Australians at War Film Archive

David Brill (Brillo) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

01:26 **Give us a summary of your life.**

My name is David Brill. I'm from Tasmania, which I'm very proud of. Quite a lot of interesting people come out of Tasmania. Neil Davis [war cameraman and correspondent] and a few others; [Tim] Bowden,

01:41 Christopher Koch, who wrote Living Dangerously, Highways to War. Did you ever see that book, "Highways to War"? It's a book about partly my life and Neil's life. It's won the Miles Franklin award. I'll show it to you later. I was born in Devonport, a place called Latrobe, which is near Devonport where the main hospital was, in 1944. Went to school in Launceston at Scotch College where I was a warrant officer in the cadet corps, which made

02:11 me very interested in the military. I was at one stage thinking of going to Duntroon [Royal Military College]. I'm very glad I didn't now, looking back on my life. I always had a passion for communication; journalism, filmmaking, the arts. That's what I was pretty good at in school, and biology. My parents owned a hotel in Longford just outside Launceston, population of about 12,000 people. I used to look forward to

02:41 getting Life Magazine, which was a weekly magazine then. Probably the greatest pictorial magazine in the world. A lot of wonderful photographers and writers who worked for it. I had a tremendous interest in journalism and photography and filmmaking, not knowing that I would ever go into it. I became president of the Kodak Club at school, which was sponsored by Kodak. My father bought me a Rolleicord, a 2 1/4 square, like

03:11 the Rolleiflex, but the cheaper version, which got my interest going in photography. That's really all I wanted to do then when I realised what a wonderful thing it was to see your own pictures reproduced in magazines. So I did a cadetship with a company in Hobart called Brian Curtis and Associates, the biggest commercial photographic studios in Tasmania. Before I was allowed to use a camera I spent two

03:41 years learning how to mix chemicals properly. Then I could use the camera, maybe a 4 by 5 speed Graphic, nothing else. On the weekends I could probably take it out for one day and take some 4 by 5 pictures. Then I had to learn how to use an enlarger properly. It's a tough cadetship, but looking back on it, it's the best training I ever had. I finished the 5-year cadetship, went to the Hydro Electric Commission as a field photographer, which was a big

04:11 government department building dams, hydroelectric power. I did all that sort of stuff. Television in 1967, it had been going a few years, but it was still pretty new in Tasmania. The ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] was set up there. I thought that the moving picture, particularly news and current affairs and documentary programs, were so important and television was so powerful, it could probably be better than say working for Life.

04:41 Two ambitions I had then. One was to work for Life Magazine; the other was work for Four Corners [ABC current affairs/documentary program]. Four Corners to me was great photojournalism. I didn't make Life Magazine, but I made Four Corners. I joined the ABC in Hobart in 1966 and we started a program there called Line Up, which was the pilot program for This Day Tonight [ABC current affairs program], which started on the mainland later, the nightly current affairs

05:11 program, work in Tasmania could work anywhere in Australia. So I was fortunate enough to work on that original program, which was great because we could do pieces up to 7 or 8 minutes long, not just news clips. You could really produce a clip. Construct a piece to get the message across, not just in a minute 20 [seconds] like a news story, but a lengthy piece. The program became so popular. I realised then that television was a great way of communication if you wanted to do serious stuff.

05:41 For a while I owned a magazine called The Tasmanian Motorist, which was a motoring magazine. I was part owner with a friend of mine called Des Power - he's a well-known filmmaker in Queensland now - which was fun, but it was too commercial for me. I thought the ABC was an organisation where you could get good important current affairs programs and documentaries on. That's the area I wanted to

go. Obviously

06:11 Neil Davis had a day-to-day impact on my life because he'd been a Tasmanian and he'd come back from Asia every year and we'd sit and have a chat and I thought this was a really great way to go. So after a couple of years there, I was appointed the ABC's first cameraman based in Southeast Asia, mainly to cover the Vietnam War. I was engaged. They didn't want to send a married man in case something would have happened to me. So they took the job away from me, which broke my heart.

06:41 They said, "What do you want to do?" I said, "I always wanted to work on Four Corners." so they transferred me to Sydney and I worked on documentaries for a while and then I went to Four Corners, which to me was the greatest time of my life. To form a program with people like John Pennington, Mike Willesee, Peter Reid, Gordon Vick, Richard Oxenberg, Kerry O'Brien of the News Went On, just really wonderful people, all learning together, all of the same age. There we were, the only major

07:11 current affairs program in Australia. It was just about the same time as This Day Tonight, but we had time. We could go away and do longer, more thoughtful pieces than the other program, we could spend an hour say on Vietnam. So that to me was real photojournalism. It's like Life Magazine was in a magazine format, but this was a magazine format for television, going out to a very interesting audience. I was about 23. One of the first big

07:41 assignments I did was to go to Vietnam, Mike and I and Bob Sloss, the sound recordist, to Vietnam to have a look at Vietnam, to cover the war. All the stuff coming out on the news programs of guns going off, but so what? How many people were killed that day or whatever? I wanted to know what the war was really about. Why was there a war in Vietnam? We could do that. We could spend the time, which was a terrific advantage. I remember there once

08:11 on this particular assignment, the first one, was we met a little girl who was 7 and had her leg blown off when she was 3. Her parents had been killed in the war; she was being brought into the hospital on her grandmother's back to be fitted with an artificial leg. It was the most beautiful child then that I'd ever seen in my life. I was 24-25. So I was very young myself. But there was no expression on her face whatsoever.

