I will pay some money

03:30 and I will go back to my wife and try and reach a compromise there," but he would stay maybe one or two months and go again, and in the end my mother was very bitter towards my father. Things could have been so different had he remained on track, but

04:00 he just unfortunately, he liked to drink too much and he liked his women too much.

So it was another woman that…

Oh, yes.

That was the reason he left when you were only seven?

I would say so. Yes, I would say so. I know my mother and her had a confrontation at a hotel. My mother and her had a little bit of a wrestle and she nearly threw her out of the window. But anyway, my

04:30 grandfather was a great man. He went to my father many times and said, "Look, come on home. We'll forgive you. Start straight. You've got the boys. You've got 'Bluey'," – my mother's name was Audrey and they used to call her Bluey.

Was she a redhead?

Yes, sort of a reddie/blondie hair but they called her Bluey and she used to be in Sandgate Athletics and that, javelin – she'd won trophies for javelin and that – but he wasn't interested.

05:00 And then when he realised – this was maybe twenty or thirty years later – he realised that he did the wrong thing and wanted to come home, there was no coming home any more. It was gone.

You mentioned that Lionel and Steve went to see him, but not Trevor.

Trevor was dead. I'll tell you what happened. Trevor died in New Zealand and I am missing a little bit – that maybe where I saw my Dad. He came down,

05:30 we got in contact with him and he was with us at the airport when my mother came back from New Zealand. They brought Trevor's body back on the plane with her, and I remember now that my father was there and he did go to the funeral of Trevor but then he just left. It's a long time ago – it's over thirty years ago.

06:00 **Trevor would've been very young to die of cancer?**

He was 25. He was a great soldier. He was a good sportsman. You ask about any of the Laverty boys. We played for the army. Because we were three brothers there everyone knew us. Trevor got back from Vietnam. He wasn't well but the position came up,

06:30 the situation came up that he could go to New Zealand on a troop exchange: a company of New Zealand comes over to Australia; a company of Australians go over to New Zealand, and he went, and he got ill and his lung collapsed. They thought it was pneumonia but after checking it later on, it was a cancer, Hodgkin's sarcoma and he lasted six weeks. We couldn't get him back

07:00 to Australia. I managed to get my Mum and my two brothers over to New Zealand; I stayed in Australia as the eldest to sort of fix things up here. But I believe to this day that his overseas service contributed to his cancer that he died of. He wasn't married, Trevor; he had a lady that they were thinking of getting engaged and Beth

07:30 was her name – I forget her last name, but her mum and dad had racehorses down at Eagle Farm. He was a mad punter, Trevor, very lucky. I can remember him, he'd be on the lounge room floor in Ogden Street, Stafford and he'd be looking through the paper and he'd say, "That horse," and he'd mention the name,

08:00 “That’ll win,” so we’d whip down to the TAB [Totaliser Agency Board] and put £1 on it or $5 on it. I might say here that one of my uncles who was in the army, Brian – he has passed away now; he was my grandfather’s son – we were great mates and he lived at Redcliffe, and he, along with my grandfather,

08:30 up until I was about 14 anyway, we sort of mixed up together and he lived opposite the Redcliffe Trots. I can remember one day the three of us went over to the trots – I was only a young fellow – and we come up to the last or second last race and Brian came up to my grandfather and I and said, “I’ve got a certainty for this last race” – that’s why I remember a horse called

09:00 Byron Bosier – and he said, “It’s going to win”. Well, I don’t know what my grandfather and uncle won but I put £1 on it and it was fourteen to one – I remember it to this day – and I can tell you there was three happy punters walking across from…he lived right next… the trotting track was right next to his house. You could stand on his verandah and watch the races, but we went over there. Well, there were three happy punters when we went home.

09:30 But you know, it’s just family. They stuck together.

Were your family into horseracing?

No. No. I’m telling a lie – my grandfather had a horse called ‘Insiterdus’ and we’ve got a photo, my mother’s got a photo of him winning two races in the one day.

10:00 The jockey’s photo is there, the horse, but no great success, but he used to have the horse. ‘Insiterdus’ was the name of the horse.

Well, I hear that Australia has a real problem with horseracing and it’s part of our mythology, isn’t it? Horseracing is part of being Australian. I just wondered if your family was into it as well?

No. My grandfather was a hard-working man; he went to work all his life. He died at 59 unfortunately

10:30 through a heart attack at work, but was a good man. He’d go to the hotel every afternoon and have two beers and come home, and they probably cost, I don’t know, a shilling each or something, the beer at that time, but he’d come home and he’d play cricket with us and whatever, and he used to be mad about cricket and boxing.

11:00 You always had to defend yourself and we did a bit of amateur boxing with him.

Did the boxing that you did with your grandfather actually help you out in the army?

Of course it did. Yes, it strengthens your character; it makes you grow up. It was good. I did quite a few amateur boxing and I won a few trophies and that around the place. I think it improves you.

11:30 A boy had to do something in those days, you know, because we didn’t have cars or drugs. We never ever thought of drugs, marijuana or anything like that. We just had good clean fun. I can remember us in the Valley there, when they first brought out television and no one had it and we were sitting down outside the store watching the old TV [television] box, but we had good fun. It was good clean fun, not like today.

12:00 Well, I’m not saying that kids today don’t have good clean fun, they do, and there are some great kids. There are, but I think that, as I was saying before about Australia is for Australians, we’ve got enough poor in this country with our drug problems and whatever. I think the government should be putting more into this to help our own kind.

Let me ask you about your first wife. It seems to me that you must have been very

12:30 **young when you met. Were you childhood sweethearts?**

Yeah. I was in the railway. I got posted to Kingston Railway Station as a trainee signalman and I went over to the shop and I saw this young lady behind the counter. She was 13 and, of course, she told me she was 14.

13:00 She used to give me an ice cream. I got an ice cream there and I’d go over, when I’d open up the boom gates to let the trains through and that, open up the gates. I’m telling a lie – I went back to the station and there was a night officer called Neville Blake and he said to me…Sandra came in to get the mail and she had a bandage on her elbow; she was home from school because she had a carbuncle on her elbow –

13:30 and Nev said to me, “I want to introduce you to the nicest girl I know”, and lo and behold, she was 17 when I married her and I was 21 and we were married for 39 years before she died.

That was meant to be.

Yes, meant to be, just the same as what is now was meant to be. I believe it’s all written in a book, your life. I was to meet Sandra, I was to marry, I was to

14:00 meet Judith as a friend and marry, and I have a wonderful life.

You said your son was 28. Is he 28 or 38?

38.

So he was born in 1965?

He was born in 1965, in Malaya, in the 'emergency' [1950s Communist insurgency]. He was born in Malaya, yes, and we had a little place. We didn't get quarters in Terendah Garrison. We got quarters down at

14:30 Malacca which was a township about twelve mile out of Terendah Garrison and we got a house there at a place called Bukit Bharu, and we had a gardener, an amah [housemaid] and whatever for the twelve months or so that Sandra was with me there, and we paid so much out of our pay for rent and whatever, but it was,

15:00 Malaya was good. We were rich compared to the Malays and we could afford everything we wanted. When you went out on operations or whatever, you might go out for an evening meal or lunch meal or whatever. But the biggest thing when you first get to the…I remember going to Malaya, when we stepped off the airport, there was a smell of those…they call them 'durang' or something.

15:30 They are a fruit in Malaya and I can't remember the name… the durian. It was the durian fruit [large oval fruit with foetid smell but good taste], and all you could smell, really. It permeates the air – it was that sort of fruit. It was everywhere. They had trees of it and it was the durian fruit and you could smell it, and it was the first thing that you noticed when you stepped off the aeroplane in Malacca.

What did the fruit look like?

16:00 It was green and it had all little knobs on it. There was another fruit, too, that was a little bit brownish and had a lot of…I don't think I'm getting them mixed up – but you'd open them up and you'd eat the inside of them. The natives loved them [rambutans, fruit covered with soft spines but sweet pulp inside], but I wasn't particularly keen on them.

16:30 But it was quite good – we bought our groceries and that at the local shop and there – and this was forty years ago – when you went into a shop they used to sell alcohol. Every one of their shops over there used to sell alcohol and fruit and vegetables, and when you'd go in, they'd say, "Come and have a drink, John." You would have a beer or whatever you liked with them

17:00 while you were shopping, and at Christmas time, you would get your order from them and they would bring you an order equal to that with chickens and fruit and vegetables as a present from the shopkeeper, because we used to spend a couple of hundred Malay dollars every week there, and they were years ahead of some of our shops here. But the courteousness – you'd sit down and they'd say, "Have a beer".

17:30 You would…They were very good to you.

I'd like to go shopping and have a beer whilst I'm shopping.

Yeah. They weren't shops like we've got here; they weren't supermarkets. They were just a little isolated shop probably about as big as these two rooms here.

I would like to get more into the Malayan conflict a little later if we can. I just might bring you back a little bit to when you first joined up

18:00 **in the army. The reason why you did that was because, well, you had your two brothers in the army, but was it also because you knew that you had to move bush and take Sandra, so that would be very lonely for her?**

Yes, that's right, and she was only 17, so I thought, "It's no good taking a young girl out into the bush". And mind you, the bush then might've been Toowoomba, Lowood or whatever. You've got to remember that forty years ago you didn't have the roads that

18:30 we've got now. You had to go by train everywhere and I just thought I'd be better off joining the army. With two brothers in it I was pretty keen to go with them. They said, "It's a good life, Baz." – they used to call me Bazza – and they'd say, "It's a good life, Baz. Come on in," and I did, and the army is a great life. It's good money, they look after you,

19:00 you see the world, you know, it's a great life and you meet some great people. People – I would've met hundreds of men in my lifetime and do you know, I probably couldn't recall half a dozen names now, but we had a wonderful time; there was the camaraderie, the friendship there. It was great.

What was Sandra's reaction to you joining up?

19:30 I think that she was a little bit frightened because of the change of jobs etc. She wasn't worried about going overseas or whatever because that came later on with our confrontations but I don't think we realised that we would spend so far a time away. She was always worried when I was away that I

20:00 might have an accident or whatever, like any wife would be. When I went down to Kapooka for my basic

training, Sandra, of course, stayed in Brisbane so I had twelve weeks there for my basic training, and then… Singleton was the other place I'm trying to think of – we went for our corps training so that was another three months, and if I

20:30 took any other corps, like SAS [Special Air Service] or whatever, I would've had to go again to Western Australia without my wife being with me. But what I did was, I took infantry and I got a posting back to Brisbane to 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment and she was happy. I used to come home every night. I would go to the army every day and come home every night, except when we had to stay overnight if we'd go out on operations or whatever or on exercise for six weeks.

21:00 We did numerous exercises for six weeks, in Queensland, in New South Wales, and in every operation that we did I can say to you that we would've walked at least a hundred mile in that six-week period. That was just infantry; it was hard work. You'd carry a pack on your back – I don't know what the weight is but you ended up with a pretty strong back – it probably might've been

21:30 40lb, it might be more – but you carried your rations, you carried your clothes, you carried your rifle, you carried your bayonet, all your webbing etc, your ammunition, and I was about 9½ stone. Fit as a mallee bull, I was. I was, really. We were all fit. We used to go on a five-mile run every morning and in Malaya when we were in base camp and that,

22:00 in Terendah Garrison, we used to go for a five-mile run out in the bush before breakfast. We were fit, we were healthy and this sort of makes you mentally perfect. We were young men trained to do a job and we were willing to do it. Whatever they asked of us, whatever they did, discipline in the army is a wonderful thing. You stood to attention and if a regimental drill officer or a platoon sergeant or a platoon commander

22:30 gave you a dressing down, you took it. You learnt the discipline. It was a wonderful life.

Had your brothers done the training before you?

Yes. There was about six months between us. Trevor went through first – and do you know, Kapooka isn't like it is today. When I went down it was like winter and they had…it was a tin hut, and

23:00 there was about a three-foot clearance at the bottom and a three-foot clearance at the top and when you went for a shower, it was cold. It was cold; it was winter. Trevor went through first, then Lionel within about three months behind and then myself and we all ended up here in 3rd Battalion. Trevor wasn't with us for a while and I can't remember exactly which battalion he went to, but I know that eventually

23:30 we were all posted to 3rd Battalion up here in Queensland because our families were here and the army tried to get you as close to home as they could. It was peacekeeping operations. There was no conflict in the world so you were at home, and you just had it as a 9 'til 5 job. Mind you, it wasn't a 9 'til 5 job; it was a 24 hour job in the army. Day, night, any time, you worked 24 hours a day if they wanted you,

24:00 and there were…every few weeks or so you would go on picket, on guard picket for the regiment, for the company and you'd stay out all night on guard duty. You would stand out there at attention for half an hour or an hour. You usually had two hours on, four hours off.

24:30 You'd sleep there and at times you'd be asleep and they would say, "The regimental officer is coming," and we would all have to trundle out in full dress and he would inspect us even if it was at midnight or 2 o'clock in the morning. It was discipline, all your life, discipline. They never stopped. It was a mental training that worked. They turned boys into men.

25:00 **Before you joined the army, were you aware of the communist rising overseas? Were you aware of any of that kind of stuff?**

Yeah. We were always aware of Russia and China but not to the degree that it is today. They were just getting over Korea then,

25:30 and our boys did well at Kapyong and whatever, and I suppose when you are in the army whether here in Brisbane they talked army talk all the time and they kept you informed where other members of your party were. It is like a little clique. Each and everyone. We've got thousands of companies

26:00 in Australia, and they might have ten or twenty employees each; they get involved in that little clique. We had a thousand men at Enoggera and they were just involved in the army; we lived for the army. It's like anyone's job: you live for that job but there are other things in life. There's other things in life, but no, I don't think we were as aware of the situation then as now.

26:30 It has escalated. It has escalated terribly in the last ten years.

Can you tell us about training? How did you find it?

Well, it was tough. We did many obstacle courses and I can remember Canungra quite clearly. We did a few training sessions up there. I can remember our rifle training out on the ranges, and

27:00 we were taught to fire at the 50-metre range, the 100-metre to the 600-metre range, but you would do

it…you might run. You start off at the 600-metre range. They would say, “Run 200 metres to the 400 metre range, get down and fire”. They tested you under pressure to your physical capacity and you might be tired after running

27:30 that couple of hundred metres with the full pack on or webbing or whatever, but you had to fire at a target and they teach you how to breathe before…When you fire a rifle, you aim it onto a target and you just hold your breath a fraction, take up the trigger and you do it within a split second, but they train you to do this to make sure that you are accurate with the rifle.

28:00 And with the machine gun – it was a Bren gun [light machine gun] when I took it on and it went to the M60 [M60 light machine gun] later on – we used to carry that down and you would fire it three rounds at a burst. It is a magazine of about thirty rounds; you could fire them all off at once, but they would teach you to be ‘trigger alert’, I call it, so that you would fire three bullets at a time and you would get them in a circle of about an inch over

28:30 300 metres or whatever at a target. They taught you accuracy. Discipline took every part of your life, whether it was training with weapons, whether you were in the mess, whether you were on guard duty, whether you were doing anything, whether you were out on an obstacle course or whatever – discipline was always there. They taught you that to save your life if a situation ever arose and

29:00 it did arise and it made you or broke you. I have seen men that didn’t make it – the training and that was too heavy – and it’s hard, it’s terribly hard. There were times that I was physically exhausted. We used to go on a twenty-mile forced march and they said, “When you are exhausted, you’ve only used one tenth of your energy. You’ve got nine tenths of your energy –

29:30 get onto it and keep going,” and it would be a forced march. I’ve come back from a march and I’ve seen other men, they’ve pulled off their boots and blisters had formed and they had broken and there is blood and whatever through their socks and that, and this was training, but they hardened you into probably one of the finest fighting forces in the world.

Without a doubt.

30:00 Yes. Australians are world-renowned. Their tactics initially I think were taken over from the British, their jungle warfare, but we’ve made our own rules, our own definitions, our own formations in the jungle; how we fight, how we retreat, and it is superior to any other army in the world and it goes without saying.

30:30 **Was there anything in training that you surprised yourself finding out that you were really good at?**

I suppose so. When you join the army you are only initiated and they put you through tests to see if you can complete them, and I suppose the fact that you

31:00 could run or walk five or ten mile or carry gear or organise men, they even taught you down to that. If you were a platoon sergeant, or say, a platoon commander, if anything happened to him the platoon sergeant could take over his job. You were trained in the army to take the next level up, command if anything happened. If you were a lance-corporal and your corporal got hit,

31:30 you could take over and still control the men through. The army teaches you that one rank above all the time in every emergency. I hope I haven’t gone off the track there.

No, no, no. It’s all good. What was there, something that…did you find that rifle, perhaps, at shooting you were good at?

Yeah, I was. Excellent. I was a first class shot with all weapons, and with the Bren gun, I was number one on the Bren for

32:00 a couple of years there, and it’s heavy with all your pack and that, and I’m only a little fellow, but you climb up some hills. The jungle’s a pretty mighty thing, you know. Out in the bush it’s hard.

I’m going to ask you about that, but I was just wondering with the Bren gun have I got the wrong weapon in my mind? Is the Bren gun carried in one or two pieces or is it just…

No. It’s carried in one piece.

32:30 I forget the weight of it now, but I think it’s around about 13 or 15 pound in itself. It has tripod legs that fold in and out; it has a curved magazine that you put on the top, and usually, if I remember correctly, there’s thirty rounds. The 7.62 [mm round] rifle that they use in the SLR [Self-Loading Rifle] fitted into the Bren gun as well, but

33:00 now though, of course, they use the M60, which is the belt-fed and we had the belt-fed M60 over in Vietnam. But our Australian training, initially, in 1961 to 1963 or so, was with the Bren gun and then even over into Malaya. It was carried in one piece and usually you carried a couple of magazines of rounds for it and you had a number

33:30 two on the gun and he would carry the rest of the ammunition, and you would work together as a team, the number one and number two on the machine gun. You see, a section is made up of a corporal, a

lance-corporal, you have a rifle group of three or four men, you have a Bren section of two men, and when you have a contact or whatever the aim of the Bren gun

34:00 is to get to the highest ground and protect you with fire, because it has the most firepower, a semi-automatic rifle. We had the OMC [Owen Machine Carbine: the "Owen gun"] then, the Owen Machine Carbine, little ones, but no, they would go to the highest ground and protect you with fire so that your rifle group could get in and take out the enemy. It was instinctive in you and even in training, we had

34:30 many of our soldiers acting as enemy; we did exercises like this in Australia. We had enemy and the good guys and the bad guys, if you want to call it that, and we had to go through all these tactical sequences all the time and if we didn't do it right, we were kicked in the butt for it, and it was hard work and you were walking all the time and then running. You never stopped. You didn't

35:00 sit down. We might have a ten-minute break an hour. You might lay down or rest on the track but you would put out your scouts. What they'd do was stop, say, every hour for ten minutes; they'd try to, but there were many times when you just went on to exhaustion.

Did the bloke who was your number 2 on the gun, was he someone you fought alongside with

35:30 **in the conflicts?**

This was in Malaya, yes. Yes. I started off in the rifle section, then I went to the Bren gun and then I got made a lance corporal and then when I went to Vietnam they made me corporal of a section.

Do you think going into the army perhaps a little bit older gave you a certain maturity that the army could trust?

Yes, but

36:00 it proves that they were 100% right in taking 18 year olds. They were the fittest men in Australia and once they are trained properly, they accept discipline. I said to you before that, as a section commander my 2IC and I were the only regular army NCOs [Non-commissioned Officers]. All the other men in the section were national servicemen. But I can tell you this:

36:30 once they got overseas they didn't want to come home. They were there for a purpose. They were good boys and they knew that we were there for a cause, and I know there was a little bit of conflict back here at the time, but I can tell you that not one of those boys said, "I want to go home." They were upset over what was taking place here but, mind you, you are segregated there. You don't get all the bad news in the army – you only get good news.

37:00 **So there wasn't a difference really between the Nashos [National Servicemen] and the regular army?**

No. Just as well-trained NCO or a soldier. They were in for twelve months and they were good men. Of course, we had Vietnam on then – they were called in short, but they were…

37:30 **So they were called up also for the Malaya conflict?**

I don't think so. I think the Malaya conflict was regular. The 3rd Battalion was the first battalion into Borneo when they had the confrontation with the Indonesians there, and we were there also when the Indonesians landed in Malaya

38:00 on the peninsula. There were another battalion before us. There were two Malayan emergencies. I think one finished about '59 and then we started around about '62 or '61. There was two emergencies but this was the second lot and I think it went to around about

38:30 1970.

You must have made a pattern about being one of the first in…

Yes.

because then you were the first in with Nui Dat.

Yes, that's right. Yes, but it's just what happened. We were lucky to be there and it was a great adventure.

With the training did you get up to no good at all?

Look, I suppose there's always larrikins in the army,

39:00 you know, and we had our fun moments where men will be men and yes, there were occasions when we had a lot of fun.

Can you tell us about one?

Well, I don't know whether it was good or not. I can remember we'd go out and have a few drinks after an operation and some of the boys,

39:30 they had to be helped home; some of them crawled home, but we had a little bit of an argument in Malaya against the Irish Hussars; they were there. They had a beach club down on the spit and they had a little bit of a fight one night and the Kiwis came over and helped the Australians and there was Brits everywhere and there was Australians and that, but no, look,

40:00 it was good clean fun. Sometimes the humour in it some people wouldn't appreciate, but they were just tough hard men, and that was the way they lived.

Tape 3

00:33 **Back to training, you mentioned that there were a few fellows that didn't make it.**

Yeah. I have seen men cry through pain, through exhaustion, through the fact that they are just not mentally strong enough to keep up to the discipline and army life. They weed out

01:00 the people who can't make it. Don't get me wrong – they try and get them reconditioned; they try and help them; they try and make them make it, but you've only got, really, to have people who can go the distance.

What about mates? Did you make other mates at training?

Sure. We were all mates.

01:30 I forget names – it was over forty years ago – but we lived in camp; we lived in the same room and even though I went home of a night I still had a bed in the army camp if I had to stay in and whatever, in the hut. We were all great mates. A lot of them were single lads; I'd say the majority of lads were single lads – they'd be out and about –

02:00 but there was no differentiation. I was still their mate and whatever even though I went, most times, home of a night.

Were there any particular that ended up being particularly good mates in Malaya or…?

Yeah. I'm just trying to think, you know. As I said, I have a hell of a thing with names.

02:30 Whether my memory has blocked out what happened forty-odd years ago, there are times when my memory lapse is not so good. I forget things. If I do something repetitively every day I remember it but if I go a year or so it just blocks out of my memory. Boys, men, I can say there was half a dozen or more that we got on great.

03:00 In Malaya, the Australians in their married quarters and that, would have parties and get togethers and whatever, and you'd all go. They might have thirty or forty personnel. They were with their husbands and with their wives. I know before my wife got over, there was a little bar down outside Terendah Camp. I liked vodka and orange in those days and I

03:30 used to have a vodka and orange and half a dozen prawn cutlets – that was my special treat after I came back from an operation – but I didn't run around with the single lads, you understand? I had my wife here in Australia and I was writing to her. We wrote – that was our only communication – and I was young and in love, whereas I did mix with

04:00 the other blokes in training and that. We helped each other, we worked together whether we were going over an obstacle or whatever; if someone was stuck, they would come up and grip them over the leg and throw them over the obstacle or whatever. You worked together as a team, and you had your hilarious moments in the camp and that when you were back, too numerous to mention and I've forgotten most of them.

04:30 It was just…it was just the life. 24 hours a day you lived it. I suppose a person should have a better memory than what I do because I'm retired now and I'm with my wife every day and it's 24 hours a day – I was with my mates 24 hours a day – but we'd go on weapons training or drills training or whatever, and you just worked as a

05:00 team and then switched on and off whenever you needed.

Do you remember when you first got the word that you were heading off to Malaya?

Yes I do. We were very excited and we were packing up. I came home and I said to Sandra, "Do you want to come to Malaya? We've been posted to Malaya."

05:30 I know she thought on it for a day or two. I said, "There'll be quarters over there. It's a two-year posting." It was a big hive of activity months before we went getting everything organised and everything right and there was lots of work to do. You were in camp most of the time preparing for it and there was packing and all these sorts of things, and then there were interviews.

06:00 You had to give all your next of kin statements and all these sorts of things.

For what purpose?

I suppose in case something happened to you. Like allowances, pay allowances, all these sorts of things. The army made certain that you give X amount of dollars to your wife and family while you were away.

06:30 I can remember coming home – I was living at 1740 Locum Road then – and I said, "I am posted to Malaya", and it was not without some sort of fear but I was looking forward to the two years over there because you get an overseas allowance, it's good for you, you can save money, you can get your home when you come back and all this sort of

07:00 thing. There was that added advantage and, I suppose, the Indonesian situation wasn't that big a thing until we got there, so it was just an overseas posting that we were looking forward to.

What was Sandra's reaction?

07:30 Well, I don't think she was too happy to leave her mum and dad, and we were only young – it was sort of our first adventure together going away, but once she got over there and got acclimatised and whatever, she was an army wife. She stood up for you, she believed in the army, she believed

08:00 in the cause. She used to go up to Terendah Camp and they used to have wives' club meetings and all these sorts of things, very army orientated. Everyone who lived around you were all in the army, whether it was the New Zealand Army, the British Army or the Australian Army. They all mixed and they stayed together, and I know that my wife loved Malaya. Every day she could go down for a couple of dollars

08:30 and get her hair done up or get a nice meal or whatever, and you had your parties. It wasn't all fighting. We had some great times, some great times over there.

What were you briefed about Malaya before you set off?

Well, it's a funny old thing. When you get a brief you'll get the officers' brief, then they'll come back and brief the

09:00 section. I'm trying to think, I think we went into…we had a stage at Enoggera, and they put the whole company at a time into that auditorium and they gave us a run down of where we were going and what was going to happen, what the situation was over there. It's that long ago, I can't really recall it but I'm just recalling little bits and pieces – that

09:30 it was a big O group, that we all went in, they told us the preparation that had to be done, and they gave you as much information as they could, that they knew at the time, and we just took it from there, but I know they had quite a lot of meetings, quite a lot of information with the blokes and that, you know. I'm sorry, I can't think of anything more.

10:00 **That's perfectly all right. Can you tell us what your first impressions of Malaya were when you got there?**

Well, I thought, 'Where the hell have we come to?', because a different sort of world. You've got grass huts on stilts, you've got

10:30 villages, you've got people living in kampongs, they wear a different dress to you, they eat different to you. I can remember we went to Singapore in a Boeing, and we went from Singapore to Malacca in an old DC3 [Douglas DC3 transport aircraft], and we got into the DC3 and they had to rev it up to start us off the airstrip

11:00 and it shook and shuddered and they revved, and it was noisy as hell and we landed in Malacca and the first thing, as I said before, was the smell. People smell differently, countries are differently. It was a tropical country, it rained every day. They had heat, tremendous heat, thick heat and rain not like what we've got here. It would come down thick rain and it was regular all the time.

11:30 People were different – different colours, different nationalities, different races. It was an experience, it was an eye opener and I enjoyed it.

What were some of the things that were maybe a bit of a shock to the system?

Well, not so much as a shock to the system but their way of life. They had rice fields and you would see the farmer with his buffalo – there were buffaloes over there.

12:00 They were big buffaloes too – hoeing his rice fields. You would see the people working in the fields around the house. They didn't have a sewerage system. Their shower system was a well where everyone would go with a sarong around them and sort of wash accordingly. I used to play a lot of tennis in Malaya

12:30 and I was introduced to…the Malaysian tennis coach at that time was Abdul Rahman was his name and he was quite a good tennis player. I managed to go to his home on a couple of occasions and it was just a…They slept on mats, they ate with their hands, they had chickens running around the house, they'd

throw the

13:00 refuse out of the windows for the chickens to eat and they had pigs there and whatever, but he was one of the better-educated Malays and probably a better living Malay. They were good people. I don't know whether they trusted us 100% but they knew we were there to help them

13:30 and they accepted us.

What was the first thing you did when you got there?

Now you're taking me back a long time. We went into Terendah Garrison Camp. We went into the…it was a hut. For our company we had three huts. We were right next to the mess.

14:00 I just took my gear in. We were allocated a bed. There were eight men to a room. We were briefed that our washing and that would be done by their washing people. We had a fellow that did all our boots and that, polished our boots.

14:30 I think the first thing I did when I had a few moments to spare was to write to my wife and say, 'Look, I've arrived. We're here. It's a different country and I'll see you shortly.' I can't remember and say that I had any great things I did. I just got into

15:00 camp, we were organised, we were out training the next day, we had company roll calls every morning and every night, they would tell us what is going on, where we were going and they acclimatised us, which took a while.

Well, that leads me into my next question, the acclimatisation and just those daily duties. What did that involve?

Well, basically, just getting used to the tropics.

15:30 It would only take a week or so. We just did our normal duties around the camp, we'd go on mess duties, we'd go for little runs – not big five-milers, and we'd go on walks, we'd do exercises, we'd have our gym instructor and whatever. We didn't weights or anything like that but we did exercises and all these sorts of things

16:00 and then we went to the mess; we had our meals there. But no, it didn't take us long to acclimatise. There were Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry there with us and a Kiwi battalion as well

16:30 in the Terendah Camp Garrison.

How did everybody get on?

Well, we got on reasonably well, but because, I think, we were a little bit better paid than the British soldier there was a little bit of envy there, and the Kiwis and the Australians sort of stuck together more so than the Brits but they were great blokes. While we were there, we had a week

17:00 at Ipoh on a company exchange and Charlie Company – we were affiliated with the Irish Hussars and they were in Ipoh, so we went up there for a week and that was the first time that I learnt you could cook a potato over twenty different ways. They had a beautiful mess and scotch eggs and all these sorts of things. We had a little bit of sporting activities up there, football, tennis and whatever, just to get used to each other for a week

17:30 and then we came back. That was one of the good times we had in Malaya.

Did that help in terms of working together?

Of course it did. Yes. You never questioned your mate or any other army fellow because they knew their job, we were there to help each other,

18:00 and whereas you might not congregate together all the time, we might get a day's leave or a night out or something and you might meet them down at the club, but basically you stayed in your camp and mixed with your own. They had a NAAFI [Navy, Army and Air Force Institute] in the camp so if you wanted a drink you could get it, or wanted

18:30 some food, some luxuries, biscuits and all this sort of thing, we were pretty well self-contained in the Australian camp at Terendah.

Can you tell us about any sort of scraps that happened between camps, say with the British?

Yeah. I can remember…I've got to go back and try and remember the cause of it. I think one of our fellows down at the beach club

19:00 was set upon by three or four Irish Hussars, so word got back to the camp of this happening and before you knew it there was a group of Australians going over to have a fight at the British camp. The Kiwis joined in with us on the way,

19:30 and we had a big golf club in between and we met together. The English were coming one way the Kiwis

and the Australians were coming the other, and there was quite a big fight over it. I can remember one bloke – he was a big massive fellow – and I remember him crying. He took off his shirt and he said, "No-one will fight me". He was an Australian – he was a bit drunk, I must admit, at the time –

20:00 but he wanted to get into the fight and he was such a massive fellow. I should know his name but you forget over the years. We got disciplined for that in army camp for a week, not allowed out to the club or anything like that. We went over to the English camp and they apologised but we were still disciplined for it, for going over

20:30 and I suppose the Kiwis were. The first impression I got of a Kiwi, I went into their mess and they were sitting down in big long rows, and do you know, those fellows they break bits of bone out and drink the marrow out of it and everything. They were a wild woolly bunch, not that we didn't have our wild woolly bunches too, but they were a good soldier and

21:00 we enjoyed our time with them.

With the scrap that happened on the golf course, how many would have been there?

I would say sixty, seventy. It was a big to-do.

On either side?

Yeah, it was a big do. You've got no idea. It's on, up and leave everything, and you'd run across in a group.

21:30 Word gets across a camp so quickly, a task force, and we weren't on active conditions sort of thing. We were there as peacekeepers and there was a few good fights there.

That's what I'd like to get into the detail of. Is it bare knuckles or…?

Yeah, bare knuckles, yeah. Straight into it.

22:00 **Did people use sticks or weapons or rifles?**

No, no. They didn't get down to…They were pretty 'Marquis of Queensbury' [early form of boxing regulation], really. A digger only fights with his fists, you know. He doesn't have to pick up a stick or a stone or whatever and bash people like you do now. It was just a fight that once it was over you would meet them the next day and have a beer with them and you'd laugh

22:30 about it. Where there might have been a little bit of animosity that night, it was never after. You just forgot what you were about and you would put your arm around them. It's mateship. Look, I've had a couple of fights with fellows in the army when I was a corporal and maybe they didn't like me or something, but you put your arm around

23:00 them after it and say, "Let's have a beer". You didn't hate them. There was no such thing as hate. You loved them; they were your brothers. But that was just one of many. I didn't get sort of involved too much because when my wife came over, I was at Bukit Bharu twenty-odd mile away from the camp, but there were some wild boys around. They got into lots of strife, on CB [Confined to Barracks] and running around,

23:30 a few drinking parties and they'd crawl back to camp. They were just wild men but they were disciplined wild men and this was their way of letting go, I think, when you look back on it now. You had to have a relief valve somewhere and when they had a little bit of time out, they'd completely relax.

24:00 They made a mess of themselves, they might bring up on the bed in someone else's house sick but you don't…This is what happened. They were wild boys; they were good boys, disciplined boys; they were hard men. You're not talking about people in everyday life. You are talking about people in a – I suppose I could use the word – an institution. They were hardened men and

24:30 they were tough and they were ready for a fight and that's how they got their relief. They lived well, they lived life to the full, they never ever stopped, and you never took a backward step on it.

Was there a difference between the wild boys in the Australian camps and, say, the wild boys of the Brit camp?

Nup. I think we all had our fair share of them. They were all right. The

25:00 first notice I got of the Irish Hussars, the KOYLI, Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry [the 'Koylies'], we used to have a task force parade and we would be all on parade. We had marched on with the Kiwis and the Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry were to come and they march at about double our pace,

25:30 and you hear the bugles and you hear clippity-clop. They walk at a very fast pace. That was my first look at them, and I thought, 'My god, they are a bit different to us', but they are good soldiers, damn good soldiers. They walk at double time. I should know

26:00 how many paces to the minute, because I did do a little bit of instructing in the army in National Service

when I came back, but I think it was about thirty-inch pace or something like this, but they walked at twice our pace. They had red berets and red sashes and that, and it's quite a sight to behold when they come on parade –

26:30 all men, a battalion in company formation, coming in in company form walking at twice the pace and that was my first introduction to the Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry.

As your time advanced in Malaya, if you were having to go out on patrol or work with any of the mixed forces that were there, did you have a preference?

Not really.

27:00 We worked also with the Ghurkhas out there. Now, they were a great little soldier. Our main operations in Malaya were up on the Thailand border for smugglers or whatever coming in, and we'd set up ambushes up there, but then the Kiwis would be out there with us; so were the English, but you never sort of crossed paths. They had it so well planned that you would cover a certain area. You wouldn't mix. You might mix

27:30 after the operation is over, but you worked within your own confines. You made your own ambushes up, you would go in of a night-time or just before dark, set your Bren gun up and your flares up and whatever, and you'd stay awake all night. Of course, you would lay say close to each other and if one or two of them there you might decided to have ten minutes, close your eyes.

28:00 You always had someone awake all night. Every night and every day, there is someone awake, at least 25% of your section, all the time in case something comes up and you are trained to instinctively react to situations. You are trained for ambush patrols, you are trained for the walking patterns through the bush, your rifle group through pepper-potting, which is coming in groups like

28:30 this to take out the enemy, your machine gun group, and as a section commander you've got to be with them controlling things, and you never used your voice; you used hand signals: your rifle group, your Bren group, come to me, come to the section commander, come to me, come to the platoon commander [demonstrating hand signals]. You never used words, and if you did,

29:00 it was in a slight whisper. You never made a noise; you used signals all the time. That is what made the Australian soldier so good. They can go through the jungle so quietly, set up an ambush in an area, and no one would know you were there, and they would get out the next morning before anyone knew they had been around. They were good and I was one of them, and

29:30 I was good at my job.

What was your specific duty?

I was the section commander; I had to control seven to nine men. I had to daily O group them – I had to go to section commander's groups to get O group through them, they'd let me know and then I would come back to the

30:00 section, I would brief the section on it and tell them what was going on. Not only that, you looked after their welfare. I used to check my men every night, FFI, they used to call it – Freedom from Infection – and I'd make sure that their feet were right, that they in themselves were well,

30:30 that they knew what was going on. I would make sure that their weapons were in operational order and I would every day, every morning and every night before I went to bed, I would go and see them. There was many a night that I came back and had to have a cold dinner, because Section commander is on his own. Your rifle group goes in two, your Bren gun goes in two and

31:00 your section 2IC stays with the Bren group; he is in control of that Bren group. But there's many a time I've come back and I have had a hot mug of coffee already brewed for me by the boys too. They'd look after me because they knew that I was going in. I can say to you that I didn't get much more than four hours sleep a night in all the time I've been overseas. You lived on your nerves and you don't realise you are living on your nerves until you get out

31:30 of that situation and come back to what is what we call 'normal'.

So what was it about Malaya that did get on your nerves?

Well, they were an enemy. The Indonesians did land on Malaysian soil and we used to have beach patrols and we would

32:00 patrol so much section of beach every night – you'd have a section out there, two sections or whatever. The Indonesians were not an Unknown Soldier to us, but an Unknown Soldier to the Malays. The Malays didn't really have a good army; they are not good fighting men, the Malays. That's why they've got to bring in British Occupational Forces. They try, but

32:30 they landed one night on the peninsula and Charlie Company went in and surrounded them and there was the odd rifle fire during the night. It was in a swamp and we had to lay down all that night. There was the odd rifle shot over the top of us and when we got up in the morning they said, "Just advance", when daylight came, and thankfully, the Indonesians gave up

33:00 after that. But you try to imagine laying in a swamp all night, hundreds of thousands of mosquitoes around the place. You stay awake anyway, but you'd hear the odd shot – it's nothing like Vietnam but there is that confrontation there – and then when we went to Borneo, we were at

33:30 Bau, in Serikin and we had our camp, Charlie Company, and we looked after what they called the M1, the dreaded M1 [a designated route], and this was where the Indonesians and smugglers and everything like that were coming down, and we were based outside a village. Now, it was only a track up to the village and it was a clear track and we probably had to go two or three hundred metres,

34:00 and in that village whenever they had enemy came in, they would ring a bell for us. What we had to do, it was a straight up track – they could fire with a machine gun straight down, do you a lot of damage – we would pepper pot backwards and forwards up either side until we got up into the village just in case they did open fire anyway. But most of the time the problems, they had left

34:30 by the time we got there. Our base camp – we were called the Rats of Serikin because we'd actually dug into the ground and we used our base camp metal sheeting and we lived literally in those sheds and that there,

35:00 and we had our own sentries out and whatever, and we stayed there for five months – that was our base camp. We had the English there and we were called out on one occasion. An English company had been hit by Indonesians with three howitzers on hills opposing them, and we were brought in

35:30 in Chinooks [medium lift helicopters]. I can remember, I was sitting right on the door. You don't have seatbelts or anything in these helicopters, you know, and the wind is whirring and the noise is there. I can remember landing on this landing strip, the Chinook with the two twin blades, and it was bamboo and you could see the bamboo from the force of the propellers moving six inches or so up and down. Well, we landed there and got in

36:00 and…it's hard to imagine but what happens, the section commander gets out, the platoon commander will say, "five section, six section, seven section" – they'll tell you where you are going but the section commander directs where his men will go. So you work from, say, 12 'til 4, or 12 'til 3, 3 'til 6, 6 'til 9, in that clock area, and you just put down your section as they come at you, like that, which is your

36:30 Bren group over on here. We had to go into the bunkers – there were some British killed – and we went out on patrols straight away and it was a bit of a blood and guts affair because, as I said, there was a number of British killed and I think to this day, if I remember correctly, the CSM [Company Sergeant-Major] of that company was awarded the George Cross for bravery.

37:00 I know that he had an eye problem – he'd lost an eye and he still went out with his men, helping his men. That's the beauty of any armed force, you know, whether it's Australian or New Zealand: your CSM, your sergeants, they all work together. They were out there with the privates. They never left you on your own. If you couldn't do it, they would get to you and help you do it. You had that

37:30 camaraderie.

That's something I'd like to talk a little bit more about, and also Borneo, in a lot more detail a bit later on. When you got to Malaya the kind of authority through the ranks that had been set up in training.

It's set up. It runs like a well-oiled machine. Don't get me wrong – you'll get blokes complaining in the army. They might say,

38:00 "Go here", and it's the wrong place and you might have to sit for ten minutes or five minutes or half an hour. Blokes get a bit browned off at that, but in general the organising powers have it down to a fine art and they know exactly what they're doing. The information is put out to your company commanders, and your company commanders put it out to your platoon commanders and they pass it on

38:30 into your sections and that, and every man knows what he's doing. That's the beauty – every man did know what he was doing from day to day. You would have maybe, I don't know, sometimes three O Groups a day, maybe more, but you definitely had it morning and night and when you are out on patrol, in Malaya and that, you have to have coordination to put out your patrols to clear before light and before dark and all this sort of

39:00 thing. Everyone knew what he had to do and if he didn't know he learnt quickly. It worked well. There's no incompetence that I can see, a lot of funny times, but no incompetence. They did their best.

Tape 4

00:36 **Barry, I was just wondering in Malaya about the conflict that you experienced. There was that one in the swamp and was there any others before you went to Borneo?**

Not that I can recall. We did have, up on the Thai border, we did have some smugglers come through there

01:00 and we captured them and took them back for debriefing and that. There were other conflicts with other groups but not with my group in Malaya. It was only on the beach but they had some Indonesians come in on the beachfront too – that's why they had the beach patrols out, but confrontation,

01:30 except for that one group coming in, the company trying to get in, I can't recall any other at this time. No, I'm sorry.

That's fine. What about the food in Malaya? Was there something that you and Sandra took to?

Yeah. I liked the food. We had a little

02:00 amah and now and again she'd cook us a Chinese meal or a Malay meal or something, or we'd have an Australian meal. You had mainly English produce but you had plenty of steaks and vegetables and whatever.

What did you call the woman who made you food?

Amah.

02:30 **Actually, that's something I was going to ask you about anyway. You were talking about the birds around here and nature. You obviously love animals. Was that something that you experienced in Malaya living there for two years? Did you have a pet or got to know any of the wildlife?**

I had a dog, and her name was Lady. She was a beautiful animal and I had to leave her behind, and I took her down to the shopkeeper where we

03:00 always shopped weekly and I know that she was picked up a couple of days later by a British NCO and his wife, and they wrote us a letter that they had her and Sandra wrote back at that time, and they could take the dog home. We couldn't. They took the dog and I think they took her to Germany because they have Germany as a posting, the British do.