08:41 She kept staring at me. I realised how powerful this segment was. Putting a sequence up with all the right shots to make a segment and being right in there trying to capture this. Using this little girl in a way as an example of what war is about. Anybody can film the guns going off, but what do those guns do? Here's an example. There was no expression on her face. You imagine all the other children running around, growing up, she couldn't run around because she only had one leg. When they put the artificial leg on and she got onto the bar and started to walk,

09:11 it was the first time in her life that she had her own limited independence and she started to smile slightly. So I held this shot and just crept in with a zoom into her face and her eyes staring for about a minute and a half. When we ran that segment in this whole hour film, plus we covered battles and we interviewed this and that to make it into a proper documentary. When that went to air, the impact of that little girl from everybody, I think even Gough Whitlam [Prime Minister of Australia] or somebody said, "The sad little

09:41 girl in Vietnam, what are we doing there?" I heard this second-hand, but that made such an impact, more so than the guns going or the tanks going into battles. I realised how powerful good television, good current affairs can be. You won't change the world, but you'll make people aware what's going on. It's an education tool. All these years later I've stuck by that. It's the work that I believe in, one way or another. It's a great privilege to do this work, it's dangerous, it's frustrating,

10:11 you never make a lot of money out of it. You'll have an interesting life and that's what I'll try to do. Looking back on a lot of my stuff that was brought out when they did an Australian Story [ABC program] on me, they got all the stories out from 20-30 years ago, I realised that stuff now is more important than what it was then because it's history now, so it's gone into another dimension. So that's basically what's really kept me going through all the ups and downs.

10:41 Does that give you a rough idea of what I'm about and where I'm coming from? Please interrupt me and tell me if you want me to do anything.

Can you give us a broad idea of the sorts of places and assignments since Vietnam you were involved in?

11:11 This is just to set the scene?

Yes, a general arc of the whole thing.

Obviously Vietnam was probably the most important story at that period, because it didn't just affect Vietnam, it affected the whole world.

11:41 Even university students in America got shot dead, the problems it caused Richard Nixon [President United States] and Henry Kissinger [Secretary of State], the expansion of the war into Cambodia, it was a huge story that affected every part of the world including the Soviet Union. So that was probably the most major event that I covered in the late '60s early '70s. I went back to film the fall of Saigon in '75. In between that, you'd be doing other things

12:11 like when Gough got in, in 1972, ‘It’s time’ [Labor Party slogan]. I was on the stage in Blacktown when he got in. It is a historic moment. The Labor Government getting in after the Liberals had been in power for so long. Then to cut it short, to go through to the fall of Whitlam. I happened to be in Canberra doing another story. It was Remembrance Day, doing another military story. I had my hands in the changing bag changing the film and the radio going hearing

12:41 Gough had just been sacked. So I ran around to old Parliament House, I was one of the few there, and everybody was in shock. I just took roll after roll after roll, so I knew what all this footage would be later on. Things like that. Another example of that period was the cost of running Government House. So Peter Ross and I went over and did a profile on Mark Oliphant who was Governor of South Australia. We covered Asia pretty heavily.

13:11 Indonesia, the frictions there. India, now Bangladesh, but East Pakistan. Plus a lot of domestic important stories, of Vince Gair [former Senator, leader of the Democratic Labour Party (DLP)] when he was made ambassador to Ireland to get him out of the way here and then the change of the balance of power in various governments. So it was all that sort of stuff up until 1975 when I was based up in Papua New Guinea

13:41 for the ABC, covering that part of the world. Then I was asked to go back to film the fall of Saigon, the end of the Vietnam War. In 1973 when I was living in Hong Kong, John Pennington and I were lucky to get into North Vietnam. We were still at war with them; this is as the war was just finishing for the Australians. From the Americans’ point of view, the war went on another couple of years. We got into North Vietnam, which was an amazing,

14:11 the only westerners to get in there at that time, to go to the other side. A week before being shot at, a week later having a beer with them, just a very strange, bizarre feeling. All these contrasts. So I went back to film the end of the war in ‘75, which is a very traumatic assignment obviously. Being associated with that place such a long time, see the whole south collapse. After that I was posted to set up a television bureau in New York

14:41 for the ABC. Before that, there was basically a radio bureau with Ray Martin and Geoff McMullen, two reporters in New York, Peter Blunden in Washington. There was no television coming out of there. Peter Reid, executive producer Four Corners, wanted me to go across there to help mould them into becoming television reporters. I’d worked on Four Corners and it’s ridiculous that we, the ABC, didn’t have any television presence in North America, the most powerful nation in the world.