03:30 I know we had a dog there. Occasionally I know some of them had monkeys as pets. There was one couple that we were friendly with – you would go in, and the monkey would be sitting up on top of the roof and he'd pull the tiles out and throw them at you. They were funny, and then there was an occasion when a gentleman came around

04:00 selling monkeys. "Would you like a pet?", and he was beautiful, black and white with real long legs and arms but we didn't get him. You'd get that, but mainly you would have a dog for protection of a night, your houses are security sealed, bars, windows. You do get prowlers, etc and women on their own were always

04:30 susceptible to something happening.

Can you tell us about the nightlife in Malaya? Was there anything that you could do, like a bar?

Yes, there were many bars,

05:00 many restaurants and my wife and I went to a number of them of an evening. You don't sit in tables and chairs like you do here. You sort of squat and they have a revolving table and they have about six or eight people around them and they'll put all their separate dishes on that and you just turn the dishes around and you eat out of a... It's very good, the nightlife there. There were curfews, and you had to be careful – 10 o'clock

05:30 curfews – and some of the boys sometimes got caught out of curfew and that, but there was quite a lot of restaurants there. You could go down…you were never encouraged to buy your food from the people in Malacca. You either went to your shop where you got your British and New Zealand and Australian goods because, you see, they don't have refrigeration like we have.

06:00 If you go into a bazaar down there, they would have the meat hanging up on hooks out in the sun with the flies and whatever. They don't have sewerage systems like we have; they have gutters and it is nothing to see a male, female or anything expectorating in that gutter or whatever, doing their business. They usually go into the sea – they don't have

06:30 toilets and that – you will see them go out for their ablutions, go out into the water.

Do you mean that you are walking along in a public area and someone would be going to the toilet?

Yes, that was in '61, you would get children and men and women. They had a gutter; it was a gutter system. They didn't have any sewerage. If they wanted to go to the toilet, they went there.

07:00 **Was there no cubicles up?**

No.

So they'd just sit…?

That's right. Yeah, that's true. That's in 1961.

Was that strange for you to witness that?

Of course it was, but you'd become accustomed to it and you just accepted it. It was just part of their life. If you wanted a chicken or whatever they would have them live there and they would kill them.

In front of you?

Yes, if you wanted them.

07:30 All their raw meats and everything that I can remember were just held out in the open, and instead of getting a pound you would have what they would call a kuti which is a little over a pound, and you could buy from them. We didn't sort of buy – but this is just observations that I've made. It was great for the girls over there because they could go to the hairdressers quite cheap over there. My wife used to have her hair done

08:00 up in a big beehive, and I know the girls in there used to go down and get some mi [noodles] and rice and that and they'd have their lunch there. My wife thought it was wonderful, you know, and we'd go up into the camp there, and we had quite a few parties. Look, it wasn't all hard work but you switched on when you had to work, you switched off when you wanted to party and you had a good time. You did.

08:30 You enjoyed life.

So how long were you in Malaya before you were sent to Borneo?

Just over twelve months, probably about thirteen or fourteen months, and then I was sent to Borneo for five months. We went to Serikin and our company was given

09:00 the company position at Bau on the M1.

Now Sandra didn't follow you here, did she?

No, she stayed in Malaya.

Was that because it was too difficult to arrange for the army wives or it was dangerous?

It was dangerous. It's only jungle over there, you know. When you see the Ibans [indigenous Borneo people], which are the natives – as you're going through the bush, you do run across them – they're still in lap laps and little grass huts and they're suckling the baby on their hip. It's a different sort of life. They

09:30 don't live as well as what we do. It's primitive and you become used to it. You become hardened to it mentally, life. You know, it's a terrible thing seeing people suffer and especially children not eating properly. We used to give them our little chocolate bars or a bit of rice and that as we'd go through, whatever we'd have spare,

10:00 because they were the innocent parties in it. They were trying just to exist. They had big villages and usually it was by a stream because they needed the running water, because at the top end they would do all their washing and at the bottom end they would do all their toilet facilities, and it was a running stream. They would walk around natural to them just in a

10:30 sarong, no bra, no nothing, naked from the waist up, and they age a lot quicker than what we do. Some of the children are beautiful; they've got beautiful skin and all that, but, of course, bad teeth. They don't have dental hygiene and anything like this and it is primitive conditions that they live in. They just eke out an existence.

Was the five months in Borneo

11:00 **a stressful time for you?**

I suppose at the time it was. We did see some sort of action. We were on 24 hour alert – when I say 24 hour alert, even when you were sleeping, if someone came and put their hand on my shoulder I would be instantly awake – the same with all the men. You didn't go into a deep sleep.

11:30 You were in control of the situation but you were on active conditions and your nerves sort of go to a different state. That's the only way I can explain it to you. It does…you live differently.

I do understand that because they say that in the first month after a child is born the mother sleeps like that,

12:00 **not quite deeply but just to hear the sound of the child.**

Yeah. Look, you've got to understand that, to keep you awake all night you try and have a battery of

105's [105mm field artillery] firing all night and you're sleeping a hundred feet from them and they're going 'boom, boom, boom' all night and all day. You might consciously accept it, but subconsciously you never accept it. You are living on your nerves. You've got to.

12:30 To survive you are living on your nerves.

Can you tell us about the conflict in Borneo that you witnessed, that you were part of?

Yes. I wasn't a corporal then, I was a machine gunner and this was the one outside of Bau where I said before we went in in the Chinooks. The Indonesians at that time had hit the British troops

13:00 from each side. We went in there, we quickly took over the situation and they pulled out the British troops. We did a search of the area – this is day – we didn't stay in that one area. You would keep a company at base in the daytime and send out the other two companies to patrol and destroy enemy. You would come

13:30 across camps. We had a couple of contacts out there with the Indonesians. What they would normally do, fire a few shots, and when you opened up back at them they would run, like a terrorist activity. They wouldn't stay and fight, they would just hit and go, hit and go, and all you'd do is follow up all the time. The British company did take a pounding on that occasion, and

14:00 I can say to you that when my section commander said, "I want you in that pit there", there were two British soldiers dead and I can remember to this day the flak jacket [body armour] that he was wearing was half burnt off, and there was a terrible odour. Death has a terrible odour. You never get it out. You know if a person has died. But anyway, that was just something that happened. We were there –

14:30 it was hard to say – three weeks, a month. We secured the area and then they brought us back in. It was only one company. We still had two companies back at Bau and they were out patrolling. This is the thing – you never stopped. You were always doing something, patrolling all the time. This is what happened with the French in Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam. They built fortresses and they wouldn't patrol, and the

15:00 Vietcong got up on the top of them with artillery and blew the crap out of them. You have got to control your area, make sure you never let the enemy into a 3-mile, 5-mile, 10-mile area and you've got artillery that is firing day and night into given positions, and if you are out on patrol you have artillery pieces covering your advance so that if

15:30 you do have a contact, they pull in the artillery and unfortunately they pull it into your position, and if you get a couple of your men killed, that's sorry. They don't pull back. You have only one way to get out of a situation like that, massive fire power and you have to take some casualties, but the artillery, they were great, tremendously accurate, the New Zealanders and the Australians,

16:00 pinpoint accuracy. I lost a good friend out there. He was awarded the Military Medal the week before. He was a Warrant Officer and they went out on patrol the next day. Kirby was his name. I remember Jack Kirby at Enoggera,

16:30 and he had to give a lecture. Well, he was one of the most natural lecturers in the world, happy-go-Larry, but he got his message across and he got killed in Vietnam, but before he died he was awarded the Military Medal. But how he died – he was out on a patrol and they called in artillery fire

17:00 and unfortunately it hit the company headquarters and he was killed. I was in Vietnam but I know that his wife didn't…He had a military funeral but no one to go to it or anything like that. He was a warrant officer, company sergeant major. He was a wonderful bloke, about twenty stone. I can remember him in Australia when we went on operations for six weeks and we walked over a hundred miles and we were coming up this road, exhausted, and Jack was

17:30 a big fellow, about twenty stone, as I say, and he was laying on the ground, perspiration pouring out of him and he was saying, "I am dying" but he got up and he did it. You have these funny moments. I can remember – little things jog your memory – we were in Borneo and we had a big six footer that was a Bren gunner as well and it rains every day

18:00 and outside our base camp was a big hill – we used to call them yamas [Japanese: yama, mountain] – and he got half way up the hill and he said, "I am buggered," and I was behind him – I was his number 2 at the time – I picked up the Bren gun and I carried it up to the top and I took his pack as well as well as my own weapon and packs, and I just gritted my teeth and got up and left it at the top of the hill for him. But blokes would do this for you. They would help each other. If you had trouble there was someone

18:30 there. When we set up camp of a nighttime, especially in the jungle in Malaya and Thailand, you would have an outside perimeter. Darkness over there is pretty black. You can hardly…It's not like here. It is black in jungle, thick jungle; it's very close, the jungle, and we would sort of make a trail

19:00 from one hut to another. We had a little tent by scraping the earth, and of nighttime you would get little luminous creatures on that path and you knew where you were going. But I can tell you that some people, one fellow I know, went out for a call of nature one night and it was dark and he got lost and he was calling out

19:30 because he got frightened and no one would answer him because it might have been the enemy. You brought him in the next morning. He had to lie out there all night because if he went in most probably the Bren gunner or someone would shoot him. That's how serious it was. You didn't know who was the enemy. You didn't take the chance. If you got outside the perimeter of a nighttime after everyone had closed

20:00 up, after they did their patrols, they would put out the pickets – and usually it was at the Bren gun – and you closed up shop for the night. You changed alternately through the night, two men on duty all the time.

Was Borneo very different to Malaya in the sense that in Malaya you could turn on and off and in Borneo you were on the whole time and that was like a precursor to Vietnam when you were on all the time again?

20:30 Yes, that's right. You were being conditioned. Of course, Borneo you're on all the time. At least with Malaya you had time to take it easy and relax even though you had your patrols and that. Different sort of terrain – more flat country in Malaya and a lot of rubber plantations and whatever, a little bit of hill country up on the Thailand border, and it rained every day there, but

21:00 it used to rain in Borneo and it's probably the…I consider the toughest terrain in the world, Borneo. You have wait-a-whiles, which are pieces of vine that wrap around you and tear at your skin and on your clothes and that. You'd walk through. You'd have bamboo. We'd have our base camp where we would set up for a week or two and we'd send out patrols from there. It rained continually every day, as I said.

21:30 It was very humid and when we went out on our patrols outside, we had to go right up this hill. It was exhausting every day; you were on the go all the time, and with that, when you were off patrols you didn't take it easy. You had to clean your weapons and make sure everything was in order; you'd never know when you had to use it. You had to go to O Groups. People would come 'round and the section commander would tell you what was going on for this day, which section is leading. Sections took turns at taking point.

22:00 **Being in the front?**

Being in the front, yeah, and I can say that my forward scouts, at times, got tired of it. I've taken up forward scout quite a lot, even though I was a section commander, to take the pressure off them – not the best thing to do because I might have got shot and they've got no section commander, but you had to give you men a little bit of a rest. It was

22:30 a tension-filled sort of atmosphere. It was serious.

Did you learn about, I suppose for want of a better word, wrangling or managing your men? Were you given those skills in the army or was it something you learned on the fly?

I was in the railway and I was a signalman and a night officer, so I was used to having a little bit of authority, but you learn it

23:00 in the army. You start off, the lowest is the rifle group and they teach you from there on in, and as you gain experience, you might go into the Bren group, you might go up to section 2IC then, and then section commander. It took me four and a half to five years before I made corporal, and it was only in the last,

23:30 at Vietnam really, that I was a corporal there and it is an experience. You get to know your men; you get to know them intimately. You know how much they can take and when they are feeling it. You can tell. I used to go around and have a talk to them and treat them as though they were my brother. You know, I'd say, "How's it going, mate?" It might be over not getting any letters or something like that,

24:00 because they depend a lot on communications from home. On an active service condition you didn't worry about it. There were times we didn't shave for a week, two weeks. You didn't even brush your teeth because the smell of the toothpaste can come down the river and the enemy know you are there; it smells in the jungle. You just…what I used to do was get salt

24:30 and I'd clean my teeth with salt.

Does it work?

Yeah, it keeps your teeth nice and clean. And, of course, you enjoyed a shower when you got home. You would just go in, clothes and all. You would just take your gear off, your webbing off and whatever, but you would go in clothes and all. Of course, you smelt to high heaven. My wife used to go, "Ooh, my God in heaven…" But

25:00 it was life.

Your brothers weren't with you in Borneo.

Lionel was with me in Borneo.

Lionel was? So what was Lionel's job? What did he do? I know you were a Bren gunner at the

time.

He was a section commander in another section at that time and he was there with us in the same company doing the same sorts of jobs that we were doing.

Did you see each other on a daily basis?

Not always, and

25:30 even if you did see it, there was no time for chitchat. You would just give a wave and he would give a wave back. There were times when we might have had five minutes but on the whole, no. We would just se each other in passing and the fact that we knew that we were both there was good. You see, they had a policy in the Second World War – they wouldn't send two brothers or three brothers in the one company because they had an occasion where a family was wiped out, but now they don't sort of worry about it, and

26:00 we wanted to be together. It depends on the individual. We wanted to be together. Lionel was with us in Borneo and he came back to Malaya with me and I'm sure he went to Western Australia with the 3rd Battalion on a posting and I came to Queensland; I got a posting to Queensland.

Was he married to somebody in Malaya?

No, he was single: high, wide and fancy, and single.

26:30 Good footballer, good tennis player, wild boy, fight like a thrashing machine.

And we're interviewing him as well, aren't we?

That's right, and you hope to be interviewing my other brother up on Mount Me, so, you know, there's a lot of…We're close.

Did you get to know any of the villagers in Bau when you were there?

No, just in passing.

27:00 Give the kids a chocolate or a biscuit or a sweet. Never.

Do you think they trusted you?

Not really, but I suppose they did come to trust us to a certain degree after a while. They were always fearful. They were always coming down raiding the villages, the Indonesians, and taking away some of their women now and again and whatever. They were living under tension like we were.

27:30 But no, you didn't have any time to…nothing in Borneo. I got a day's leave to come back to get a couple of teeth out at Bau. There was an English dentist and he just pulled them out and I went straight back out. There were no days off; it was five months slog.

Do you think the conflict in Malaya – had you not had that, Borneo would have been a lot more difficult?

Definitely.

28:00 **So it prepared you in a way?**

Yes, it did prepare me, yes, and it prepares you in working with big groups of people. You are only one little group and you work by yourself but you are working in conjunction with other groups and bigger groups, and it teaches you to be able to work together.

What about being able to let some steam off in Borneo? Could you have any alcohol at all?

28:30 Going back forty years, I think we were allowed two cans a day and it was hot beer, no refrigeration, and some of the times the boys would bury it to get it cold, but in Malaya we did have a rum ration and that was highly prized. I had a few boys in my section that didn't like it so what I'd do, I'd make myself a big pannikin of coffee and I'd throw in about three or four nips of this overproof

29:00 rum and I'd have it. I was cold – you'd be wet out on patrol, so I'd have a dry set of clothes. I would change out of my wet ones, get my dry ones on, put my rifle in my tent next to me when I went to sleep so that if anything happened I just had that rifle there to get out – I had it ready to go, but I would just have this wonderful brew and just relax. Yeah.

It sounds nice.

It was great after…

29:30 We did get a nip of rum. I just thought of it.

But in Borneo, two cans?

Two cans a day.

What was it? Do you remember the beer?

I'm pretty certain it was Tiger beer, the Malay beer. It gives you a headache.

But did you drink it anyway?

Yeah. Yes, we did. They did something to help you; they helped you as much as they could. They rested you when they could; they looked

30:00 after you. They could see when a man was breaking; they knew it. You know, as far as getting to know people, it's a great eye opener. You can tell instinctively with men. I've worked with men for forty-odd years and I can assess a man pretty quickly and know what he's like under pressure and how he would go in life.

After Borneo you came back to Malaya?

I came back to Malaya.

30:30 **How long were you there before you came back to Australia?**

Probably about three or four months.

How was that, the last few months there?

Hectic, because we were getting ready to go and we had to pack up a house and we bought some things over there that we brought back here. We didn't have any operations or anything but nevertheless you still had your commitments in camp so you weren't always home, but it's a pretty big job to

31:00 reorganise a task force to get home. It's a thousand-odd men and there's a lot of work to be done. I got posted back to Brisbane.

I'm sorry, I'll just interrupt there for a second, Barry, but in those three to four months before coming back to Australia, were you in a situation where you had to go out on patrol or did you run into any more conflict there?

31:30 Yes, you were still on operations. Whether or not…it lessened as we got closer to going away – maybe the Kiwis or the English troops would have taken over our patrols and that – but we just flew home, a big Boeing 707, and as far as I can remember, we…

32:00 up until the last couple of weeks, we were busy all the time.

Do you think Sandra wanted to leave?

No. She loved it; she was used to it. Her mother came over for four or five months – my son was born in Malaya, and my wife, when she wrote home and told that she was pregnant expecting Shaun,

32:30 my mother-in-law came over for five months, flew over so while I was away on operations they were great company for each other.

Were you actually back there when he was born though?

I was there when he was born. I didn't get to him the night he was born but I got to him the next day. What happened, I got word the next morning and we had a company parade, and they said,

33:00 "Private Lionel Laverty and Private Barry Laverty, fall out", and of course I'd told them my wife had just had a little boy and I got the day off to go up to Terendah Base Camp, the British Hospital, where she had him. That was the only time I saw him. I wasn't there when he was born or beforehand but I managed

33:30 to get there after, the next day.

So were you at home, though? She just had to go into hospital and you had to go back to work?

Yes. The hospital was in the base camp. It was a British hospital in Terendah Garrison and I think they put her in about a week before the baby was due – it was a little bit of a difficult birth but I did visit her, but

34:00 I wasn't there when Shaun was born. I got there the next day and we were going out on patrol, out on operations, but they were good enough to say, "Get up there and see your wife and son", and Lionel got the day off too.

Lionel got the day off too.

Yeah, we both went up there. We were well known, the Laverty name, in sport and known in the army; we were known by a lot of people.

34:30 **So when was Shaun born?**

1965. 22nd of January, 1965.

You only had the one son. Did you just want the one child?

No. We tried to have more but unfortunately it wasn't to be, and I don't think it's good to have one child but nevertheless we tried to bring him up as well as

35:00 we could. His Nanna and Grandad came in and helped a lot and spoiled him rotten. He's living life good at the moment; he's got a family and he does the best he can.

Is he another Laverty boy in the army, in the service?

No, he's not in the army. He works on computers and he's very good with them, and

35:30 he's on short wave radio; he helps out there. He runs a grievance board. He's quite well up in the short wave radio here in Queensland. He's got a brilliant brain – he's not like me – he's got a good brain.

Did you want him to go into the army?

No. I'd had enough. I'd seen enough.

36:00 I'm sorry that…whereas if Australia needed me now I would go, I would hope that we don't have another conflict. It's a terrible thing. I think we are better off without wars but there are times when you've got to have a war, especially in our present situation. You've got to control power with power; it's necessary.

36:30 People don't agree with me but it is necessary. It's the only way. The only way to put a man or a nation or a country in line is to say, "You move and I'll bomb you", like they did with Hiroshima; it brought them to their knees. It was a terrible thing but it stopped the war, stopped millions getting killed, and I think this now,

37:00 the confrontations they've got now, is the start of the third World War, and you know I think it'll go on for ten or fifteen years. I think it will see me out, and I am 63. Do you know it's terrorism, and I don't see…? The only way America is going to win overseas is to use might. They won't beat terrorists. Look at the French in Malaya and Vietnam – they couldn't beat terrorist

37:30 activities, even in Borneo, and now they are getting terrorist activities overseas – hit and run, hit and run. You don't need a big army. Just put a bazooka on, kill four or five men and run. You can never beat it unless you eradicate everyone. Children are brought up today to hate – you can see it on TV, on radio –

38:00 "Kill the Americans. Kill the Australians." Little children, they are brought up to believe that so the only way to stop it is to eradicate them and start a new generation of thinking, and it's never going to happen. You are always going to have conflicts, always terrible wars but I would give my life for my country if I had to.

38:30 There's many things I'd give my life for. I've had a good life, a wonderful life, wonderful experiences in the army and I'm glad to be alive. Every day of my life I thank God.

So how much of Shaun did you actually see after his birth?

Very little, until we came home. I didn't see him at all. He was, I think, about two months.

39:00 I know he cried. They had the immunisation needles then and they can affect children – we didn't know it at the time – but he cried from Malacca airport to Perth, Western Australia, on the plane terribly and then he exhaustedly went to sleep. He could have died – it was some complication with the injections that he had to come from Malaya, overseas – triple antigen or something –

39:30 I may be wrong. There is some problem with that, or years ago there was, and we didn't know at the time, but he got over it. But he cried from Malacca to Perth, Western Australia. We came in at Perth, Sydney and Brisbane.

Gee, you must have wanted a drink after that flight?

Yeah. There weren't too many planes on, but they all ran out of beer and spirits from the army boys. It didn't take too long to consume

40:00 what was there.

Even Sandra would want a beer after a crying baby for five hours.

Yeah, it was terrible. We had him from one to another all the time, trying to pacify the lad, and I didn't know…We knew there was something wrong, but to just what extent..? It was years later that we realised that it was from the injections that he had.

They warn you about that now.

They do. They didn't then.