15:11 So I stayed there for 11 years and a variety of stories. When I arrived there the first big story we did, Geoff McMullen and I, was to cover Jimmy Carter’s [President of the United States] campaign from Plains, Georgia all the way through. His mother, Miss Lillian, on the railway station, his brother Billy and all that sort of stuff. Plus a lot of stuff on the State Department and the White House and on we go. I stayed there for 11 years. Came back a year or two later, went to Moscow to do the same thing for the ABC. Stayed there

15:41 for 18 months, came back, freelanced, I was literally under contract jobs. Then went back to Hanoi for a year. After that freelanced. I got very interested in doing aid work with people like CARE and Oxfam [international aid organisations]. Done most of that type of thing in the last few years till I joined SBS [Special Broadcasting Service, multicultural focus] six months ago.

16:11 **Tell us about the area you were born into in Tasmania.**

Tasmania really is very much a rural community. It’s only got a population of about 1.5 million people. It’s a very beautiful

16:41 place. I found it, growing up in Longford, incredibly lonely. My mother didn’t want me mixing with the local kids, she didn’t think they were good enough or whatever. Cos she was a little bit of a snob; she’ll admit it herself. So it was a pretty lonely upbringing. It’s amazing when I think about it that it’s a big thing to get out of Tasmania. It was a huge thing for me

17:11 to come from Tasmania to Sydney; huge thing to do. Then really to move on from there, coming from this little island, which is so far away from really anywhere if you’re overseas particularly in American or Europe, tucked away down there below the mainland. Something drove me, not because of wanting to travel

17:41 so much, it was more the wonderful stories to be told. I go back to Life Magazine, just looking forward to that every week when it came out. See these wonderful pictorial stories in that incredible magazine. They were like movies, they were like little films, because they weren’t just one or two shots, they probably ran three or four pages telling a story with wonderful images. It wasn’t so much just to travel the world, it was really to go and

18:11 do stories on these people or these places. Tasmania, when you say, I suppose really after meeting Neil Davis when I was very young and he was very young, he was there for a while before he went off to Asia, that obviously had a tremendous impact on me. He was a pretty special bloke, Neil. He was somebody who really had something

18:41 special or he wouldn’t have done or got to where he was. To me, to call people a ‘hero’, I get a bit tired

of hearing about people, sportsmen or television presenters, putting them on a pedestal. To me, a lot of aid workers I've met, or schoolteachers or nurses or Neil, I've been into battle with Neil. To me, he was a real hero because he did

19:11 things not because he was gung-ho, but he really wanted to show it and explain it. I think it's the same with aid workers I meet around the world. You never hear of them, they're unsung heroes. I guess that's part of why I wanted to go in and do it, because of the respect I have for these people. That doesn't really answer about being brought up in Tasmania, does it?

19:41 Really, my career took off when I joined Four Corners I suppose. In Tasmania with the ABC there, it's a small place and everybody knows everyone. It's in many ways a small attitude towards stuff. When I got to Four Corners, they were much more enthusiastic and open about allowing you to do or try things. That hadn't happened with the ABC in Hobart, which all comes out in this book about me.

20:11 **Back to your earliest memories of Tasmania, was it a rural house you were living in?**

We were brought up in a hotel, which I'd never recommend to anybody. My parents were very busy running it. It was a beautiful old inn with a lot of my mother's; she was a great collector of antiques. But it was

20:41 a very lonely existence, being an only child. I used to have all my meals in my room, served to me on a silver tray with a waitress in a white apron and it was an incredibly lonely existence.

You didn't mix?

Not very much, no. She didn't like them much around there. She thought it was rough. I went to school in Launceston, which is 15 miles down the road. I used to go swimming up and down the beautiful river there called the

21:11 Esk River. I had one of these rubber that you could lay on. We used to use it as a little basin there. I was always on my own if I remember there.

Can you give us an idea of mum's personality?

She was a very complex woman. I wouldn't say temperamental, she was very artistic, but she

21:41 meant well for me, but in many ways I found it very hard to communicate with my mother and father. I think that's a bit of a problem. She meant well. She wanted me to go into the army; she wanted me to be a Duntroon army officer. I'm glad I didn't do that after doing a story on Duntroon on bastardisation years ago for Four Corners.