Tape 5

00:33 **I was just wondering how your training held you up out in the field in Malaya, or whether there were things that you picked up along the way?**

Well, no. Our initial training through our corps and infantry training

01:00 was good. It is different sort of tactics when you are over in Malaya. You can learn copybook tactics by the plan but they are only a guideline. They did hold us in good stead for Malaya. You work at home in company strengths; when you work in Malaya or Borneo or Vietnam, you work in battalion and

01:30 task force strengths, which is three battalions – much more involved, but it does hold you in good stead. Your tactics are still the same. You work individually and you given a particular duty to carry out each and every day or a duty that might take you a week to fix up. It did hold us in good stead.

What were some of the tactics that the terrorists were using that you had to combat?

Well most of them hit and run.

02:00 They might put up an ambush if they've got superior forces like they tried with Long Tan, but generally it's two or three men which will hit you hard and pull back. You've got to go through a procedure of going over the ground and checking to make sure that there's no more enemy. You don't know until you've sort of gone and checked out the area, but

02:30 if a machine gun starts off, you know that there's a group of men; if there's rifle shots there could be one or two or it could be a sniper or whatever. We've had in Malaya there, we were just going across the paddy fields – and they're big open fields, you know, and the paddy bunds are about two foot high and you walk up to your ankles and a little bit higher sometimes through paddy bunds. We were walking along one day and the next minute, down the road,

03:00 I see an enemy and there was three of them and they were just jogging along with the machine gun over their shoulder, very casual. They don't have tactics like we do; they just walk behind each other and our gun opened up and it jammed initially and by the time we got going, they had run away but they had gone completely. It took us about and hour and a half to reorganise and make sure that there was no one else there.

03:30 Just because you've had an initial contact you just don't go on willy-nilly [regardless]. You clear the area and you make sure that there's no more enemy there. That's basically it.

When they hit you, as you were saying, is it mainly with machine gun fire or are there other tactics that they use or other weapons?

Yes, they can set up a little jumping mine.

04:00 In Borneo we used to go along up to the top of the crest to just – it was on the border – to make sure no enemy were there. We were going along this path for maybe two or three weeks or whatever and on this path there was a trunk of a tree in a Y shape

04:30 and we'd just walk along over the tree itself. Well, this time it turned out one of the men stepped in between and a jumping mine, he stepped on a jumping mine, it jumped up around about four or five feet and splattered him all around the rubber trees. It took us a couple of food bags to get his remains out of there and whatever, but he was the only one killed at that time. It was documented in

05:00 Borneo but what we did then was sent a section up that night, which was again my section – you worked in section strength – for an ambush in case the enemy came up to see what the noise was, the commotion was, but they didn't come. And that night, I can remember, it was misty rain all night and we just sort of laid there either side of the track waiting and we pulled out again just before daylight so no-one would know that we were there. I don't think there's any more.

05:30 **It's a bit of a gruesome question but I don't mean it to be: you mentioned that the guy was splattered with a jumping mine?**

Yes, there were bits and pieces of him. In two food bags we picked up portions of his body, and do you know for weeks after; skin and flesh was

06:00 embedded in the trees from when the explosion went off and you could smell that stench of human flesh for weeks after – it was there.

Can you describe what that smells like?

It's a smell that once you've recognised it as a decaying person or a dead person you never forget it. It's an insipid sort of a smell

06:30 like rotting flesh and it's peculiar all to its own. Once you've smelt it, you never forget it in your life. I

haven't had any big contacts or whatever; I had the odd one or two but only a handful of where men were injured or died and I'm happy about that. There is not big contacts with 10 and 20 and 15 die.

07:00 I just mopped up afterwards. I was lucky. I had a few bullets whip past my head. We were coming in one day and it was just one fellow – he fired a few shots and I just turned the section in open file and we went straight through. We turned back. We were coming out, back into camp, and he fired and I could hear the bullets whip the trees near me. Whether he

07:30 was aiming at me or not I don't know, but he was aiming at someone. I had the compass and the protractor; they aim mainly for the man who's got the compass and protractor or who's head of the section. All I did was wheel the section around. We were coming back in company strength and the rest of the sections were behind me, the same as with platoon headquarters. I just wheeled the section in extended line and we went straight through, and by that time the person involved had gone.

08:00 He'd got up and gone. We had to clear that area out and it probably took another hour. We were probably about fifteen minutes from base camp or something, but you have to make sure that you patrol an area where you've had a contact and make sure that there's no enemy left, make sure the area is clear, always. This is why you have patrols in the morning and at night at base camps and all these sorts of things. Even if you're out on patrol and you set up as a

08:30 platoon you will still have a clearing patrol morning and night. A section goes out and the whole platoon or company stands to while that goes on and they might be out there for fifteen or twenty minutes or so and you stand to for about half an hour or so – half an hour before dark and half an hour after.

Can you actually describe – this is a bit of an obvious question, but for the archive it's really good – can you actually describe

09:00 **specifically what standing to and standing down is in a platoon like that?**

When you go into a platoon area for the night, each section is designated an arc of fire and you usually have your tea maybe five or six hundred metres from the

09:30 area that you are going to go in for the night and you move in under cover at darkness. The whole platoon, whether it is thirty men or a hundred men, will stand to until it becomes dark and then an order will be given to stand down and then your night pickets take over. The rest of the platoon go about their normal duties whether to O Groups, cleaning weapons

10:00 or whatever. The next morning at daybreak or just before daybreak, the whole platoon or company is called to stand to. You sit out and wait because enemy will attack first light or last light; that's when they'll mostly come to surprise you, or they'll try and surprise you in the middle of the night – that's why you have pickets out on arcs of fire and all this sort of thing. It's just a general stand to of the men

10:30 of all the company for that half hour, morning and night, and then, as I said, when you stand to, there will be a patrol that will go out and clear the area in front of you. You may even put out a Claymore mine [directional anti-personnel mine] out on your arc of fire in case anyone comes in; you put out trip flares [flares designed to go off when a tripwire is tripped] in your area. If anyone is going to hit a trip flare,

11:00 you've got them in your sights. You put out all these sorts of things. To the uninitiated it seems strange but, you know, it's not. You protect yourself as much as you possibly can. Even when you are at a company base and you clear the area in front of you, you have mines out, flares out, all the time, and you have the way to go in and the way to go out.

11:30 Sometimes they have been known that the enemy have come in and turned the Claymore mines – that's how cheeky they were – to face you. Now, a Claymore mine is full of ball bearings and whatever and it goes up and out, and it just cuts you to pieces. It's an American mine about 1½ inch thick curved to about 12 inches and probably about 5 or 6 inches each

12:00 in width. To the uninitiated it sometimes seems funny but to the army bloke, to most people they'll understand it.

With the fellow who got hit by the mine that you brought back in two body bags, obviously there was not much left of him at all so what is the rationale behind bringing two body bags back?

What happened,

12:30 we changed our policy because we had a platoon that got hit outside and a few of them were killed and they brought them back into the company camp. There was a lot of nightmares and screams and cries from the boys that night, they were very upset.

Because of the remains that were there?

No, because of the fellows that were killed and because of the pressure that they went under. This is

13:00 what happens. After that if you got hit out on a patrol, you would stay there; you wouldn't come back to base. They would leave you alone. They changed policies on it. This time in Vietnam when this platoon

got hit, our platoon passed them on the way in. They were going out and as is our custom when one patrol finishes another starts.

13:30 We just gave them a little bit of a wave as we passed. Apparently they had an O Group out in the middle of a rice field and I'm sure it was a banana plantation around it, and they had the O Group on the side there, and from the Horseshoe [name of a hill feature], which was a range of mountains several hundred metres away, they were hit with a rocket launcher and there were

14:00 about five killed. We'd just got back to the platoon. This is how it happened: we passed, they went out, we got back to the platoon [base], we were cleaning up our gear and you heard the 'whoomp, whoomp, whoomp' as the tree-bursts [shells exploding in the trees] and the attack came in. The next minute the APCs [Armoured Personnel Carriers] were there and they said, "Does anyone know where such and such a platoon is?" and I said, "Yes because I passed them". I just threw on my web belt, grabbed an SLR at that time

14:30 and took them down. We had to walk in for about a hundred feet or so, but I took them down – I knew the area. Being a section commander I'd been though it quite a bit, so I just took the APCs down there and they got the medical staff down there and after they got set up, I just sort of got back to my platoon. There was a number of them killed and a very good friend of mine. He was the first NCO killed in 5 Battalion

15:00 in Vietnam and he left a wife with two little children under 10; he was young, 24, 25, and he was a good bloke. What happened, he was at the O Group. When the rocket launchers came in, it was hit with most of his section and his number 2 and Bren gunner must've been leaning over cleaning the M60 [Heavy Machine Gun] and they were hit with a tree-burst

15:30 and Gus tried to get back, and when he did he got hit with a piece of shrapnel that went through his right cheek. When I got to him I just rolled him over – he tried to get back to his section – and I looked in his mouth and I thought, 'It has gone into the throat' so I tried to clear his throat out but it had gone into his brain. The shrapnel had gone in through the cheek and up to the brain. Killed him completely. That's something that you

16:00 live with. It hardens you. You might feel sorrow. I remember it in the newspaper clipping. We got the newspaper clipping even in Vietnam, and his photo was there. You know, it's just little incidents that come to mind. But everything is done automatically. Your patrols are going all the time; they're in and out; it is so coordinated. You've got your helicopters flying around,

16:30 not one, not twenty, a hundred or more. You've got your air ships; you've got artillery going off; you've got men – American, Australian or whatever – all over the place. It's a tremendous noise; it is a tremendous commotion, and the biggest surprise of all was when I got to Vietnam and I hit Saigon airport. There were hundreds upon hundreds of personnel planes and whatever.

17:00 The noise was tremendous and yet they were moving troops. You can have all this commotion but things still go on. It may seem to you funny that you can pass one platoon going out, can pass another, can wave to a bloke, and ten or fifteen minutes later you go about your business at base camp because you have just come out of a patrol and you hear the 'whoomp, whoomp, whoomp', and sections of people have died in that time-frame.

17:30 You don't even think of it. You never think it's going to be you. No one does. If you thought it was going to be you, you'd never go. When you get up to go into a contact, no bullet is going to get you and if it does, it's going to be nice and quiet. You just go to sleep. If I've gone off the question a bit I'm sorry.

No, that's perfectly all right. We do want to go

18:00 **through a lot of detail on Vietnam a bit later on.**

I keep referring back to it because that was the most contact I had and in Borneo I had a lot of contact and then I had two years in Malaya. In Australia we were continually on training and on exercises. We did lots of exercises, six week exercises all over the place. I have had it in snow and I have had it in heat, and we've got through it.

18:30 **For all the time you were in Malaya, what was the worst of it for you?**

Being a young man and having a young wife, I think being away from her and my family, my mother. I liked army life and I loved it. Whether you call me gung-ho [enthusiastic] or whatever, I liked it

19:00 and it didn't bother me. I did miss my wife but everything's in perspective. I knew she would be there when I got home and my family would be there. It's a different environment when you come from a section to a task force. It's in multitudes. You have many men whereas you go from a single man to a thousand men, and you still work cohesively.

19:30 Everything is planned. It works cohesively.

The quarters that you were in with Sandra were a little bit removed from the main base.

Yes. It was an officer's house.

Can you describe the layout and what it was like?

Yeah, sure. It was a brick home. It had fans in every room, security on every door. All the floors were marbled and they were beautifully tiled marble.

20:00 You walked into the lounge room and it was all tiled and we had our lounge suite and table there. To the right of it was our dining room and we had that petitioned off. To the left of that was a nice big kitchen, and you had toilet facilities and everything for the amah out the back there, and then you had a two-way bathroom, and

20:30 it was three bedroom. It was all tiled; it was cool for living over there. We had officer's cutlery and everything. They didn't take anything from them; they just said, "Here is your place. Stay there," and we did and it was great. We had a very nice married quarter and we lived next to a Malayan millionaire. They picked good homes in good

21:00 places for their personnel. We had a nice home. It was a little bit far away from camp and sometimes it was a long day. They had a bus; a bus would pick you up and take you to the camp and then bring you home from the camp, but you know, you mightn't get home until 6 or 7 o'clock and then you are gone at 5 in the morning. You just come home to say hello and have a meal. Most of the time,

21:30 three-quarters of the time you are at the camp. We had a dog, had a gardener who would come and do the garden and they would look after. When my wife was pregnant, the amah wouldn't let anyone touch her. They get very protective towards their master and their missy, as they used to call them.

22:00 There is a bond there and that's all they'd do, or that's all they were doing then when forces came over. They would screen them and they would get those jobs there so they were pretty trustworthy.

How many other army wives were around?

I would say a couple of hundred.

22:30 Bukit Bharu was a big place, and there you had English serving members, Kiwis, Malay serving members and Australian. It was a bigger area in Terendah Camp where they had most of the married quarters and living quarters; they lived in camp. I suppose that was

23:00 their aim initially, to have everyone in that close-knit group but for some cases, and I was one of them, it might've been a dozen of us, it might've been twenty of us, I don't know, but there weren't a lot of Australians in the area that I was in, but it was quite a good area. Around the corner from me, I had a mate called Freddie Pfitzner, Lieutenant Freddie Pfitzner. He

23:30 rose to major and he used to pick me up in the bus every morning and he would hang on my front door and he'd say, "Come out here, Private Laverty. We're waiting for you". He was a hard man, hard officer and yet when he got over to Malaya, up in Thailand, over in Borneo, you could not have met a better officer.

24:00 He changed. He was a good officer – don't get me wrong – great officer anyway, but he was a disciplinarian, but for looking after his men and all this sort of thing, he just changed. He was great. He wasn't my section [he means platoon] commander. Andy Mattay was my section commander. He was a one-pipper, second lieutenant. He retired as Colonel Mattay, and I can remember

24:30 little incidents at the mess. They would have an Orderly Officer on and we would be in the mess eating and Andy would come around and he would say, "What's the meal like tonight, fellows? Real good?" and this one bloke this night sitting next to me got up and said, "No. It's pure and utter shit, Sir." and it was shocking meals in '61 but you ate 'em. So Andy said, "Is it?" He said, "Stand up. Move out here," and Andy sat down, he ate the meal,

25:00 and got up and said, "That's pretty good mukan [food (Malay)], mate." He didn't have his tea but Andy ate it on him. But he'd go to the officer's mess. He was a great one for eating, as thin as a beanpole and about six-foot tall. And little incidents like…We had an army ration pack and you'd get those hard tack biscuits – not many of us ate them because they were too hard, and we used to bury them –

25:30 and I can remember Andy digging them up and taking a couple of packets for him to have on the way. A good bloke, a fit man, a mountaineer in his spare time – he'd climb mountains. I haven't seen him for forty-odd years. Snowy Purdon with 3 RAR, he was a sergeant; we used to call him "Beak", not to his face, because he was a big fellow with a big nose. He'd flatten you, you see,

26:00 but he was our platoon sergeant and he was a funny man, and he'd stand us up and he'd have a go at my brother mainly, Lionel, because of the fact that we used to play a bit of football and sometimes we'd get out of a bit of guard duty or whatever, and he'd say, "I have got you this time, Laverty. You're coming on guard duty with me," and he'd go up to company headquarters and we'd be out on parade and he'd come out with this little letter and his lips would quiver

26:30 and he'd say, "Private Lionel Laverty and Private Barry Laverty, fall out." We would go to football training and whatever. But that was just him. He'd say, "I've got you now. I've got you where I want you. You're coming with me this time." I did more bush work than Lionel, but Lionel was pretty lucky. He was a better footballer than me, and he's got a better memory than me too.

27:00 It's just funny things that you think about. My company commander was Major Hodgkinson . He was a redheaded fellow; he was a fiery fellow, a good major, and he lives in Canberra. I haven't seen him but my brother has seen him and he's asked about us and

27:30 when I get down to Canberra again next time I'm going to see him. Just people you meet. It brings back memories just talking about things. I know my train of thought is not on what you're telling me, but you're letting me ramble on and just tell you little things. Your memory gets triggered and if you're like me – as I said, I've got a little bit of a nerve condition –

28:00 sometimes your memory is good and sometimes it's bad, but you recall things as you're going along.

Absolutely. That's what today is all about, and we're not following any prescribed format, so it's absolutely fine. I asked you before about casualties in Malaya and you said there were a few. What were they mainly from?

Rifle fire, a mine, and…There was a

28:30 fellow called Andrea Doore [?] , he accidentally got shot in the head; he lived – it was an OMC [Owen Machine Carbine, sub-machine gun] and it was his own rifle. It was an accident that happened and it went into his head and it didn't go into the brain. You have a helmet on and what it did was, it run around his skull.

29:00 He suffers with epilepsy but he continued on over there after they got him out of hospital and whatever, and he was a great bloke. I'm trying to bring back to mind – I know there were other incidences in Malaya. There were three or four instances where people got

29:30 wounded or killed. On patrol, there was even an accidental death as well, but mainly it was either smugglers or Indonesians that got shot, not so much our fellows.

30:00 I don't think that one of our fellows was actually shot by an Indonesian over there. It's just like the SAS in Afghanistan; they never lost a man. We didn't lose too many in an actual fight, just through an accident or someone might step on a mine, but otherwise we got through it pretty well.

How were you received by the local Malays?

They didn't like us, the 'White Mice' [South Vietnamese military police], if we strayed out.

30:30 They were the Vietnamese MPs. We called them white mice because they were just little fellows dressed in white, like me, and if you stayed out on curfew or you back-chatted them they would shoot you, hit you over the head, shoot you. They didn't care; they didn't like you. I found they accepted you but they wanted what you could give them, not what they could give you, whether it was financial or

31:00 whatever. But it was a different sort of life and you sort of stuck to your own. You didn't have the time to cultivate Malay or Chinese friends. Army is a 24-hour day. A day is not 8 'til 4; it starts at 5 o'clock in the morning and finishes at about 7 o'clock that night. It's a 24-hour thing. We did have get-togethers

31:30 at various army places, a party or whatever; we stuck to our own. There were some nice people, nice Malay, nice Chinese people, Straits-born people; they acknowledge you and I know they wouldn't do you harm.

I was asked by one of the researches in our office to ask you about a holiday you had in camp with the Irish?

Yes, yes. Look, we were affiliated with the Irish Hussars, and Charlie Company, 3rd Battalion went for a week – we called five days a week then – up to Ipoh and

32:00 it was a time when we had sports together, training together, just a little bit of time to get to know each other, and we used to eat in their messes and whatever – they had a far superior mess than what we had in Malaya in '61. It was the first time when I stepped into the Ipoh mess that I found over twenty different ways to cook potatoes, and I found scotch eggs were to my liking.

32:30 But it was a great experience – we played tennis and I was reasonably good in the army; I was number one or number two and my partner and I got to the finals of the singles and the finals of the doubles; we won the doubles but it was a great time up there for the five days.

33:00 We didn't do exercises; it was a recreational thing that we had, just affiliated the same as Brisbane is affiliated with a town in America, and because of that affiliation the military got together. They were a nice bunch of blokes. Their messes were good and their beer is good. We used to go and have a game of darts and you'd drink tops, which is half Tiger beer, half lemonade; it was quite a smooth drink.

33:30 We had a good time and then we came back to Ipoh. I don't know whether we went up by train or bus or truck. You see, when we went out on operations they trucked you out basically; you would go by truck, by road. That was in Malaya. In Borneo and Vietnam you went by helicopter, either Iroquois [Bell UHIB etc utility helicopter, the 'Huey'] or Chinook [Boeing CH47 medium helicopter]. The Iroquois is where you

34:00 take about eight men; the Chinook you can take about thirty men and it was quicker and easier to get there. Mainly in Malaya we went out there by bus. We had a great time up in Ipoh and we met a few people that you say, “We’ll write to you” and all this, but life goes on, you know. You get down a different road, and

34:30 I think your life is better for meeting them and I’m sure that some time in life I’ll see them again, but we had a great old time. That was about a hundred men, a company, a hundred men. There’s about nine hundred and ninety-odd in a tropical battalion. They’ve changed the numbers now – this was years ago.

What about music? I mean this was the ‘60’s.

35:00 **Did you have any music on the base that you’d listen to?**

Not really. I suppose the music of the day… I didn’t take much interest in music. I didn’t have a radio. Even to this day I have a radio in the car but I never turn it on or whatever.

35:30 There was no real sort of music within the camps or whatever; only the fellows who had their own radios might have it on. My wife and I listened to records, whether they were classical or just some modern music, but Elvis Presley was around then – he was one of my favourites,

36:00 and quite a few of the singers, but I enjoy nice music, good music, good tenors and classics and whatever, nice mood music. But I suppose we just listened to the music of the day. Within the army on patrol, you wouldn’t hear nothing. I remember when, I think we were in

36:30 Borneo, when President Kennedy [John F Kennedy, President of the United States, assassinated 1963] was assassinated and they brought that over live to us. We were on patrol when he got assassinated. Little things like that they would keep you up to date.

What was people’s reaction to that?

Well, I don’t think…

37:00 They took it as a little bit of a shock because of the fact it was unexpected. He was a pretty popular president; they thought maybe it might have gone into another conflict. It was just a world-shattering news that came along.

37:30 **What were your thoughts on the Americans at that stage, or America itself?**

I think they’re great. I think they should have been in Vietnam.