Why was she

22:11 **so determined for you to go to Duntroon?**

I think a lot of it was probably to make her feel good. To be a Duntroon officer, or doctor, or lawyer, in those days it was a standard of a position I think. As the years went on and when Tony Armstrong Jones, Lord Snowdon, married Princess Margaret, she thought it was all right for her son to be a photographer.

22:41 It was that sort of snobbishness there that played on her.

Was her background in Tasmania?

Yeah. She came from one of those well-to-do families. My father came from the other side of the tracks. He was never good enough for her, so she kept on saying, so "Why did you marry him then?" There was all that conflict. Being an only child was very, very hard for me. No one to talk to.

Tell us more about your dad.

23:11 He was a musician. He was a businessman. He used to write music and he'd set up brass bands and buy all the instruments for them and conduct and teach them how to read and play music on the side. He was a good man. He was very popular, but my mother dominated him, I think, at times.

Was he keen for you to pursue...?

He didn't really care too much.

23:41 I think that generation was just like now, but I found it very hard to talk to him. I think he would have been happy had I stayed down there and took over the pub business, but that didn't interest me at all.

Did the keep the business going?

Yeah they did. They bought other hotels and eventually they sold it all up. When I left, I went back on trips now and then, but I was really then entrenched in this

24:11 business. The more I did, the more it got interesting. I realised what a big world there is out there with so many important things to cover, to do stories of.

What was the primary school in Launceston like?

It was a prep grammar school. It was a

24:41 private school, only boys. I had to learn to dance with boys. Then I didn't like it much there after a while, so I went to Scotch, which was much better. It was a much broader-minded school.

That's where you did high school?

That's where I did my matric [matriculation]. That's when the photography really took over I think.

Did you do well at school?

Not

25:11 really. Certain subjects I was interested in I did. Only things I took an interest in I was reasonably good at. Through that Kodak Club, that's really where I got a great interest in photography and journalism.

How old were you when you first became involved in that?

At school we were doing it. Kodak would bring up portable

25:41 darkrooms and teach us all that sort of stuff. Then I made a point of meeting some of the photographers on the Launceston Examiner [local newspaper] with their big Speed Graphic cameras. It was wonderful to meet them and go and see their picture in the paper that they took. When you did it yourself it was even more exciting.

How old were you when you were first interested in the Life Magazine?

13-14, something like that.

26:11 **That's where the spark came from?**

Yeah. I remember seeing a series on South America and another series by another wonderful photographer called Gary Burrows who I met in Vietnam. He died, he crashed in a helicopter. Just seeing that, there was something very special about telling stories with pictures. I realised this was just magic

26:41 to be able to do that; that you could have pictures and captions and words that other people could learn from or look at. To me it's still to this day an amazing thing to have that privilege to see a picture you've taken in a magazine or a film on television. Still, now, years later, if I've done something and they put it on the TV and it's good, it's a wonderful feeling that you've done

27:11 something which can explain or show to millions of people. And the power of that. The old saying, the power of the image. That's how it all started. Then it snowballed into Four Corners at a very young age to work on that program.

Can you remember a moment where the whole idea of pursuing that as a career gelled in your mind? Was it looking at Life Magazine?

Yes, definitely.

27:41 I didn't know anything about it, or how to get into it, I didn't even think there would be a place to go. It just developed. I had a schoolteacher who said to me, "Why don't you think of going into professional photography?" He thought I was pretty good at it at school. I'd take pictures there.

When did you get your first camera?

When I was 14. My father bought me a Rolleicord camera.

Had you requested it?

28:11 I think I said I wanted it. It was a semi professional camera. It was a very professional camera, but you wanted something that looked, you didn't want a box brownie [old fashioned camera], you wanted to take it seriously, you wanted to have the right gear. That was great. Then my father built me a darkroom under a house we owned on the river in Hobart. Under the house, I had this dark room. I would even at nights

28:41 get up at 10 or 11 o'clock after it had been raining, go out with a tripod and do time exposures in the streets, of traffic going past or boats on the water. Come back, turn on the radio, listen to Arch McCurdie from Sydney on ABC radio doing a jazz program, and develop film and then do the prints at midnight with this jazz music going in a dark room and see the images come up. It was the most romantic wonderful

29:11 feeling. At the same time, when I went to a movie called Blow Up starring David Hemmings, but played the part of a great photographer called David Bailey. All that sort of stuff made me realise how romantic in a way this is. Not that I, I did do fashion work for a while, but I found it very artificial. My filmmaking, still to this day, I call it raw filmmaking. It's right in there. You get the smell of the person.

29:41 You get right into their eyes or their hands or their mouth. You're capturing the personality of a person.

So it's the reality that you're after?

The reality, the real reality. Not even with lighting, I'd rather, if I can do it properly with natural light, I love stark blacks and whites and playing around. Pushing that lens to the limit. You get that real raw, as long as it's reasonable. I strongly believe in that.