38:00 Unfortunately they didn’t win Vietnam. They knew they couldn’t win it because the Chinese were sending in troops, hundreds of them, thousands of them, and it was an unwinnable war. They tried and I think they did the right thing fighting for people. They were a little bit of a muscle man in as much as they can do anything,

38:30 like Iraq and that – they just went in. There was evidence there that they were going on nuclear weapons and that, but regardless of that they wanted Saddam Hussein [President of Iraq] out of the way. He was a dictator; he had to go and I believe in my own mind they’ve tried to assassinate him many times. I think the Israelis have tried to assassinate him and haven’t got to him, so

39:00 the only way they could take him out was to take the country out, plus the fact they had one of the major oil refineries in the world there, so many oil wells – thousands of them, and they wanted him out of the way. I don’t think it’s a winnable war. I think it’s a bit like Vietnam. I think it’s a bit like Afghanistan, but with Al Quaida and all these terrorists, that’s the way it’s

39:30 going to go for the next ten or fifteen years. They are going to kill a lot of people. There’s only one way to get rid of them: that’s to annihilate the lot of them and start afresh. They hate Europeans. There will always be that conflict between Asians, Muslims and Europeans. They will never get away from it.

Tape 6

00:33 **When you came back to Australia after Malaya I know you were still in the army but was it a little bit difficult to get used to being in a safe environment?**

It took a while to adjust, that’s for sure, and even to this day, which is forty odd years later, I still have my moments now: memories, nightmares if you could call it, pain – physically and mentally –

01:00 that I have because of my overseas service, on active service. I think when we came home I can remember flying in, having our relations there; we were pleased to be home and the bands were there to celebrate and to recognise us there, and

01:30 it was a great feeling, and you sort of went out on leave straight away and you took off while you were over in Malaya and Borneo. But there are times when your memories go back to it all the time. I’m

having a little bit of trouble distinguishing when they

02:00 brought us back by boat or took us over to Borneo by boat, which they did. They took us over by boat, took a couple of days to get across there, and I know we went out of Australia in a Boeing [aircraft] and I think we came home in a Boeing. When I came home from Vietnam, it was an entirely different situation because I was brought home for use of word casevac [casualty evacuation], medivac,

02:30 and I was sent into the air force in Malaya, to Butterworth. We stopped overnight in Butterworth, we stopped overnight in Cocos Keeling Island, we stopped overnight in Perth, we stopped overnight in Sydney. This is because of the casualties coming back – I was probably the best-off bloke there;

03:00 there was a lot of bad injuries – and they put us into the Amberley Air Base and we got an ambulance from Amberley to 1 Camp Hospital. You forget a lot, I do.

Well, you're doing very well today, for what it's worth. Can I ask you when you first came back to Australia after Malaya did you find that nobody

03:30 **had any clue what went on there?**

Yes. There wasn't much in the papers about it. People are against war here in Australia; there is conflict with people here not wanting blokes to go and some to send them. It does affect you,

04:00 but I found that once you got over to Malaya you didn't have Australian newspapers; you didn't hear much local news from home. Even when we went to Vietnam we knew there was some unrest here but it was never broadcast in front of our face every day of your life. What you saw on TV here we never saw over there.

04:30 They gave us a good public reception, that everyone was for us and 'we'll soon get it over' and 'we'll get you back' and whatever, 'you are doing a good thing for your country' and that, and you lived your little army life. It's strange – you can have an office of six people working five days a week for three hundred and sixty five days a year, you become involved whether you are in a solicitor's office;

05:00 you become involved in that bit of work, and what I'm trying to say is, this is not six men, this is a thousand men, or three thousand men, involved in one particular thing and all they concentrate on is the task at hand. You don't worry about bad press; you don't worry about what politicians are saying. You are out there to do a job, get it over

05:30 and get home. And you know you are coming home; you believe that in your heart; nothing will ever happen. You can laugh about it now but you don't sort of laugh at it then but you are confident that you are going to come home.

We've spoken with a few blokes that were in the Korean War and one of them mentioned how the general public didn't even know

06:00 **that Aussies were even there, so I wondered if that was the same in Malaya?**

Yes, I think there were a lot of people that didn't know we were in Malaya and I wasn't really aware of the Korean conflict until I joined the army, you know, and I didn't miss the Korean conflict by many years, five or six years. I know they had a number of contacts over there. I've met…Most of

06:30 the men that went there came back to be instructors in the Australian Army as sergeants or warrant officers and I met them here. They came back with 3rd Battalion and you worked with them and they were instructing you here in Australia. I would say that there wasn't a lot of interest in Malaya because it wasn't a one-off thing;

07:00 you had troops rotating every two years for that term of what the countries agreed to.

You mentioned to Chris [interviewer] just before that you did a lot of exercises when you came back to Australia. How long was it until you knew that you would be heading off to Vietnam?

Within a month I got posted to 5 Battalion from here and we just got the word

07:30 5 Battalion was the next one to go to Vietnam and sixteen weeks later we were in Vietnam.

What did your wife say to that?

Oh dear, it shocked her to the core. She was up here in Brisbane, and she stayed with her mum and dad, which was a help, and she had Shaun to look after, so she was pretty insulated but it was a shock. I didn't expect it, and I suppose

08:00 and I suppose if I'd gone to the powers that be and put my case, they might've said, "Look, we'll take you out of 5 Battalion and put you somewhere else for a couple of years", but I was in the army to do a job, and I realise now it was a bit quick after a couple of years being overseas to go back to Vietnam, but I wanted to go. It was an experience.

08:30 **So you were sort of, in a sense, positive about going because even though you'd had Borneo and Malaya, obviously…?**

You get a little bit tired, mentally tired and physically tired, but no, it was a new adventure and I had joined the army for six years and I was going wherever they sent me.

At that particular time when you went to Vietnam, was that '63?

1963.

Was that the time in Australia, particularly in Sydney, when all the students…? So that was all happening before you left?

09:00 That's right. Yes, they had conflicts and that. Yes.

What did you hear about that on the radio and in the newspaper?

Do you know, we got practically nothing. Nothing. I think the powers that be said, "Look, we're not going to upset the boys by knowing there is so much of a commotion at home. We're all the way with LBJ [Lyndon B. Johnson, President of the United States of America]. We'll go and keep that bad press from them." But let me say that we knew there was conflict here in Australia

09:30 but not one – even to the National Service fellows, and they were only 18 years of age – wanted to come back home. They wanted to continue. I can say that for anyone that I knew. Not one said, "They're having conflicts at home. I'm going home because I support that." No, they were there to do a job and they were prepared to stay all the time.

I guess what I should have explained, too, in that question was, when you were

10:00 **in Australia, before you left for Vietnam, were you aware of what was happening with the student riots and all the protestations?**

Yep, yep. It didn't bother me; peoples' opinions never mattered to me. I think that if the government of the day says, "You are going to war," and if you are an Australian, and you stand up for Australia and you be counted. I don't care if my next-door neighbour is against

10:30 it, against me or whatever, I will do my own thing, I will make up my own mind and that was it. My mother, I know she had, as I said, four boys, she must have had her worrying times, but she is proud of the fact that four of us served in the army.

All three of you went to Vietnam too?

Three went to Vietnam,

11:00 three went to Malaya and Borneo and one went to Malaya and Borneo. There was a mix up there. Trevor, the one who has passed on, he had the same service as me: Malaya, Borneo, Thailand, Vietnam. Steven had Vietnam and Lionel had Malaya, Borneo. Lionel got out of the army and joined the

11:30 Commonwealth Police down in Canberra and he stayed there. He's retired now, like myself, but he worked for Kaleen High School, their budgets and all this sort of thing; he used to do that; he was quite a good mind on him, like me – brilliant.

12:00 **Just what I was thinking. So, when did you go to Vietnam?**

1965. I am hazy on that but it was '65.

You went into Vietnam in 1965?

End of 1965. I think I had about four or five months at home. I'm trying to think – I think it was just before Christmas. I think it was the November of the year.

And what were your first impressions of

12:30 **Vietnam?**

When I climbed into Saigon out of the Boeing, my eyes were about as big as saucers. You think in Malaya and Borneo you're in a war, but wait 'til you see what they had over there. It was tremendous. Hundreds of planes taking off and landing and people everywhere and noise. It was an eye-opener, and

13:00 I was 25. It was an eye opener but they shift you away from there. You just go into another gun ship or whatever and they shift you out to Phuoc Tuy [Province] to the base camp and we stayed there to acclimatise for a few days, maybe a week – I can't remember now –

13:30 and then they pushed the whole battalion. They decided that Nui Dat was going to be our headquarters; we had to hold and clear Nui Dat and for the first, I don't know, ten to twelve weeks or more all we did was patrol. All we did was patrol, clean the whole area up and then we set up camp there. The artillery came in.

14:00 But in the meantime, as we were doing this, the twelve or thirteen weeks that we were clearing it, there were American gun ships [armed helicopters], B52 bombers [American heavy long-range bomber aircraft] – you could hear them miles away – 'voom', 'voom', voom,' dropping the shells day and night,

artillery pieces off. It was a war situation.

Were you one of those Australians told to put on a Hawaiian shirt when you landed?

No. I never heard of it.

14:30 **I'd heard from one veteran that we interviewed that he had to put a Hawaiian shirt on to hide the fact that he was in the army, when he got on to the Qantas plane for some reason.**

When they took us over, we were all dressed in army greens and it was…the whole plane was all army. I don't know of any instances where they

15:00 had to put a shirt on; that may be so – maybe when they were in the country, in Vietnam itself. I don't think it was from Australia.

I think it must have been in Vietnam, actually. You are right. Were you able to have a drink on the way over there?

I think it was a dry ship when we went. Usually they let you have a beer, one or two beers, but

15:30 it was a dry ship. It was serious business.

It must have been sad, though, just leaving your son, because he would have only been about nine months old?

Yes, of course it was, and leaving my wife; she was only a young woman, but you think that twelve months isn't going to be a long time. It takes a little bit longer than just to say twelve months isn't a long time, but

16:00 we'd write to each other. Sandra used to write to me regularly, practically every day. Not all the days I'd get a letter – I might be out for four or five days and I'd come in and there might be three or four or seven letters for me and I'd have to read them in sequence. Not all the time did I have the opportunity to write a letter. Maybe once a week was all I had, maybe

16:30 once every two weeks. If I was out on operations for a couple of weeks, no letters, no nothing, no communications, and they were censored, our letters then. I know that. You had to be careful what you put in them and whatever.

So what about your wife's letters to you? They weren't censored, were they?

I think they were opened and looked at it.

In case of bad news?

I suppose so; I may be wrong.

Like a 'Dear John' [a letter ending a relationship] letter?

Yes, they did. They did censor mail, and

17:00 it was for the good of the troops.

So tell us about Nui Dat. It was your order to clear the compound, was it? What was it?

To clear the area around Nui Dat. Nui Dat was a little mountain in the middle of a whole lot of paddy fields and on the left hand side you had mountains called the Horseshoe. Now, we'll come to that later on because, really, we didn't start clearing the Horseshoe 'til late in our

17:30 term of enlistment over there, and the other battalions behind us took on the Horseshoe. It was probably a mile to a mile and a half square and we had to clear the area for probably ten mile around it, had to clear it right out on patrols. We never had a base camp or whatever.

18:00 You just clear out…It's like we cleared out all the area around it and then we came into Nui Dat because we knew that no-one would be there, and the battalions…We were on the east side of Nui Dat; the other companies were to the north and to the south – they didn't actually sit on Nui Dat. We did.

18:30 Charlie Company was on the east next to the artillery.

Can you explain to us what you mean by clearing?

Certainly. Vietnam was made up of tropical jungle, paddy fields and also rubber trees,

19:00 and to clear a place – it's quite thick – you probably couldn't get a good vision of, say, ten feet in front of you, but what you do is you go out through the country, through the terrain, a platoon, and you have a certain area that you're working in. It might be half a mile from the Nui Dat base, and you would clear a particular area. It's just like going in with

19:30 patrols through the bush and making sure that there's no enemy there, no panji [sharpened bamboo

stakes] pits, mines, anything like this – that it's a safe area for Australian troops, that you've got an area that you know you are safe in. That's the best way I can describe it. You clear that whole area of everything and once you've

20:00 cleared it, you send out patrols every day to keep that area yours; you contain it to make it yours. If you don't, the enemy can infiltrate and attack you. This is what happened with the French when they built their fortresses in Vietnam. They lost in Vietnam, the French lost and so did the Americans. I believe that they got out.

20:30 It was one of these things they had to. They couldn't win against that terrorist, against that guerilla – it wasn't so much terrorist then, it was guerrilla warfare.

Did you have earthmoving equipment and all that kind of stuff?

Yes. Armoured personnel carriers, earth moving, everything. We had all sorts of equipment in there, clearing, making air strips, making LZs [Landing Zone].

What are LZs?

Landing zones for helicopters, to get casevacs out, medivacs out,

21:00 supplies in. We would be out on patrol when we were clearing Nui Dat, and to get out – we would only carry about four or five days rations, and they were American rations – they were quite good, only small. We didn't live on much – but they would drop it in, parachute it into us and parachute in our water. Any water we got out there we had to put tablets in. Any quick-running water – you'd come across a bit of it out

21:30 there in Vietnam – you would chlorinate it, otherwise you would end up with a bit of dysentery or whatever, or you could end up with dysentery.

So can you tell us what you actually did in the first few months of clearing Nui Dat? What did you physically do?

Well, I had a section of seven to nine men and at times we were the lead section, the rear section or side sections.

22:00 You have like a diamond formation with your platoons, and I just…They'd given me a particular point that I'd have to go to. I'd have a compass and a protractor and I would direct my forward scouts in that area. I would have a map of the area as best as we could ascertain, and I would take my section, relay every half an hour back to the company commander

22:30 or the platoon commander, Bob Isles, and they would communicate with me as they wanted. I would communicate with my section by signals. I would either pull them in or if I wanted them to extend a little bit I'd tell them by hand signals. I'd move out; that means – extending your arms outwards – means to open up a little bit, or if I wanted you to close up or if I wanted you to go either side of a track,

23:00 different men alternate; you'd use your hand signal. I just looked after my men, cleared the area, just controlled my little section.

In doing that, in clearing the area around the base, or what was to become the base, was there much conflict in that particular arena?

No. There was a curfew but we came across quite a lot of

23:30 the natives and I call them natives because that is what we referred to the people there. We came across rice caches, arms caches; we cleared little villages and that; come across tunnels and obvious Vietcong strongholds and that and we cleared them out. We had a couple of villages close to us at Nui Dat and we shifted them around. If you got a big

24:00 cache of rice, someone would come and get rid of it or poison it or whatever so it couldn't be used for the Vietcong. You couldn't tell your enemy over there because they were all dressed the same, every one of them. It's a hard way to live, really, but you treated everyone – whether it was an old female or a young man or whatever – you treated them as the enemy and if they were out

24:30 you would tell them to stop and if they didn't stop you wouldn't put a warning shot over their heads. They had to stop and do what you told them.

Can you tell us what it would be like, for instance, if you were out on a patrol and you came across a village and that village was in that ten-mile perimeter around Nui Dat that had to be cleared, how would you go in to the village?

25:00 There was one particular operation where we were going to go out and check out a village. It was planned a few days beforehand and they sent out a reconnaissance patrol of a platoon overnight to check the area. They then came back and got the company and overnight we marched in darkness and that section commander who went out to do the reconnaissance led us all the way in, and it was

25:30 between one and two mile in complete darkness. We could find our way around in darkness because they were so well reconnoitred, and we completely surrounded that village at nightfall – they never

knew we were there – and that morning we went in and cleared it. There were tunnels in it, there were weapons in it, there were suspected Vietcong there and even the

26:00 women – they have Vietcong women as well, you know. Male and female fight together over there, not like here. You'd take them, pass them down for interrogation and whatever. If they had any tunnels you would destroy them.

How would you destroy them?

Destroy what you could and the others they would put a little

26:30 charge in and block it up for them, but they would come and open it up again. They would have it under beds – you'd go into a hut. Their hut is about ten foot square, and their bed is like a bamboo slatting with a bit of cloth on it; you'd lift up underneath and that's where they'd have the tunnel traps: under the beds. You'd have special men that would go down to do it.

27:00 You would clear out what you could, you would go right through the village; each section, each company would have a particular area within that village to go through, and you treated it as a war game. There was no mucking around. "Anyone there? Hands up, move out, turn around, stand there, don't move."

27:30 The children would stay there; you would put them right out of their homes, no sympathy, no nothing. You were there to do a job. There were enemy around, they were killing people and they were killing their own people. You didn't muck around. I'm sorry, you just had to be ruthless and I suppose people get hurt, and I'm sure there's been accidents happen over there with civilians and whatever that soldiers say are unforgettable, but

28:00 it's a part of war.

What was your briefing, let's say, the night before you went into the village? Did they say, "This section is going to be doing the rice fields; this section is going to be doing the huts." Is that how it worked?

Yes. Normally what happened, you would go to an O Group with the team commander and he would say, " 5, 6 and 7 Platoon are going in and we're going to surround this village, and we are going to

28:30 search and destroy within it. Barry your section, 7 Section, will lead in and you will go to the furthermost, to the northern bounds of the village, you will surround the village, and then 6 Section will come behind you and do the

29:00 check and destroy course. Then when they have cleared that area, you will go to another area and clear that." It was very slow. It wasn't quick. You had to be careful; you had to be careful even in the jungle or in the villages where they might leave a little jumping mine and you tread on them. They might have a

29:30 little panji pit. They put a block of wood with nails in it and you put your foot into it and you can't get it out, and it goes through your ankles. They were out to kill you, don't get me wrong, but you understand, a person who has been injured is out of the picture anyway; it makes no difference whether you are killed or injured – you're not there fighting them.

30:00 That was the way their mind worked. If we got a tunnel in one of the huts, we would always call it back, always let the platoon commander know. He would direct you from there. If you had a suspect or if you got weapons, you would immediately send it back to your platoon commanders, to your platoon group, and they would direct from there.

30:30 Not often, very rarely were you ever in a situation where you were out at section strength, you always had platoon or company strengths in Vietnam, always moving around in company strengths, even if you're going through the bush – it's a hundred men and they will have one platoon up the front, one at the rear – they will cover a big

31:00 sweeping area. It's easy for me to say; I know what they are doing, but to sort of get it across sometimes is hard.

No, I am understanding it. I was just going to ask you, with that village that you went into,

We went in through a few villages but that was one in particular. It was a big village.

This big one that was in the perimeter of Nui Dat, was there a situation there

31:30 **that was very hostile?**

Yes. They were hostile; they were sympathetic to the Vietcong, and we knew that Vietcong were coming into the village by our feedback. We knew that there were Vietcong coming into that village and we knew that it had to be cleared; it was a Vietcong stronghold so we went and we cleared it.

Did people get hurt

32:00 **in that particular search and destroy?**

I am sure, yes. Yes they did.

Did you see people get hurt?

Yes.

Can you tell us what happened?

I saw one young fellow – he was only, I guess, 17 or 18 – get shot. The bullet went in here and came out of his back the size of his fist, and we just buried him there.

32:30 There was another Vietcong tried to run for it, an older one, and he got shot as well. You couldn't even be gentle with the women, I'm sorry, because they would kill you quicker than the men. They were fanatics. It was only a couple of little incidents that happened,

33:00 but if you could bear in mind that I'm only just one group of seven men. If you've got a hundred groups of seven men, there's something going on all the time and there's a lot of action. You've got to multiply things.

Why do you say that the women could be quicker than the men? Did you experience that?

Yes. They would shoot you and I've seen them shoot another person, a Vietcong woman, and I've

33:30 seen Vietcong women killed as well. Not a lot – it might've been just once instance that I saw, but there was no mercy shown by either side.

Were they the government's orders?

Yes. Protect yourself at all times.

Male, female?

Anything at all. That was it,

34:00 otherwise you could be killed. If they have a weapon in their hand, you shoot them; if they run, you call on them to halt and then you shoot them, and that's the way the cookie crumbles.

Tell us about this incident when this VC [Vietcong] woman was shot.

It was on a patrol. They hit us with an ambush, three of them, and they went and opened up with the machine gun and when we went through,

34:30 we found that one of them that was shot was a woman. There were three that were killed; it was just an ambush and they tried to run but the machine gun just opened up across a paddy bund and it was just a young girl – it's hard to distinguish their age – but around the twenty-year-old mark.

Was that common, on behalf of the VC, to actually do small ambushes like that?

35:00 I would say that 90% of their contacts would be just strike, destroy, move. That's the jungle warfare that they were taught. We were out to clear the area and hold it. They just came in around your perimeter at night,

35:30 fire a couple of shots or whatever, get a patrol, have a sniper up a tree and whatever and fire a few disturbing shots to hold you up. It takes time to clear an area once there's shots fired. You can't risk men's lives. You've got to go through and clear that jungle, and if I could impress upon you, that jungle was bushy. It's not like what you see here, Australian bush. It is tropical bush, and

36:00 even in the rubber plantations and the banana plantations, it's all close together. I can give you an instance. We used to go out on patrol from Nui Dat and we'd come back the same way around this big tree. The big tree must have been twenty feet in circumference, and this day the section of us came in – we used to walk around the right-hand side of it – and

36:30 this time we were coming in, and the section commander for something said, "We'll go round the left-hand side," and do you know, within ten or fifteen feet in the terrain there was a cache of rice; it would've been ten foot high, thirty or forty feet long and about twenty feet in width up off the ground, and we were no more than fifteen or twenty-odd feet going around missing it, but this time

37:00 we went the opposite way. I don't know how long it had been sitting there. This was for the Vietcong; that's how they got their food. So what we did, a lot came in and they just poisoned it. It was humungous; it was as high as the roof of this house, as wide as this door here. It was amazing. Terrain is tremendously thick.

37:30 The jungle is tremendously thick and you've got to learn when you are in infantry, whether you are a forward scout or whatever, you've got to learn to peer through the leaves. You've got to look further than just in front of your nose. You can sense when something is going to happen. You know the terrain.