30:11 You really get in there and you see the texture of people's faces and you smell them. You try to capture their soul, their personality. I remember doing that with stills. I did a lot of; Bailey did that with his fashion work. He took the models out of the studios, got them dancing up and down the roads. That great shot of the Beatles going across the crossing, that record cover, that's really famous. I've done quite a few record covers, I used to over the years. Great Australian bands like the Easy Beats and people, Normie Rowe and

30:41 Billy Thorpe. I did a lot of stuff. It was really the television and programs like Four Corners that really inspired me. People. That's what the world at the end of the day is about. I don't know if we're the most important animals in the world, but we're certainly some way meant to be the most intelligent. The things we do to each other, good and bad.

31:11 **Your early years were lonely, did that change when you got into your teenage years going to Scotch school? Did you get a group of friends you could share these interests with?**

Not really. I've always been a bit of a loner in some ways. Part of me still is to this day. It's the way that you're brought up. If you're brought up

31:41 in a lonely environment, I mean, I still like having my meals on my own. I don't mind having good conversation afterwards, just because it's a habit. Often I go and sit in a little restaurant around, still to this day, because it was the way I was brought up.

You didn't feel you were lacking anything? It was something you took for granted?

Yeah. Absolutely.

32:11 **How old were you when you started being involved in the cadets?**

14. They ran a very good cadet corps at Scotch. Cameron kilt. It was a very fine cadet corps. I was good at that. I really cared, when I got up through the ranks, for the

32:41 younger cadets coming in. I was really keen, because I liked the discipline of the military. It was neat and tidy. I found that quite satisfying in its own way.

Did you start to take an interest in past wars that

33:11 **Australia had been involved in?**

Yeah, I used to read a lot about the Boer War, the First World War, the Second World War, but also I grew up in that period of the Harold Holt - Menzies government that thought communists were dreadful people. "If we don't stop them they're gonna come down here and overrun Australia." It was all propaganda. That's why Australia got involved in the Vietnam War to protect…

33:41 the 'Yellow Peril', the 'Domino Theory', spreading down here to this white, Anglo-Saxon country of ours. All that propaganda as a young kid going into you, it was only when I went to North Vietnam years later, in 1973 and sat down like you and I are sitting here now, having a beer with them, or a meal. They were just like you and I. Wonderful people.

34:11 I thought, "This propaganda, this war thing, what are we doing?" On my first trip to Vietnam, this is in a documentary about me, when I went back to Vietnam after the war, I realised I went to Vietnam for the first time as a young bloke, "This is stupid. This is their country. What are we here for? These are lovely people. They've got just a different idea of running their country. Whether it's communism, socialism, capitalism." Capitalism is not much better than socialism

34:41 in many ways. If [Karl] Marx got it right, that share thing would have been a wonderful system, but unfortunately greed gets in the way, so it doesn't work out. But it was an eye opener to me, after being brought up on the propaganda that the Vietnamese are dreadful people, they're communists, then actually going there. Then spending all those years coming and going during the war in Vietnam, still to this day we haven't learned that lesson.

35:11 I think it's something like 40 wars going on as we're sitting here now. We put people on the moon, but we still can't stop killing each other. So I'm glad that I didn't go into the military. My mother wanted me to because of her reasons for it. When I did the film in Duntroon about bastardisation, which shows the dreadful thing of young cadets going normally then from one private school to another private school like Duntroon, not going out and

35:41 seeing anything about life, then graduating, going to South Vietnam as platoon commanders without any real experience of life. I met a few of them at a party they put on for us in the cadet mess in Duntroon and watched them get a few drinks in and how young and naïve. The next day or next week

they were going off to Vietnam as young officers to be killed or lead men into battle without any experience of life. I don't say it's wrong; there are a lot of good things

36:11 about Duntroon, I've got great respect for the Australian military, spent a lot of time with them over the years, a lot of time, and been very proud to be with them, but I'm glad I, I'd rather go into war with a camera and try to capture what's going on for the archives or history books or whatever, than go there with a gun. I'm glad I didn't do that.

When you were in the cadets, were you contemplating that as an avenue?

36:41 Very much so.

Was that propaganda imposed by the school cadet environment? The fear of communism?