38:00 You know if things have varied from one week to another. If there is any sort of movement in there you

know it, and you get, like, an intuition. Usually when they open up with a contact, if it's a single rifle you could say it's one or two men, but if they open up with a machine gun you know there's a number of men there and if we were caught in an

38:30 ambush – and I've never been caught in an ambush – what you do is just turn right or left and go into it; that's what our training is. If you're going along an open field or in through the bush and you're hit on the right or left side with an ambush, there's not much chance of you getting out of it anyway, but with the Australians they don't run away.

39:00 You're instinctively trained to turn and open up with everything you've got and go right through that ambush. Some of you will get out. That's the way you are trained, instinctively to turn right or left and open up with everything and go through. It's second nature. You never lose it.

That's perhaps why we are such good fighters.

Yes. But you know, with basic training and that, they teach you unarmed combat and all these

39:30 sort of things. They give demonstrations at army camps and all this sort of thing for the people. You were taught all these things to protect yourself and to save lives.

This might sound like a silly question, but I am curious. With the jungle being so dense, did you have machetes [large slashing knife] or something that you could chop through, or somebody to do that for you?

Yes. There were times when we had to use our machetes,

40:00 probably every day, but you would try to leave the undergrowth as much to nature as you could, but in some instances you would have your machete and you would cut through. A forward scout wouldn't do it; he would be out there looking for the enemy. You couldn't just take a forward scout and say, "Look mate, just chop through here." He might get shot, or they

40:30 might wait until someone else comes through, five or six of them.

Tape 7

00:33 **What can you tell us about your experiences with the Americans in Vietnam?**

Even though we came under the American jurisdiction, we worked independently of the Americans. They had a Task Force Commander who was a brigadier – and I forget his name now – he certainly took commands from the Americans as to what the

01:00 Australian troops were going to do. We may have had American rations and munitions and all these sorts of things and we had our own helicopters, Australian, and we were really an independent unit to the Americans. They were a great machine, a big machine – humungous [huge], the American war

01:30 machine – the greatest power in the world, you might say. It's amazing just what they had on the ground over in Vietnam; it was an eye opener.

What was your impression of them as soldiers on the ground?

I thought they were a brave soldier, but I thought they weren't up to us as far as tactics were concerned, because they walked one behind the other, rifles up, rifles down.

02:00 I think they're learning now, but they didn't have the tactics or the planning that we had. They were a brave fighter but I don't think they were as good a fighter as the Australian. They have everything going for them, all the weapons in the world; we've got nothing compared to them and yet our casualties were a lot less. Pro rata you've got to work it out; we were a

02:30 smaller group – there's only a few thousand men to thirty thousand Americans; nevertheless, we don't suffer the casualties that they do. But they were a good soldier, a great soldier, always a buddy. I got one day's leave in Vietnam and I did meet one American who said, "Come on Aussie boy, come and have a drink with me." I had a beer with him and then I went back to our rest and recuperation centre and then went out.

03:00 They were a pretty good bunch of blokes.

Were there times where rules of engagement went out of the window, out in the field?

Yep. Yep. Survival of the fittest. You just kill or be killed. Funny thing with jungle warfare – you don't see a lot of enemy; it is very spasmodic.

03:30 You don't get a hundred men. You might get two to three to ten men that work in little groups; they hit and they run and they hit and they run. They pick their places where they're going to have a contact with you and when they do initiate the contact, they are gone within a few seconds. If they stayed in the

forward you would get a good

04:00 idea of where they are, but you don't get much warning. You've got to be very quick at picking them up and generally they just hit and run.

What were some of the events or circumstances where the rules were bent because you had to survive?

Well, you know, I suppose when I look back there was no…I never saw

04:30 one Australian mistreat any other soldier from any other country. They might have killed them in conflict but they respected them as human beings and we buried them. There was no torture or anything or no bashing of any prisoners that I ever saw; they just took them back by helicopter, took them out, and whatever.

05:00 The conflicts themselves, the rules where they were broken, was unfortunately where you had to kill a person or you might see a boy that is shot, he is about 17 or 18, and you think, "What a waste of life". He might not be doing much, he might be just spying on you to see how many of you there are. There was an instance where we went through a little village and we cleaned it up

05:30 and we pushed on for about half a mile and the company sat down to have a lunch break. I put my sentry out and I was just having a little bit of lunch when I heard the shot. I got out to him and he had hit a young fellow. Two fellows had come up from the village to see where we were. What had happened, my little sentry – he got a kick in the backside over this – he was eating lunch

06:00 and the two fellows came up 'round the track, the first fellow saw my sentry, he stopped, the second fellow went into the back of the first Viet Charlie, Vietcong, and my fellow had enough sense to pick up the rifle like this and go 'bang', and hit him through here and he did a somersault. He was only about 17 or 18 and we buried him. I think that is a waste of life. He was probably not a Charlie [Vietcong]; he was just maybe an innocent bystander but you take them as enemy,

06:30 so we just buried him and moved on.

Was there any kind of protocol of going to let the village know or would you just bury them where they were and that was it and move on?

No, we buried them as they were. You don't know where they come from. The village when we went through it was a stronghold but it was deserted and we wrecked it; we wrecked it completely. There was nothing there.

07:00 Where these two had come from, I don't know. The unfortunate thing was they weren't carrying any weapons, but they were spying and they stopped and my little sentry just went 'bang' and unfortunately he got killed. The other fellow ran away. I got out there and I said, "Stay there. Cover me" and I went out with my 2IC and we just cleared a little

07:30 bit of area to make sure there was no enemy out there and then we came back in. Then we just decided to sort out the young fellow who was killed. It was instantaneous; you just don't stop when there is a contact. You go through it, clear it out, and then you go out and you clear all the area to make sure there is no enemy again. This is just basics of infantry.

Given that you, in that circumstance, you have to

08:00 **accept everybody as enemy, why did you kick your sentry up the bum?**

I kicked him up the bum for having lunch while he was out there. He shouldn't have. He should've waited 'til he was relieved and come back in. He should be on guard; he might have got the both of them, not getting one and letting one get away. He shouldn't have been eating while he was on sentry duty; that is what he got a kick in the backside for. He was only a young fellow and he was number 2 on the Bren, too. He was a

08:30 good bloke, a young fellow, young National Service. That was the reason why he got a little bit of a rev off me; he could've got himself killed.

If his back was turned the other way he could have.

That's right. He could've got himself killed. They had machetes; they didn't have any rifles but they had machetes. So, what do you do? Just a lapse because he was tired and because he thought he'd have a quick bite to eat, and he put his

09:00 rifle down like that. He was lucky; could have been the other way around.

How about kids? Were there any circumstances where you saw kids being used as…?

I didn't see it with children but I know that they have used children as shields there. They have used children to bring in grenades

09:30 or material for explosives and whatever. They have used children on bicycles to bring in what they call a Bangalore torpedo [tubular explosive charge] where it's bamboo filled in both ends with an explosive in

the centre; it will kill at short range, and they would bring it in and use it. Yes, there were times.

10:00 They don't care. They don't worry about life. They don't worry about children, and certainly they abuse children, but I've never come across it. I have come across children smugglers where, of a nighttime, we've picked them up and we've had to take them back to a company base for an interrogation. It's just passed on down the line. But no, I've never seen it where they, in any contact that I had that they used children like that.

10:30 The Vietcong was a good fighter; whereas they'd use hit and run tactics, they were a good fighter. When they had to stand their ground and fight, they were a good fighter.

What was it about them that you would say would distinguish them as a good fighter?

I suppose similarly along the lines of the Australians; they were fighting for their country.

11:00 They believed in a cause. Their tactics were different to ours but they wouldn't give up. They would fight to the last man and I have had experiences where I was told where they put in an attack and the Australians

11:30 were shooting them and they would be carrying a machine gun, two or three of them. One would go down shot and another man would come up and pick up that machine gun and carry it for them to get into position. They wouldn't back off in a fight. That was in Nui Dat; that was the Battle of Long Tan. I wasn't there but I can tell you about

12:00 it, but I wasn't in it.

I'll get to that one in a minute. I wanted to ask also whether you witnessed any of the atrocities of coercion that the Vietcong were using on the local villagers.

Yes.

What sort of things?

I've seen them maimed, I've seen them injured, I've seen them murdered because they wouldn't come across

12:30 to the Vietcong's way. It's just a way of life that they get their own people. You'll see a little child with only one leg; he's had it blown off. Not like we do – when we set a mine pattern out, we clear it after we've finished with it. They don't. They just leave their little jump-up mines in the ground for people to stand on, and they kill their own and maim their own.

13:00 It's just the name of the game.

Did that make it a harder fight knowing that you were having to deal with South Vietnamese that were perhaps…?

Yep. You never knew which was your enemy because they all dressed the same. The Vietcong had a sort of a uniform but the most that we came into were just dressed as peasants or whatever,

13:30 just a little conical straw hat and usually dark trousers and a loose top sitting out the side. They were just dressed as villagers but you never knew which was the enemy so it made it all the more interesting. From Vung Tau to Nui Dat when they got it organised, we had trucks that came through

14:00 bringing in the goods and sometimes bringing in men, and you had villagers, Vietnamese people, on the side of the road and that sort of thing and you wouldn't know who was your enemy or not. If there was going to be an action you were prepared for it every minute of the day; you didn't let your guard down. We even had

14:30 plans that if you were in an armoured convoy and you got hit, the best way to get out of that to turn a defensive situation into an attacking situation.

How would you do that? Can you walk us through what you would actually do in that situation?

Well, depending on which of the trucks were hit, not so much like a mine, they were usually

15:00 fired upon. You would have maybe ten or fifteen men in a truck and you have a seat either side and some sitting in the middle. If they opened fire on you, immediately they would stop the truck, you would board out left and right to the opposite area of where the attack came from, form up, and then try and get out of it the best way you can. Another thing, too,

15:30 the ones that weren't hit, the trucks, they didn't stop. They went straight ahead to keep out of trouble, because if they stop, they might get into trouble as well. They usually take out one truck. I've never had it happen but we did have procedures in place where if we were attacked in convoy, how to react to it. They did use trucks from Vung Tau to Nui Dat.

16:00 **Was there anything that the VC did to the local villagers or chiefs that would stand out?**

Yep, they killed them, took them out and shot them because they wouldn't agree with them. Yep, I've heard of that. I actually didn't see it but it was common knowledge that that's what they did with the head man of the village if he didn't comply – take him out and shoot him, and I am sure they killed quite a few of them. Any villagers that didn't agree with them, 'bang'.

16:30 Couldn't care; human life was nothing.

After having been there for a while, were there any tell tale signs that you could pick up in a local village to give you an idea that they were being forced?

Usually they would get word to you. Someone would get through to the forces or we had our interpreters and all this sort of thing.

17:00 I couldn't speak Vietnamese but we did have our own interpreters. We had our patrols out and you had Vietnamese forces with you as well, out there, and by word of mouth they would get back to you and say, "This village is a strong hold". Tremendous communications. It's absolutely awe-struck the communications that they have,

17:30 what they know of the area, and I suppose to this day they have their little spies in all these villages who report back. I think to this day they had Australian troops and American troops, something similar to SAS, out on little patrols getting all the information they could, staying out of contact, just seeing everything

18:00 and not being seen and getting information back to the powers that be. I am sure that they did it. Even in Thailand and that, we had a border that you couldn't go in to. We did go over that border on a few occasions looking for a fight.

Why was that?

18:30 I suppose we were just blokes and we were out there patrolling and you go over a little bit and might get a bit bored going out day after day and nothing happening, but yeah, there were times we went over the border, and there were times we had to get a sick man back from the border, whether he was injured or whatever. You would drag him a half a mile or a mile and

19:00 cut an LZ and get a helicopter in to him. But sometimes, too, whereas we're the greatest map-readers in the world, you can make a mistake where you are; it happens. But I can say to you that we have gone over into enemy territory when we shouldn't have.

On reflection, you accept that stuff don't you?

Yes, you do it.

19:30 **You were talking earlier about how good Australians were at ambush. Could you walk me through the detail of setting out and doing an ambush in terms of sights and sounds and what you'd hear and how you'd operate?**

It would be an area that would be looked at probably a day before, maybe by the section commander or the

20:00 platoon commander or whatever. You would look at your arcs of fire with your machine guns – you would have two machine guns set up down the track – you would come in under cover of darkness again. Each man would be positioned on the left side or the right side of that ambush. You would put out your trip flares so that when the enemy come through they would hit them, the trip flares, and it would illuminate the

20:30 area and you could take them all out or as many as you could. You just don't fire in the darkness. You don't have your own men on both sides of the ambush because you are firing into them. You try and put yourself in the best possible situation you can. You might have trip flares put over the other side so that when they

21:00 try to break out of the ambush they will light up the trip flares and you can get them that way. It is set usually with a machine gun and a trip flare, and once that alights you just open up. You do have a couple of Claymore mines that are set up at strategic places within the ambush, so you just you press the button on that and it just goes 'boom'. It's just a massive noise and it's chaotic, you know.

21:30 You instinctively react to do what you've got to do all the time in the given circumstances, but the noise, it's instinctive reaction. It is still nerve-wracking and the old heart pumps afterwards. It physically affects you.

In what way? During or after?

No, you never get anything. It's funny to say.

22:00 When you initiate something, it's just an instinctive reaction and you go through and you do it; it's only when you stop. It's like if you have a car accident: it's five or ten minutes later the nerves settle in. You don't worry about the time.

After a successful ambush it's all noise.

Yeah, and then you pull out. You go out.

22:30 You don't count your dead or anything like this; you just pull out and you go away. I heard of an instance where they set up an ambush one night in Vietnam and

23:00 the enemy started to come through the Vietcong. What they did, you count the men as they come through. I know that they stepped very closely to the machine gun but they had counted over a hundred Vietcong; they didn't release the ambush. There was only a short seven-man section. They were going into a village,

23:30 but it was too big an operation for them to hold, and I can tell you there was over a hundred Vietcong, one behind each other, going into this village and they had set the ambush outside, and one of the fellows was in the ambush – that's the reason that I knew it as a section commander – it gets back to you. What they did, they called in artillery

24:00 further down the road into them when they passed out of the ambush. They didn't let them go, but they called in artillery that time.

That would be quite a night.

To listen to artillery going off every night is something – it takes time to get used to, but to understand

24:30 what it's like to have an explosion close to you is entirely different; you never forget it. If I get a bad thunderstorm – I haven't for a number of years – but I've had it so bad, the thunder has frightened me so much I've fallen to the floor in shock. It's that instant reaction that what's happening is that loud you never forget it once you've had a contact, once you've had artillery or

25:00 fire on you.

After an ambush or a conflict like that and the action is all over, and the nerves…

What you do is you get back to your base camp and you debrief it. You go through an O Group with your platoon commander; he goes back to his company commander; it's put back to Battalion Headquarters. You brief when you go out and you debrief

25:30 when you come back in, everything that happens, and you learn by your mistakes; that's the way they work it. You pull out, and if there's no one around you try and make sure that no one knows you are in the area. That's the secret, I think, of the Australian infantry in jungle warfare anyway.

And does the debrief actually help

26:00 **settle people's nerves?**

Yep. Yes it does. What comes back from company headquarters comes back down to me. See, the thing is, what you've got to appreciate is they couldn't have an O Group with a hundred men around it. You're on active service footing. What they did was pass the message on and you, in turn, you could go to six or seven men or if you couldn't get them all together you'd go to a couple every now and then

26:30 and just tell them what's going on. You might have to repeat the story three or four times, but you work in individual groups. You have three or four groups within that group, but a section is the smallest group that you have and they are split up into rifle groups, the scout section and your Bren gun group, and they in turn are made into a platoon which is three sections, and that

27:00 is made into a company, which is three platoons. They were in radio contact all the time and they get back to company headquarters and that's the way it works. They keep you informed as to what is going on. It's a system that is fool proof I think.

Can you tell us about any fellows that you were debriefing that you

27:30 **could tell were visibly affected by what they'd been through, that you had to keep an eye on or settle down in any way?**

I can say within my section, as young as they were, they were good men; they would never have broke under any condition; it never affected them. I think it would have affected them more when they got some mail from home because they were happy, your home contact.

28:00 Now and again, you might get a little ration pack with a cake in it or biscuits or something from home, but as far as the job their mind was on it and if someone was injured, killed, whatever you took it in your stride. They took it in their stride; they knew they had to. You grow up pretty fast.

28:30 **Let me go back to the ambush tactics for a second. You've got a track that you're setting up an ambush on.**

Generally it's on a thoroughfare on a track.

I just wanted to get a picture of roughly where you'd position your men for the ambush in relation to your trip flares and Claymores and things like that.

Well, as I said, you'd go on one side. Your machine guns would have the main arc of fire,

29:00 the area that's mostly visible, and you would set up a trip flare out in front of them. Your rifle group would be to the one side and there's only seven or nine men in it. Your other end would have a trip flare as well and you would have possibly one or two Claymores set up either end

29:30 or in the middle.

Were the trip flares triggered by our guys or the people on the track?

The trip flares would be made by wire. You would put a stake in the ground, you would put your trip flare out, you would set it up, the section commander would take the pin out and leave it set there. They would come through and trip the wire.

30:00 I have seen flares go up as the NCO was taking the pin out too. In that case – we laugh about it now, but it wasn't funny then – you had to pull out of the ambush straight away and give it away because they'd know you were there for miles. They'd know you were there. It's funny. It happens occasionally. I had one instance in Vietnam

30:30 where my forward scout came back and said, "I've hit a wire". A section commander's job, I just signalled back, "we've hit a wire", so I went out to him and the wire was here. I said, "Don't move" and I had to go along the ground – you slide along to wherever the mine was and what you do, you have a pin and you put the pin back into

31:00 the mine. But this one was so rusted out and that it would have never gone off in a million years anyway, but you are not to know that at the time, so the old sweat is beading on the forehead as you are going out to try and say, "If your man moves he could get blown up", so you've got to defuse the situation. There was no worries because it was corroded and everything. The Americans might have left it there, not so much for the Vietcong, because we found that with some American campsites that we'd gone through, they hadn't properly cleared it.

31:30 It's just a job and you laugh at it.

You've mentioned a couple of times that you averaged about four hours' sleep a night in your time over there. How did you physically deal with the fatigue?

I think the body is a wondrous thing, you know. When you are in a situation you can live on your nerves

32:00 and your reserves for many, many months. It's after you relax and you recuperate. The human body is a wonderful thing and under given circumstances four hours sleep a night is enough. It's the pattern that you get used to. You go for twelve or fourteen hours a day. You're walking, patrolling, and

32:30 you go to O Groups and whatever. It's something you are used to, the body accepts. You know it's not for all of your life; you know it's for just a short term and it's something the body gets used to and you accept it. You don't get tired; you don't feel tired. Don't get me wrong, we can stop on the side of a track stop and they'll say, "Stop for ten minutes", and you'll just fall down with your webbing on

33:00 and whatever with your rifle here and you'd close your eyes and do you know, you can doze for that five or ten minutes, and that refreshes you; you get up and go on again. But, you know, you've got heat and rain and whatever to put up with – you get used to that. The human body is a wondrous thing, as long as you're in that environment. Once you stop doing what you're doing and go to something else then you settle back down.

33:30 I look back down the track and think, "How the hell did I ever do it? How did I ever carry some of the loads that I've carried up hills, and I've walked hundreds of miles. How did the body take it?" and I was only about 9 stone, 9½ stone. You just train for it and your body is, well, I suppose

34:00 just like a piece of steel. It's something you are used to. You mentally accept it and the mind is a wonderful thing. All things are possible with the mind, everything. You've got to have that positive thought too.

On that, can you talk to us a little bit about getting used to death

34:30 **and losing mates.**

Yep. I didn't have many instances where I saw death – I suppose one instance is too much – but I had a few and I suppose the first time you see it, if it's your own, you feel angry, you feel a little bit soft so that brings you back to reality and you say, "That could have been me".

35:00 When you see one of their's dead, you may feel some semblance of emotion but you become hardened; you become used to it, and death is an everyday occurrence. I must admit

35:30 when I got to my mate and he was killed in the ambush it hurt me because we were great mates. We kicked it off in Sydney, we had different sections together in different platoons, but I had my own section to think of and you put your thoughts to the back of your mind. I was sorry to see him go, but after that

36:00 I couldn't care. I've seen dead men in civilian life. I was in the prisons for fourteen years. I've seen men die naturally. It's only a sleep, but you become hardened to it in war. The inhumane things, the maimed children, the women

36:30 that are killed inadvertently, even to a good fighter like the Vietcong that's killed, you've got to respect him as a fighter, and fighting for a cause, the same as we are fighting for a cause. We believe we are right and they believe that they are right. I know that we are right – we are. They are wrong, but you can't tell them that. You've just got to

37:00 try and carry on the situation as best you can.

I wanted to ask you this question a few minutes ago, but I will now. I was just wondering what did you go through your mind when you actually came to your mate who had been killed before you had to snap yourself out of it?

I didn't know that he was dead initially but I could see that he was sort of blue in the face,

37:30 and what you do, you all practise a bit of first aid. I saw the little hole in his cheek and I opened up his mouth, he wasn't breathing and he was a little bit blue or purplish in the face and there was a lot of congealed blood in the mouth and down in the throat which I tried to clear out, and it wasn't until a couple of the other

38:00 medics that came with the APCs came up to me and said, "He is gone". I just went back to his section and his number one on the machine gun was killed, his number two was killed; there was about five of them killed. I suppose you get a shock but you're used to these things; you're trained for these things.

38:30 I don't think I've had…I never had any nightmares while I was over in Vietnam, Malaya, Borneo or any of those things. My ghosts chase me more now that I am home, thirty or forty years later. I have my nightmares, I have my bad nights, and it's my ghosts chasing me, but that's life.