Yes, it was all that, very much so. It's like now, the fear of terrorism. That's a new weapon that politicians are using. I've spent a lot of time in Muslim countries, and with Muslims, as an example. They've got a different philosophy of why is the terrorist. We can see that,

37:11 we can be accused of what we've done in Iraq, or the Americans, it goes both ways this thing. Why are they blowing up places? Why do they dislike the West so much? Let's have a look at this. Let's go underneath the artificial side. Let's go to the depth. Let's go back and ask why do they hate us so much? Same thing that happened during that Vietnam period. When the Vietnam War was over, they reckoned after Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand would fall,

37:41 then it would move down to Malaysia, Singapore. It hasn't happened. Again, we've gotta look at all this. America lost 58,000 troops; Australia lost over 500 with some civilians. I think something like 2,000,000 Vietnamese died in that war. It stops, a few years later it's all forgotten. We don't learn from these lessons. When you see dead people in war or you go into a major

38:11 battle. The smell, the noise, the screaming, people with their guts ripped open, this is hell. You can never explain a war to anybody unless you've been there. I think this is one of the good things in many ways about Anzac Day. Nothing much is said, but it's all the diggers [soldiers] get there, they just give a look to each other and they know. They've got the feeling. This great comradeship, because they've all been through, they've been to hell and back. It's something

38:41 I've tried in the work I do, now and then, to try and explain this through the sort of filmmaking that we do, that I've been associated with. When I say that, I think of not just soldiers shooting each other, but the lines of refugees over the centuries. You see people with their little one bag, if they're lucky, or an old donkey with an old,

39:11 what are they called? A donkey and a two-wheeled thing.

Cart?

Cart. Donkey and a cart with some little belongings heading off, not knowing where they're going. You think of that. This is going on all the time. Now and then you get something that I've been associated with that's been shown to the UN [United Nations] or people see it somewhere that it just prompts them.

39:41 You stop and think. That's where I think the sort of work we do is so important.

This humanitarian drive of yours was present in your teenage years?

I think so.

Did you feel that need developing?

Yeah, I think I did. I didn't know how to then. You come across these things as you walk into these situations I suppose.

40:11 I feel, as a person, that I've always had that for decent people. A bit more equality in life. It goes back, when it really hit me, when I went into North Vietnam, that we're basically the same. That's when it all gelled. When I say that I think of what George Bush [President of United States] says, "We'll smoke them out. We'll get them dead or alive." We consider ourselves to be these smart people in the West. They've been around much longer than we have

40:41 and are much more cultured and much more sympathetic towards people I think. Not this craving for artificial wealth. I think it's something that has to be looked at very carefully. Why is terrorism so big now? That's the new war. So I feel that

41:11 I then had that feeling for other people. I even remember at school in the cadets when I got a little bit older, 16 or something, when young cadets were coming and going to camps, how scared, first time away from home, and freezing cold parts of Tasmania, how I tried to be kind and helpful to them. I'm not saying this to blow my own trumpet, but it was just something I could do and cared about. I've been accused of

41:41 being in places where I spend too much time talking to the people. Carl Trevors accused me of this in

an article that was written to say that I want to stop and talk to the people. I do. I know when I've got enough. I'll go into the home and have a cup of tea if they invite you in, and have a chat. It's only courtesy and caring for these people.

Tape 2

00:35 **I might take you back to your own photographic studio. When you were processing those photos, what was it doing for you? How was it changing you?**

Firstly it was magic to see

01:00 something that you've taken with an instrument in Canberra. Through the process of developing it and then printing it and see an image come up on a bit of paper and seeing that bit of paper in a newspaper or a magazine that a lot of people could see. To me, even then, it was a wonderful privilege that you were doing something that other people could enjoy or learn from.

01:30 Even the motoring magazine that I was part owner of, the Tasmanian Motorist, this is where the Australian Grand Prix was held at Longford where my parents' hotel was. So I'd go and cover that for the magazine. I've got one behind you there. Grab that thing. To get onto your point. This is a shot I took for this magazine, the cover of it, and I'd walk past the news agency and

02:00 walk up and down. That's my cover, that's my photograph. It was incredible and powerful to think that. It's not like being an accountant where you just see figures coming or going or whatever, or writing memos, here was something. I realised people would buy the magazine. It was something in my mind that was very, very special; the power of communication.

Did it give you a sense of power?

02:30 Power of communication. It gave me something that you are sharing with people. Information. Good conversation is so important. That's only for a motoring magazine. It wasn't as important as the work that I did later on. Like say, Australian soldiers in Vietnam. I was there when the first Australian battalion came home.

03:00 We went down to Nui Dat and filmed them leaving when Gough Whitlam pulled them out of Vietnam [the main Task Force was actually brought home by Prime Minister William McMahon. Gough Whitlam ended Australia's involvement in Vietnam by bringing home the last members of the AATTV in 1972]. When you think about that, it was a huge event.

Were you filming with a video camera then?

Film. Everything was 16 millimetre film.

What kind of photographs did you like to take when you first started?

Still

03:30 life, flowers. I used to play around with the camera. You could try things, landscapes of beautiful rivers or beautiful old buildings, churches, things like that, with trees in the foreground. The framing of something to make it look very subtle, to make it look very soft and very beautiful. Then I played around with fashion photography for a while because that was glamorous I felt at that age.

04:00 **How old were you then?**

18. I had a lot of stuff published in a magazine called Flair, which was like Vogue fashion magazine here in Sydney. After seeing that film Blow Up by David Bailey it was all glamorous life. But I realised it was a very artificial life as well, that type; it wasn't real, it was artificial. I feel, still to this day, that a lot of that stuff from magazines and television is quite damaging because not everybody can look like

04:30 somebody on the cover of Vogue magazine. It's not reality. It's all to sell, to make money, to build profits for people. There's nothing wrong with that. We live in a capitalist society. But it's lying in a way, I still believe that today, it's artificial advertising. But it's part of our society. I wanted to show the real, raw stuff, the real stuff of people. Good and bad.

When did that urge

05:00 **start to develop?**

It started with Life Magazine when I was 14, but I never had to opportunity of doing it. It was a slow progress. Then I started to watch Four Corners, Life Magazine, Time magazine, Newsweek, Stern, Paris Match, these wonderful photojournalistic magazines. But it was really Four Corners. I used to sit down in my room in the hotel down there, my parents had another hotel in Taroona on the river in Hobart and watch

05:30 Four Corners on a Saturday night. They'd go up to the Middle East to cover something of the conflict in

Israel or the Palestinians. Real stuff. I got interested in what's going on here. Why haven't the Palestinians got their own home? Why are they not learning this? Listening to a lot of radio, reading a lot of stuff about all this. That's what gradually grew to me. This is reality. This is what the world's about. About us, people, the conflicts, also the

06:00 good things, the positive things that happen in the world, like wonderful aid workers who are out there doing positive good work, not for the money, but because they really believe in it.

Did you find that you were very different to your classmates having this interest in world politics?

They told me that I was. Even some of the other kids

06:30 that people now, that John Little went back to interview for me of the book. They thought I was a bit odd in school for some reason. I wasn't very good. I'm a bad speller. I'm partly dyslexic. I read and write a lot better than I used to, but as a kid I found it, then you were thought of as being dumb. A lot of the kids laughed at me, "David, why don't you go out and play with the plants in the school yard?" and all that cruel stuff.

Why did they say that?

Because I was

07:00 slow at reading and writing and they thought you were dumb. That was nothing to do with being dumb. We didn't even know what dyslexia was in those days. Maybe that pushed me even more to use a camera to express myself, because I found it hard maybe to write it down. I've heard this said about a lot of other interesting people like David Bailey. I've read an article about him over the weekend that he was

07:30 very severely dyslexic, that's probably why he became such a brilliant photographer because he drove all his energies into that. He said, "Thank God I can't spell, because I wouldn't be driving around in a Rolls Royce today if I could spell" or something like that. But, I always had an interest in the world. Why, I don't know. My father didn't care for travelling, my mother was. I always had a map of the world

08:00 in my room. I still do. I still have a map of the world plotting various places, looking at it. Reading about what's happening in Chad. Even at 14 or 15. The ships that used to go down to the Antarctic, they're still going down, used to all leave from Hobart. I'd go down and watch them going off to the Antarctic. Wow, watch them going down. I was thinking, "What's it like down there?" All this stuff. Even now, if I go off on an assignment to a new place,

08:30 there's not many places I haven't been to, but if I do, or even a place I have been to, when I get there, when the plane's coming in to land, this is an adventure. This is different people, different culture, it's wonderful to take all that in, the smell of all that as you get off the plane, going through that customs hall. It's this whole thing of this interest in cultures and people, and the history. I remember as a kid that might have been

09:00 also, the adventurous part was a part of it. But when I got to some of these places back in the '70s it was the people that really got the suffering, the injustices of people. That gradually built up. It's like a university course or degree; learning, learning, learning.

09:30 **Was your mother interested in developing countries?**

Not at all. She was interested in travelling on luxury ship liners and the glamorous part of that travelling. I wasn't. I didn't go to England until I was based in New York. I was always interested in going to Third World countries.

Why?

Because I thought there was more reality and there's more dirt roads.

10:00 More simpler things. It's not big Cadillacs or Rolls Royces, it's horses and carts in a lot of it. You sit on the street corner and have a meal. There's something wonderful about the basics. Not all artificial advertising slogans everywhere, there are a lot of those now, but it was just to me

10:30 Third World countries had more basics, more honesty. When I say that, I think of New York, which I love dearly, but it's all to do with capitalism and making money and wheeling and dealing.

When you were younger, were you able to express yourself in words?

No, I don't think so. I think because of not being too good at school in many things, I didn't have that confidence. I was

11:00 very, very insecure.

Did going to Duntroon sort of...

I didn't go to Duntroon.

Did the cadets help you get the confidence?