It's not uncommon.

39:00 No man is exactly the same when you come back. Don't get me wrong – there are some fine people in this world, people who don't go to war, who have beliefs, raise a family and do great things, and I've got a lot of friends and I respect them just as much as I did for the fellows who went and fought with me overseas, but you've got to understand, the fellows who fight overseas,

39:30 they're a bit of a different breed. You've got to be a bit gung ho and you've got to be a bit of a…like a desperado, you know, devil-may-care. If I could've won a VC [Victoria Cross] I would've. If the opportunity came up, I would have a go even if I got shot, because if I got shot it's just going to sleep. But the opportunity never arose. A couple of mates of mine, a platoon commander,

40:00 he got the Military Cross. Raynor was his name, and he did it through an ambush – he was brilliant through an ambush getting them out. It wasn't to be; I wasn't an officer. They are a cut of a breed; they were a different breed – larrikins you could call them. Life is so cheap, why not? Why not live for now?

40:30 That's the way you go, I think anyway. I might be wrong in my assessment of the blokes.

Is that an attitude that you brought back home with you or was that something purely for the field?

It was something that I had over there. I was a more outspoken, outgoing person when I was in the army as to what I am today.

41:00 It has changed me. I am more reticent today. I have my friends and that, but I don't go out and cultivate people. I can live in my home and whatever – you become a little bit like a hermit, but I am 63. I don't suppose I will ever change.

Tape 8

00:35 **Barry, you mentioned to Chris you went into Long Tan after the battle there. Can you tell us what happened that day? Did you come in to clear up, did you?**

What happened, they had, I think, a group of entertainers coming to Baria to entertain the boys.

01:00 D Company 6 RAR were out on patrol and it meant that another company had to stay back at Nui Dat to give them some sort of protection, and it happened to be D Company 5 RAR. So you've got D Company 5 Nui Dat and D Company 6RAR out on patrol. As I understand it, what happened, I was…

01:30 Up on the top of Nui Dat, we had a big 50 cal machine gun set up there and at the time I was sitting out there on sentry duty and the next minute to my right came these big clouds of black smoke, about four or five of them and the 'whoomp, whoomp, whoomp." What I didn't know, it was our artillery coming in

onto 6th Battalion. They had been hit by the Vietcong; they were coming across

02:00 to Nui Dat right in our line and I saw the action and what happened, to cut a long story short, the next day we went out and cleared the area, the dead and the wounded, from where 6th Battalion were. What had happened, they had run into

02:30 the Vietcong and they'd opened up with machine guns, the Charlies, on the Australian troops, and they brought in the artillery pieces to give them covering fire. They brought in APCs, they lined them up one beside the other – it was late in the afternoon, and by the time they'd finished it was dark. It wasn't until the next day that we got our orders

03:00 after the initial contact and the Australians were killed and whatever, that we went out to help clear the area. What we did was pick up weapons and buried some of the dead Vietcong. It's documented in a book that I've got in there if you ever want to read it. 5 Battalion stayed

03:30 out with 6 Battalion and they went on patrols throughout that area. It wasn't long afterwards then that I was injured and I was casevaced back to headquarters.

Can we just slow down a bit, Barry, because I'm going to ask you about that day that you actually did get injured, but before I ask you about that, when you went…

04:00 We were brought in by APC personnel carriers.

Into Long Tan?

No, out into the area of the battle of Long Tan. We were brought in with APCs, section at a time, straight in, and we went straight out.

Did you bring the Australian bodies back to Nui Dat?

No, I didn't. They were helicoptered out. We had no contact like that. I know that by that time, 6 Battalion Delta Company had been pulled

04:30 back and we were just out there to clear the area, and that was basically it. We went on patrol from there.

Once again, when you're saying "clear the area here", you mean actually clear it to make it safe?

That's right, to make sure that there was no enemy out there anywhere, that there was no coming back with their weapons or whatever. It was a company force that was

05:00 over a hundred men that were coming in to hit Nui Dat at that time. We didn't know it, and it was just through sheer luck or misfortune or whatever that they ran into each other. I don't know the full story of 6 Battalion. With Delta Company 6 RAR a friend of mine called Buddy Lee was the section commander of the same section

05:30 that I was in 6 Battalion. He was D Company, 7 Section, 6 Battalion; I was section commander of D Company, 7 Section, 5 Battalion. I know him; I know that he got hit three times; I know he survived it and we did come back on the plane together. There was a few boys, I think there was

06:00 pandemonium for a while. There were bullets, armour, everything going off all over the place, and regardless of how disciplined they were there's got to be a little bit of panic but they stuck to their guns and they held them. They killed a lot of Vietcong; they did; they stuck to their guns. If they hadn't have been stopped there, they could have over run Nui Dat, I believe anyway,

06:30 because the others were down at the Little Patty [Australian pop singer of the 1960's] I think it was, the concert.

I'd heard that before, actually.

Yeah. Over there it was just one company left behind. All the other companies had gone in. It was an experience that you didn't think about much at the time. I didn't know that it was Long Tan. I knew it was an operation and that we went out to clean up.

07:00 You don't get a lot of news about deaths or injuries out in the field; it is only when you come home. They keep it away from you. Like the first day we were in Vietnam a national serviceman got killed, shot by another Australian soldier by accident. That was the first day we were out clearing Nui Dat.

07:30 I saw an enemy, 'bang', and he turned out to be a national serviceman; he was the first national serviceman to die in Nui Dat.

I wonder what happened to that soldier?

Nothing, but it's something that he would live with for the rest of his life, but it was just an honest mistake. He wouldn't have meant to do it, no way in the world. It would grieve you to do that. I feel sorry for him.

08:00 I know what he would have gone through, I know that. Blokes just accepted it as one of those things that happen. It just happens.

This might seem like a macabre question, and I suppose it is, but I was wondering when you buried the VC from the battle that occurred there, did you put them all together in one big grave or were they individually

08:30 **buried?**

They were in individual graves and we tried to bury them deep enough so that the animals couldn't get to them. It wasn't a coffin or anything like that; you dug a hole and you put them in it.

Did they have identification?

No, not really. They were fighting for a cause and they were brave men.

09:00 No, it was just one of those things you do.

What did you do with their weapons?

They took them, took all the weapons. You take them back to company headquarters; they were all piled together and you'd take them out. There would be weapons lying around. There would be bodies lying around, so you just pick them up, you just go through, just a job, you'd go through and do it. You wouldn't think any more of it. It wouldn't cross your mind afterwards.

09:30 You'd get onto the next job, the next day. You can't dwell on these things. Truly, it's just life.

Tell us what happened to you? How did you get hurt there in Vietnam?

We were on patrol and we had a cluster of not grenades – it was a sky burst

10:00 in the tree, just a shell, and I got injured through the right leg and in the back. I was walking, I was alright; they shipped me back to Nui Dat and I was there for about three or four days and they checked me over thoroughly and they just said, "Alright Barry, we're sending you home."

10:30 and I said, "I don't want to go home." He said, "You're going to be a little while convalescing. Your nerves are shot completely." Even though I was unaware of it I was living on my nerves. He said, "You're injured," and I had a germ in the bowel as well, so he said, "You're going home." so I got shipped back

11:00 to Brisbane.

How long had you been away?

About eight months. A long time. You never think of it. I've got two discs gone in my back that give me trouble all the time – they play up now and again. I've got back injuries; I have a number of disabilities. The medication I take has given me gout so I have that as a side effect.

11:30 I had a pancreas problem and I have a bowel problem and I think that was due to the defoliants etc overseas, and I'm on medication all the time and I will be for the rest of my life.

I have to ask you, you said you didn't want to go home. Was it because of your mates?

Yeah, pretty well. I wasn't going to leave my section. They were down a section commander. They only had…

12:00 Dino Arnold – I can remember his name, my section 2IC – he was a younger boy than me. I was 24, 25; he was around about 21, 22; he was a single lad, but everyone else in that section were national servicemen. We didn't have enough NCOs to go around. It was a loss out of my platoon for me to go, because

12:30 there's only the platoon commander, the platoon sergeant and you've got your three section commanders and one gone out. They've got to bring in new blood. We were trained with my group. I didn't want to leave them, no way in the world. It was something that was forced on me. If they had given me a week or so I would've been back, I would've got up, I would've got back in, and regardless of

13:00 what sort of condition I was in when I finished it, I would've finished that tour. For a number of years it did affect me psychologically that, them sending me home instead of letting me go back out and if anything had happened it would have happened out there.

What happened to your men, do you know?

I must say that at the end I lost contact with them but I'm pretty

13:30 well assured that every one of them returned to Australia. They were all NSW and Victorian boys and I know that they all got home safely.

Well that's good to know.

Yeah, it is. It's great

You've given me goose bumps talking about them, because you certainly felt loyalty.

Yeah, they were more than mates – they were brothers, you know, and

14:00 I used to talk to them every day. I'd watch them, watch my forward scout especially because it's a bit nerve-racking being up the front all the time and there's only a couple you can alternate. You've got to look, you know, that everyone is fit mentally and physically all the time, and every day, before I went to bed of a night, regardless whether it was from an O Group or whatever, if it was pitch black, I would go to each and every one of the men in the section and say,

14:30 "How are you going, mate?" They were more than mates to me – they were my brothers, and I was prepared to die for them and they were prepared to die for me. I've cried, many years ago. It's an experience that I think has made a better man of me, made me more mature, made me realise life more,

15:00 just what life is, how precious living is; but I have no regrets now – I am content, even though, as I said to you before, I do have my little nightmares and that – I am literally content with myself; I am at peace. It didn't worry me about the people in Australia not wanting us to go, having

15:30 riots and all this sort of thing. I don't care what other people think. It's what I am doing and what I think and what I know is right, and I believe that it was for a good cause and I would do it again. If John Howard said, "Bazza, we want some old fellows to be a front line. I know that you are all going to get killed or something, but I want you to charge up that hill and take it." I'd give it a go, and I know

16:00 my brothers would too. Do you know, when they started this Afghanistan thing, my brother – and he's sixty – he rang me up and said, "Have you got your gear ready to go, Barry? Are you right?" We were ready to go.

Speaking of your brother, how did you meet up with your brother in Vietnam?

Trevor was in a different battalion and I saw him twice. He was a section commander and I saw him twice, but you get

16:30 word through friends. A lot of people knew us and they'd sort of pass word on: "Trev is OK" or "Bazza is OK", and you'd pass the messages from battalion to battalion, but I came home. He went to Vietnam after me when they had the three battalions as task force, not when they had 5 and 6. I forget the other battalion that they brought in, but they brought in three, and he was there and he did his full term

17:00 and came home but he was sick when he came home. And I still say to this day that that cancer that he died of was the defoliants and whatever. But he was a young fellow and I know when they told him that he's not going to make it, he turned to his mother and he said, "I'm frightened, but if it's got to be the way, it's got to be the way". They were trying to get him home to Australia.

17:30 They had an earth tremor over in New Zealand and to this day, when they came into his room he had packed his gear ready to come home to Australia and they said to him, "Look, Trevor, you're too ill to travel" and it was at that stage I think that he sort of gave up. He just laid back in the bed and just died peacefully a few days later.

18:00 **Chris and I are going to take a picture of you and Lionel when we didn't have this said on tape, about you guys being used for a Lucky Strike advertisement in America, and they said, "Why don't you two hang out in this photograph and have a cigarette". Can you just tell us about that day a little bit because we'll take a photo of that.**

Yes. They had

18:30 a few American advisers up there and their news media came in – for the Americans, not for the Australians – publicity and whatever, and we were sitting up there in a company, just settled down for the day in the bush, and they wanted a couple of blokes to test their cigarettes, their Lucky Strike, because they were new then and they said, "We want a couple of smokers," and they said, "If you've

19:00 got brothers that will do us". They said, "Alright, the Laverty brothers". So we just sat there, Lionel and I. We were dirty and grubby not washing for six weeks or showering or anything like that or shaving for six weeks, and I think they gave us a carton of Lucky Strikes or something at the time. We just sort of… Lionel is lighting mine. Nothing big – it was just something that they wanted us to do for the day so we said, "Well, why not? We'll sit down." We

19:30 didn't get anything for it or whatever, but we had the enjoyment and I think the Lucky Strikes were passed around to all our mates. I wasn't really keen on them because they didn't have a filter. I smoked until I came back from Vietnam and I stopped. I was getting bronchitis all the time so I stopped, and I haven't smoked in forty years, and it's a habit that I think is a bad habit.

20:00 **What about drinking? Was drinking a big part of being in the army?**

Yes. I used to go and have a drink but I was never a great drinker. Don't get me wrong, there's been the time when I've been drunk but drinking is a great part of time in the army; the boys love it. They drink

it down, they swill it down.

20:30 There's some horrible stories about blokes getting back and things that have happened to them. Every day, every night if they are not on duty, they are drinking and if they are not drinking, they are chasing women, but that's their way of life. I would go and have a couple of drinks and I have had more drinks

21:00 now in the last ten years than I've ever had in my life, but it's good for you, a couple now and again.

That brings me actually to another question, and that is, because you were there in Vietnam for eight months, do I take it that you didn't have any leave?

I got one day's leave in the eight months I was there. They tried to rotate you and send you back to Vung Tau. They had a

21:30 house there for the personnel and you had one day's leave. You could go down into Vung Tau and have a look around the streets, or you could stay at the R and R, 'rest and recuperation' centre. I stayed there for the day. Well I didn't. The first hour or two I went with my mate,

22:00 the officer who was awarded the military cross, and we went down to a legitimate massage parlour and I had a beautiful massage and so did he, and then we came home and we had a couple of beers back at the rest and recuperation centre. He had to be back by midday and I had to be back six hours later. I suppose thoughts were then, "Gee, I'd like to stay" but you know, commitment and

22:30 dedication – he said, "No, I'm going back". They wanted him back. He could stay a couple of hours but he wanted to go back to his troops and I went back the next day.

Was it tempting to stay?

Not really. It was just a different environment where you could walk down the street. They were all armed, the Vietnamese police. We weren't armed when we were out on R and R .

23:00 We didn't carry rifles or anything like that. Vung Tau was full of bars and girls. The Americans were big on it, not so much the Australians; the Australians didn't get the time out. I'm not saying that…Back at Vung Tau, the base camp, they might have got leave, but the people who actually were out in Nui Dat

23:30 didn't get the leave, but there were curfews and all these sorts of things and I know, even then, they'd have their few beers and whatever. We didn't even manage. Sometimes we got a beer.

It must have been tempting for you being in Vung Tau for that one day, or was it tempting for you to go and get

24:00 **a woman for the day?**

Yes, I suppose so.

But you didn't?

No, I'm sorry. I like my women white, I do. I love my wife and sex is just something you have for five minutes and it's gone. With the person you love it's a lot more endearing and beautiful, so I wasn't going to run out

24:30 in a mad drunken moment and race off a woman. They were only after one thing and a lot of them were full of VD [venereal disease] and whatever; you had to be very careful. But no, it never entered my mind and, as I said, I was only there for about one or two hours and I was with my mate, and we just went back to the rest and recuperation centre and stayed there until they got the truck the next morning to take us home.

25:00 I had a nice sleep and I wrote a letter to my wife and I had about half a dozen beers and I went to sleep beautifully without having to get up for a picket or a patrol or give an O Group, but you switched on the next day the moment you got into that truck to go back.

I suppose there's that, what do you say, 'joie de vivre' of when you're in a war situation people just throw their usual morals to the

25:30 **wind, don't they?**

Yes, they do.

So that's where that question came from.

To the victors go the spoils. Unfortunately there are willing women and there's unwilling women and it's a part of war and life.

Did you hear about any kind of misuse of the Vietnamese women by Australian soldiers over there in Vietnam?

I can say I heard of

26:00 none. Even when we captured Vietnamese, they were treated with the respect and dignity that we would treat ourselves. I'm not saying that the individual didn't get a backhander or something. As far as I know, women were never abused and neither were the men. They might have carried

26:30 on a little bit and gone out of curfew and run back, midnight curfew, and they'd stay in town and they'd be running up to get the truck back at 5 o'clock in the morning. They were a wild bunch of boys but they were not brutal in any way shape or form. That's one thing that I've found. Always fear – they will kill you but they'll be fair to you.

27:00 **I suppose we have heard a few stories here and there about Australians being a bit wild. Did you witness any kind of that wildness in Vietnam?**

I can say we were in a little bar and I forget where it was. They had a rickshaw outside and it was full of Australians having a drink and my section was amongst it. I was sitting in the corner with

27:30 another corporal from another section and my fellows started to have a little bit of a bicker, a little bit of a fight, so I stood up and I said, "Look fellows, enough of that. There's going to be no fight". One wanted to ride the rickshaw. Anyway, this corporal said to me, "Look," he said, "if you don't shut up, I'm going to punch you in the ear". Without ado, I punched him and the

28:00 whole bar went to pieces. There was fighting everywhere, and there was about thirty or forty blokes in but it was just one of those things. I didn't know him – he knew my brothers, and I don't think he liked the Laverty name because we were well known in the '61's to the '67's, through sport, rifle shooting, athletics, on the field, cricket, in the army.

28:30 We were well liked.

That might have stemmed from some jealousy or something?

Yes, I think so at the time, and I was just a young fellow. I was only a little fellow, thin but wiry as anything, and he was a bit bigger than me, but just because I said to my fellows, "Calm it down. There's going to be no blue here," and he just said with a few direct words, "I'm going to put you on your…'b' arse."

29:00 So before he knew it, I hit him, and then…We were four people here, my section had come in to look after me and it started all over the place.

What did his section do?

Well, the other men were fighting as well, but what happened, the MPs [military police] came, so they told us to get out of there pretty quick. They didn't arrest anyone or anything like that, but they had the MPs around.

29:30 Just one of the instances, some mad capers they get up to, some of the boys. You forget a lot of them, but boys will be boys.

Did you win the fight?

I think so, but I did get a bit bloody and battered.

30:00 **You didn't send a photo of you like that back to Sandra?**

No, I didn't. I got a little bit of a reprimand over it but they didn't demote me or anything. I didn't get into many blues but I stood up for my men.

Did any of your men actually receive those 'Dear John' letters, you needed to take care of them in that way?

No, I don't think so. I am sure they didn't.

30:30 They were young boys and I would say 18 or 19 and none of them were married. I was the only married one within that section so I was lucky in that way. I know they used to get lots of letters from here and they'd laugh and joke about little bits in the letters, bits of news and that, and if they got any cake or biscuits they'd be sharing it around, and

31:00 it was great.

Can you tell us about an incident where you felt particularly concerned for your own welfare in Vietnam? Was there an incident where you thought you didn't have the backing or support and you could possibly die?

I always had the support of every person over there.

31:30 I've said before that I don't think the bullet was meant for me, and it certainly wasn't. Not only did I have the men's support, you had the Australian support, you had the American support, and I didn't feel let down or that I was chasing a kite in the sky. We were there for a purpose and we were well looked after, and I always felt that

32:00 someone would've been there to help me every time. If I didn't make it, someone would've got through and if I got killed, I know they would've killed whoever killed me, the same as I would do the same for them.

You mentioned that your nerves were shot when you went back to Australia. Was that a gradual progression for you?

32:30 **You started off in Vietnam all right and you could feel yourself getting worse, was it something like that?**

No. Look, I'll be honest with you, I never knew that I had a nerve problem out there. I'd say it could've stemmed from having too much service too close together, Malaya, Borneo and Vietnam, but I first noticed that I could be walking in the jungles of Vietnam and I could hear beautiful music, orchestrations – magnificent.

33:00 It was psychological, it was on me, and one day a doctor asked me about it. They can tell if you're having a little bit of nerve problem, and he said, "Have you ever heard voices?" and I said, "Yes. Can you fix it?" and that was one of the things that started with my nerves, but you don't know until you are out of that situation.

33:30 I lost nearly a stone in weight. When they got me back into Repat [Repatriation], they put me on a shock treatment, an insulin treatment where they put me into a coma for a number of days and a number of weeks and they toned me down and I put weight on and they fixed me up mentally. They were good to me. They could have given me the electric shock treatment, but because I was young they thought I was worthwhile saving, and

34:00 at that time they put me in with some of the World War II diggers having their problems. I think they were a big age group and it wasn't the best environment for me to be, but nevertheless they helped me. It took years to get over, many trips into hospital, many different types of medication. I used to take 60 to 70 milligrams

34:30 of Valium a day, enough to put a normal man to sleep for a week, and it wouldn't affect me. I could work with it and go with it. That is how bad my nerves were. I'm off them now; I don't take them now. I do have a tablet to sort of relax me and make me sleep and I will be on that for the rest of my life. They are government controlled; you've got to get a certificate for them to get them.

35:00 It's something that you never really know until you come back home. It must've been getting to me. I didn't realise it. My decisions were still spot on, I never lost a man, I carried out every bit of orders, instructions that they gave me. I did have a type of conjunctivitis in the eyes – I didn't have glasses then – and I had to go into the shade to read a map.

35:30 My eyes were damaged from getting in too much light over there, and all these were little problems, I suppose, accumulating into one massive one, and then when I got slightly injured they said, "Look mate, you're going home." And I said, "No brother, I'm not going home," but what will be will be.

Your wife would have been happy to have you home.

36:00 She never knew I was coming home. What happened, we got shipped to Amberley and from Amberley down to 1 Camp Hospital. There were two of us, a mate of mine who was in the battle of Long Tan and he got hit in the explosion and he ended up halfway up a tree, and him and I came home together and they gave us leave

36:30 for that night to go home for the weekend but we had to be back at the hospital on Monday. I lived at Mount Gravatt, so I got a tram home to the Mount Gravatt terminus and from the Mount Gravatt terminus I got a taxi down to Logan Road, and we were talking, the taxi driver and I, and I was telling him where I'd been and that. I didn't have ribbons on or medals on at that time, and I said, "How much?" He said, "Nothing for you, mate.

37:00 You've done a bit for us, so it's going to cost you nothing". I stopped at the crossroads before my home so I walked down the road and I walked up the back steps and I opened up the door and my wife and mother-in-law were there and so was my son, and that's when they knew I was home. A friend of hers rang her up and said, "I think I've seen Barry on TV".

37:30 We were on TV; we were in the Courier Mail [Brisbane newspaper], all of us coming home, Corporal Buddy Lee, Corporal Barry Laverty, a photograph of me and that – I've got the paper somewhere 'round here – we were all back. They told us where we'd come from.

I was curious about the music that you were hearing. Was it anything you'd actually heard before?

Nothing. It was just beautiful,

38:00 orchestrated concert music and it was magnificent. You would be looking around, seeing that there's no enemy or nothing around but it would just come into your mind. It was a psychological thing that I didn't realise at the time was affecting me, but they picked it up when I got medivaced out and after a few days

38:30 in a bed. I was at Vung Tau, in the hospital in Vung Tau, and they just checked me over and kept me going and talking to me and that, and they said, “You’re going home” and I said, “Sorry buddy.” but I went home. I didn’t get any leave then. They shipped me straight from the hospital into a Caribou [light transport aircraft], and it took four or five days to get home. We stopped at Butterworth,

39:00 we stopped at Cocos-Keeling Islands, and I can remember our trip into Australia at Perth. It was winter, and they took us off the plane into the hospital and it was bitterly cold. The nurses came down and they brought a cold Australian beer with them. There were two or three around my bed talking to us – some of us could talk, some couldn’t. We had a young fellow with shrapnel wounds; he was opened up right through the stomach. It was healing without

39:30 operating on him. They had operated but it was an open wound and that was how they were healing it, and he was only a young national service fellow. And as I said, there was Buddy – he got hit three times and he said, “They missed my heart every bloody time.” but I got it from another bloke, he was laying down there at Long Tan and this mate was saying, “Don’t leave me. Talk to me.” He was frightened of dying.

40:00 He said, “Don’t leave me. Talk to me.” It was Buddy’s section that was hit, the first section in. I know that.

So Buddy talked to him to stop him from…?

No, it was Buddy that was hit, and Buddy was saying, yeah, he did, over the firing and whatever, he talked to him. He never had the movement any more than that, on the arm.

40:30 I don’t know whether he’s ever got it back. I haven’t seen Buddy for thirty years, Buddy Lee0. I remember him saying to me, “Bloody awful shots, Baz. Couldn’t hit my heart.”

Tape 9

00:34 **I’m just really curious about the shock treatment that you mentioned that you got. I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit about what they were assessing as the symptoms and the just the detail of what it was and how…?**

They gave me a condition called psychosomatic manifestations – correction…I’ve got to think of it now.

01:00 It was a stress. I can’t think of it. It wasn’t post-traumatic stress; it was a different sort of stress, but…I can’t remember it. I might come to it in a minute. They decided that because

01:30 my blood pressure was up and I’d had a couple of injuries and whatever and I’d had lost so much weight, that I had a nerve condition that they were going to give me as a recuperative sort of thing some treatment and there were two kinds of shock treatment that you can have. One was the electric probes on the tongue – they give you an electric shock,

02:00 and the other one is rather expensive but it’s an insulin shock treatment where you are induced into a coma for an hour or two hours day and a sister sits by your bed and monitors you. This goes on, I think in my case between a week and two weeks. Every day

02:30 they induce this coma onto you and it gradually blocks out your memory, puts your weight back on, tones down the nervous system and for two or three years I felt great, and then it started to wear off again.

What did you notice first off as it wore off?

03:00 Well, I couldn’t sleep, I was getting migraine headaches, I was irritable – shockingly irritable, and I was on different sorts of medication to try and help me along and all they were doing was increasing the medications. I was trying to work; I was holding down a job and they gave me a 40% disability

03:30 pension when I came back. I did feel better after the shock treatment. It is psychosomatic manifestations with something something – that’s what they had me down as. The medication that I’m on that I take now and

04:00 I don’t take all the medication I should. I take enough to keep it in my system, and to get that medication you have to be labelled a schizophrenic. I am not. I do have my moments but I have a great life and I live within myself. But that’s being honest with you, and that’s what war does to you. It changes you. War caused disabilities.

Given that the initial shock treatment helped settle you down and

04:30 **you had enjoyed army life, they were enticing you to come back?**

Yes, they were. They went and they saw my wife and they said, “Look, he’s a good soldier.” I could’ve carried on and had another posting. I don’t know whether life would have caught up with me as it did

when I went out in civilian life. I do think

05:00 at that time I was too unwell to make a decision and I decided for that reason to get out of the army, but my medical treatment was ongoing and maybe it was because…Then I never let anything show. You put on a brave front. You don't tell anyone you are sick. It was a stigma to go to hospital and say, "Look, my nerves are giving me

05:30 problems," or whatever, "I've got blood pressure, I hear music" or whatever. You never told anyone. Now it's entirely different.

So did the musical episodes ever come back?

Never. I haven't had them to this day. No. I do have a problem with my perspiration, which is (UNCLEAR). That's another disability – it's a

06:00 nerve condition – but I live life pretty well, I'm no danger to anyone, no danger to myself. I'm a happy go lucky sort of a fellow and I live life to the fullest.

Did you seek out any of your mates?

No, I didn't. Funnily enough, when I made my decision to get out of the army,

06:30 it took me a long time to associate with anyone from the army. I don't know why but I just wanted to forget. It's only over the last five or six years that I've gone back to Anzac Day services and whatever and sort of got my enthusiasm back for the army. I've never lost track of the

07:00 fact that I'm an Australian and what I did I was glad I did. I was never sorry joining up the army or anything of that nature.

What about the welcome home, or lack of welcome home?

Well, the boys, they weren't there for us but I didn't come with all the troops, you see, so I missed that reception.

07:30 To me, I thought that everyone liked it, and they did, but when the troops come back there was crowds and mobs, if you want to call them that, protesting against them or 'bring the boys home' – the Greenies and whatever. It's never been a bother to me. I don't care if a hundred people didn't like me doing what I did;

08:00 I would go and I would do it if I thought that it was the right thing. You weigh out both sides, the good and the bad for it. You just don't stick to an opinion because you are fanatical for believing that is right; you've got to have a reason as to why it is right, and I am proud to be an Australian.

08:30 **Did you follow through in the news and media just about how the war was going?**

Yes, I've always read quite a lot of papers; always have done, kept up with world affairs, always interested in Australians abroad, Americans abroad, England. I think Britain is a great place – all the conflicts.

What did you think of how the war wrapped up for Australia?

Vietnam? I think Australia,

09:00 it was an honourable decision. It was the decision of the Americans that sort of gave it away; otherwise the Australians would've still been there. We were only carrying out orders but I think the Americans at that time knew that they couldn't win it.

09:30 It was an unpopular war in America so they decided to close it down. The Ho Chi Minh trail, they were coming down by the millions and the North Vietnamese they took over Saigon and renamed it and whatever, a coup if you want to call it that, but it was an honourable retreat by the Americans and to this day I believe they got out because they knew they couldn't win it. They had the power to win it. They could drop

10:00 a big Hiroshima bomb and that would fix it, but world opinion would be against it. I wouldn't be against it; I would accept what they do and I think, as I've said before, to dominate a person if he's strong, you've got to be stronger. You've got to keep them down especially where situations like Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq exist.

10:30 We've got a great country here in Australia, a great country; it's worthwhile fighting for; our standards are worthwhile fighting for. We've got brilliant people in all fields, in all walks of life, and it's a place where a man can still be a king one of the few places in the

11:00 world. Let's keep it like that.

Did you share any of your experiences of Vietnam with either Sandra or your kids?

I spoke a few times to Sandra, the same as I have spoken to Judy, probably more so to Judy than to Sandra. I never spoke to my son. I kept it in me but there were times, there were moments when

11:30 I would explain a little bit here and there, but I don't think they fully understood. I was a sort of an arrogant abrupt man and when I came home, instead of getting down with my son and playing as a father does to a boy, I was very stern and he had to toe the line and I missed out a lot

12:00 with my son. The same with my wife – I was short tempered, I was quick to be upset, angry, and it's not until the last ten years that I've mellowed and I don't think that I was a good husband or a good father. But my wife understood, and my father-in-law – he's dead now – he

12:30 used to say, "You don't know what that poor boy's been through. Look after him." and she did. My son over the last couple of years, he said, "Dad, I didn't understand what you were going through, but I do now". And do you know, I put my arms around him and he put his arms around me and we'd kiss each other and we'd love each other and it's not unmanly. We have a new understanding, a new love,

13:00 and I am a better man for it.

So the Barry that came back after Vietnam was different to the one Sandra knew before?

Yes, definitely. I was always doing things; whether I had a car or I was playing cricket or tennis, I was the best. I was a bit of an 'I am' bloke but

13:30 when I went overseas it matured me, but my experiences hardened me to such a degree that it became psychosomatic and I took it out on people. It wasn't for five years, it was ten, twenty years. I fought the system, I was bitter. It's not until the last ten years

14:00 that I've mellowed and accepted things. It's life. As my father-in-law said, "You don't know what the poor boy has been through." He understood.

Did you for yourself link…

There were times that I hated myself but I couldn't control it. If my son hurt himself, I would say,

14:30 "Get up. You're not hurt." I'd show him no sympathy, whereas I wanted in my heart to grab him and say, "I'm sorry, son. I wish I could help you," But that was what my army experiences did to me; it made me a short-tempered, bitter person for many, many years because I saw good and bad men die. I've seen people who wanted to live

15:00 die. They wanted to come back, maimed or whatever. They've lost their life – they've given it for their country and the experiences made me a bitter man for many years. You're probably the first person that I've really opened up and said just how bitter it's made me. But don't contradict things – I love my country and I would be back for it.

15:30 I would fight for my country. If they came here, anyone, I'd fight for my family, for my own life, for Australia.

Were you aware at the time that your behaviour was related to what you'd been through during the war?

I think it was pretty obvious that it was because of my war-caused experience, that my condition was related to it. Yes, it was.

16:00 But there was no way that I could control that, not at the time. Time does help. It does soothe you as you get a bit older; you calm down, but I'm still not perfect. I don't have any arguments

16:30 now. I live a nice easy life but the times I get irritated I control myself. You can learn to control yourself – you haven't got control earlier in the piece but now I do have control, and I'm lucky inasmuch as I have a wonderful wife who understands me 101% and she lives for me, so I'm a lucky man.

17:00 **That's gorgeous. You mentioned to Heather [interviewer] before that sending you home early kind of affected you psychologically. In what way?**

Yeah, I think so. I was leaving my mates. I was leaving a job undone. I should've been there.

17:30 I should've brought my boys home. I should've been there on the boat when they came home. I should've been at the reception for the people, to march through the streets of Sydney and Brisbane. I should've shook each one – I never had the opportunity to shake any of my boys by the hand and say, "I'm going home. Goodbye. This is goodbye". It was just something…I was taken out of the bush, into hospital, home.

18:00 I never had time to get word back to my platoon commander, my platoon sergeant, the other section commanders that I knew. It was such an abrupt bloody thing that happened, and you live with that and I still live with that now even though I'm better. But it does affect you; I should've been there. The same as I was there when we went over, I should've been there for them to come home.

18:30 **It's very fortunate that they all made it back.**

Yeah, they did. I don't know what they are doing in life. I know they come from all walks of life and I

know some had wealthy parents and some didn't, and they had good jobs and whatever, and I'm sure they've made something of themselves, all of them.

19:00 I would like to see them again. I suppose there would be a few that I would recognise by face. I'm sure I'd recognise Dino, my section 2IC – he was about my height but he was a blocky fellow – and I'm sure I would know Bluey, he was my machine gunner – he was a tall, red-headed fellow, and the 2IC's, and my forward scout

19:30 because I had a lot of contact with him. He was out front all the time. You had to sort of look after them. It was a big job that he did. It was a big job that every man in that section did; you couldn't lose sight of that fact, but when you learn to control men, you've got to also learn to look after them, and I tried to do that – sometimes badly, but I tried to do my best all the time.

20:00 **You've mentioned to us once or twice that it's only been the last ten years that you started to have nightmares.**

No, I've had nightmares for thirty-odd years and it's a long time since I've sort of jumped from the shock of thunder but I have done that, but I

20:30 have my dreams when I go back in time. I talk to myself, I upset myself, my wife will wake me up, I will kick, I will jump, someone's chasing me, someone's trying to kill me and I'm pushing my feet down to get them off me and they're grabbing me – it's just wild dreams that you have and it is related, I'm sure, to my war experiences. I don't have the headaches now that I used to.

21:00 I live a pretty reasonable sort of life but there are times when I go back in memory and I think and I say, "How the hell did you do it? How did you do all that?" And it was the same for every bloke that was with me. They did the same as me; they stood with me day by day. Day and night they worked with you, they walked with you,

21:30 they slept with you, they ate with you. They did the same thing as what I did except I had a little compass and map and I sort of told them – they knew where to go automatically. I didn't have to tell them. They were trained but if I wanted to change the situation, I could. They knew what they had to do in a forward assault or a side assault or whatever

22:00 instinctively – they were trained to do that – but I had to map read, and I had to give grid references as to where we were on the map and we had to be in our right position all the time. We didn't have navigational compasses or all this sort of thing; we just had the old compass and a protractor and a map. You were constantly monitoring your position and you can get lost.

22:30 You've got to know how to read a map – it takes experience to learn it; it takes a few years to learn that, but you can learn every river, every entrance, every ridge, every valley. You can pick yourself whether you are halfway up a ridge or three quarter the way up, by the gradients and all this, by the terrain – it's all marked out before you. But not only do you do that, you've still got to be aware of the whole situation –

23:00 where your men are, is there any enemy movement in the area? You just do it automatically. You are trained to do it. You don't think; it just comes instinctively, and whereas it might seem a lot to a person you do it in rapid

23:30 time all the time.

I was wondering what your feeling is on the work that you were doing after the war and whether that helped you settle down at all?

I don't think it did. I was young and I wasn't well. I was living on my nerves even then.

24:00 I was working twelve hours a day trying to keep a roof and that over a family. It wasn't until I got into the prisons in my 40's to 55's that life started to settle me down and whatever. Within the last eight years or so, they put me on the TPI – Totally and Permanently Incapacitated – where

24:30 life has settled down for me. My health will never be the same but you can reach a level, a plateau, and you live your life accordingly. You don't go...I don't lose my temper. I try and live day by day compartments, not week by week or month by month; I live for today, what's going on today and then tomorrow, I'll live for tomorrow. You

25:00 have everything in moderation: food, liquor, sweets or anything you like. I enjoy the good things in life. I have a great life, and the pressure of not having to work does help you. The fact that you are financially settled helps you. You've got to be happy with your lot – I mean, you don't want to be

25:30 Barry Laverty with Christopher Skase [former Australian businessman] ideas. You've got to be happy with your lot, and we are. We are.

I was just wondering how much you relied on your military training for work in the prisons?

Yeah. Tremendous discipline. Very close contact with men. My army service helped me in

26:00 assessing situations and controlling situations and controlling men. There's some big bad boys in the prison, monsters, and they tried to stand over me in many shapes and forms. We've had riots and whatever, but I did my job and I stood against them, and it was all through the way the army taught me for discipline and controlling men.

26:30 I didn't hold grudges in the army or in the prisons or whatever. You might have an argument with someone. A prisoner can hold a grudge to get back at you. Once the situation is involved, I just forget about it. I'm aware of the situation but I don't hold grudges like a lot of people do when they have an argument, especially in the prisons

27:00 there because you get all sorts of people there. You've got to be constant and regular, never change. If you are a happy personality you stay that. You keep the same mannerisms every day; otherwise they will find that you are false and there are some brainy boys that are put inside jails.

27:30 I was there when Johnny…Whisky-a-Go-Go, Jimmy Finch and John….He was in maximum security, John, and he had a special little cage up the corner. He subsequently died in prison, but I used to be one of the officers that would walk in

28:00 solitary confinement up and down his cage, and he would talk to me – he was quite an intelligent fellow. They killed a lot of people in the Whisky-a-Go-Go; he always claimed he was innocent. Jimmy Finch… They did a little bit of a protest, and I'm trying to think of who it was with Jimmy Finch, but

28:30 he tied his mouth up with wire – no anaesthetic or whatever – so the police wouldn't verbal him or the prison officers wouldn't verbal him, and Jimmy Finch at the time bit his little finger off, over a period of hours, just chewed it off, in protest. They were tough boys, but that's life. You get some people who shouldn't be in prison.

29:00 Truly. Not everyone is guilty and I don't think they should have traffic offences put in the prison; they should have somewhere else for them. You get many types of people, from homosexuals to recidivists, people who if you put out would do the crime all over again.

29:30 Some people in prison, that's the only life they know. They keep coming back. It's better than being out on the streets. Sometimes a male will probably kill in a moment of passion and regret it for the rest of his life, but regardless, it's fourteen years in jail, and you can feel a little bit of mercy for that sort of man.

30:00 Different for a fellow who goes out and rapes and murders a young girl or whatever, or stabs a person to death about ten or twelve times and mutilates the body and that sort of thing – you have no pity for them. They don't deserve pity, but you've got to treat them as human beings. You've got to be nice to their face. But this is where I say it depends on what sort of personality you yourself are when you are dealing with men. You can never let that facade drop,

30:30 never change your attitude. You've got to be constant with people all the time regardless of what you are thinking. We had Carl Otto – he murdered his brother. They were watching TV and they had an argument over a TV program, so Carl up and strangled his brother, and he was exercising in the yard. He was in solitary confinement, and he was a big six-footer, solid built and

31:00 the officer that was with me, we were having a little bit of a joke, and the next minute I saw this shadow come over me and he stood about head and shoulders above me, and he said, "What's the matter? Are you laughing at me?" and I knew he was a crackpot and I looked him in the eyes, up, and I said, "Listen, I'm not laughing at you. Now, you get up and walk up and down your compound

31:30 before I put you in your cell," but inside my heart was a little bit frightened but you never show that front to them. He's still in jail as far as I know, and he's probably changed, but a great artist. You see some beautiful things that they pull out in prison – beautiful artists, and a lot turned to religion and this sort of thing. That's an experience. You put on a front and you are constant.

32:00 You never deviate from your dealings. You never show a soft line, you never show a hard line. You've got to be tolerant all the time.

And is that something that you aligned to what you learnt in the military?

Yeah, always. Yes, my control of men. I found over the years that whenever I meet a person – and it might take me once or twice that I meet them, I mentally assess them as to what I think they are.

32:30 Not often I'm wrong. I can tell a reasonable bloke from an unreasonable sort of fellow. I suppose it's just natural; it depends on their sort of bearing and whatever. It teaches you; the army teaches you.

Given what you'd gone through and the ongoing treatment you were going through, did you ever find yourself shaken by the work you were doing in the prisons

33:00 **in various conflicts?**

Not really. It's just like the army; you condition yourself to an environment and you live in that environment. I've seen a couple of dead men in the prison as I've seen a couple of dead men in the

army. They died for different reason and in different ways but I can't say that it's

33:30 concerned me or worried me or I've lost sleep over it. I never dream about my prison experiences or anything like that. I believe that was a good job for fourteen years. I do dream about my war experiences, not all the time. It can be once six months or it can be two nights running. I might go good for a while, but you can ask my wife –

34:00 I'm a terrible man to sleep with, and I say, "Why don't you get single beds?" and she says, "No. I like to put my arm around you and cuddle you." She wakes me up; she looks after me. I wake her up and she'll decide whether to bring me out of that sleep or not. It's life.

You mentioned to us this morning that you are a Christian and I just wondered

34:30 **if faith played its hand through your war experience?**

Yes, it has. It certainly has. I've always been a positive thinker and I've always been a Christian to my fellow man. I read the Bible every day. I believe in it and I believe there is a God, and I treat all my fellow men and women as brothers and sisters. That is the Christian belief that I've got.

35:00 **Did you have a sense when you were in the field that someone was looking after you?**

Yeah, I think so. As I said to you, I knew that I was going to come home. I knew that. I knew I was, even though I might've been in danger, you never worried about it. I had that little premonition that I was being looked after.

Do you think that was youth or faith?

I think

35:30 it was youthful exuberance for a start, but I think it was fate. I think your destiny is written out in a big book and it was my destiny to go into the army, to go overseas, to come home, lose my first wife through a brain tumour and meet my present wife and get married, and I know that one day when I go to sleep, I'm going to

36:00 meet them, every one of them, and it'll be a great reunion. I can say this, without being boastful – I don't think that I've intentionally done a wrong to another human being. I love life too much; I love human nature too much; I love people too much.

36:30 **I have one more question for you. If, perhaps not your son, but a grandson came up to you and said, "Grandad, there's a bit of a war on the other side of the world. I want to go to it," what sort of advice would you give to him?**

I would say, "Son, if that's what you want to do, go to it. It's a great experience; you'll love it. Don't fight for another country but fight for your own country; fight for Australia". I wouldn't stop him from going if that was his wish.

37:00 I don't think you should. I know that my son at 38 has said to me, "Dad, I wish there was national service in my day. I wish I could've got into the army and seen the things that you did." It's life.

INTERVIEW ENDS