It really did. As I got older too, I realised, some of these other kids who used to bully me in class, when they were in the cadet camps in the freezing cold Tasmania, I was in charge, they broke down. I was the one that was helping them through

11:30 their weaknesses or their whatever came out. They could be a bully in a normal situation, but when it came to something a bit tougher… It's been very interesting, because covering wars I've been with some people who have been quite macho; to go into a very tough situation, then the real person comes out. I've always been known to be very calm under pressure in those tough situations like that. It's amazing, somebody who does lack confidence in certain things,

12:00 I think it's a lot to do with one's upbringing. My mother always said I was never good enough and all that sort of stuff. In those tough situations, those strengths really came out. They do with me.

Are you a robust person?

Not robust, I've been in situations where people can't handle it and I've taken charge and said, "This is what we're gonna do." There's a calmness that comes over me and I reckon I can normally handle those things. Then the strength comes in,

12:30 "Right, we're gonna do this." bang-bang-bang. That's partly the reason I think I'm still alive, that I've said in a lot of interviews that have been done on me, that my instincts and calmness have kept me from being killed.

Did that develop from any religious background that you had?

No. Just being practical, and just being that sort of person. I stop and think at times, when I feel insecure, and I think,

13:00 "God, you don't feel like that"; it's part of what your makeup is. It's very hard to stop those sort of feelings. I realise the older I get that bringing up a child is just so important. What you put into it. Learning from 1 to 4 or 5 or 7 or 8 are the most crucial years. If you've been pushed things into you, "You're never good enough, you're this or that." they're gonna stick with you and it's very hard to break that pattern in the growing process. But

13:30 it amazes me that one has those other strengths when they're in those situations.

Have you ever cracked in those situations?

It cracks afterwards. In my case you go back to the bar and have a few grogs [alcohol]. What do you do if you're in a tough place? Some people can drink, some people can't. I'm one of the people who shouldn't have drunk in the first place, because

14:00 it became a problem with me, alcohol. I liked it very much, we all did. They'd drink more than me, but it didn't affect them in the same way.

Has the cadet discipline helped you later in life and career, doing everything properly and making sure things are neat?

14:30 **Has it kicked in with your curiosity?**

Yeah, I think it has. I think you've gotta be. Particularly as Ray Martin said the other day when he did a thing on me, "He's covered more wars than General Cosgrove." Well, I suppose I have and what I mean by that is, I think being disciplined, Neil Davis was incredibly disciplined,

15:00 anybody can use a camera. It's how you use it and it's more than that, it's how you look after yourself. I think by being a bit disciplined like those cadets, I'd make sure my boots were always polished, still do. But it gives you disciplines when you're in a battlefield, or in tough situations. It can be a war or something, and you just know what to do. You know not to go too far, don't do this.

15:30 Always asking, "How safe is it up the road? Who's around? Stop, stop, check, check." It's all those mental things that keep you alive. It's more dangerous to be a cameraman or a sound recordist than it is to be a soldier in a lot of wars, because you're there, you're vulnerable. You haven't got a gun to shoot back. You're not taking

16:00 orders from the military operation to go forward or back, or a platoon goes here, goes there, you're at your own judgement call. You're very vulnerable, so you've gotta be very disciplined. There's nothing like experience, but it takes time to get experience. You learn as the years go on. You get a smell. You look at people and you get an idea. "How safe is it here? Pull back from here. We don't need to go through there to get this sequence, we don't need it." It's not being weak

16:30 or anything, it's just being sensible. You could be dead, or worse still, lose an arm or a leg or something.

That calmness must feed in well with the discipline?

Yeah, I don't know where it comes from that calmness, but it does. It doesn't matter whether you're not right. It doesn't matter what you do, it's just nothing's worse than working with people who panic or

17:00 become artificial, covering up their scaredness by being a bit silly. Neil Davis was incredibly calm. I remember once going into a battle in Cambodia with Neil. He went in a bit further. I had a sound recordist with me, and a slate board. It felt like a Hollywood production. I got pinned,

17:30 I usually had a clear camera, had a sync lead to the Agra, [sound recording device] and the sync lead snapped and I was in one foxhole and he was over there and the bullets were flying and there's mortars coming in. If you keep your head down low enough you can. If a mortar lands there, the explosion will go over your head if you're in close to them. I thought, "What the hell am I doing here? How did I get caught in this no-man's-land?" Eventually it stopped, so I eventually ran back and got back out of that area.

18:00 5 minutes later who comes out but Neil Davis, "Have you got a cigarette?" "You know I don't smoke." He lays in a hammock, lights up a cigarette, calm as you like, just another day. That could have been an adrenalin thing or something with Neil. It never was with me, it was more news and that. Neil said he liked that sort of stuff. Calmness,

18:30 or trying to be in control, is real tremendous concentration on what's going on around you in those situations is so important, communication skills of people too.

Did you develop that calmness at an early age?

I think it's in early age. I think I've always had it. It gets easier as you get more experience. It's still horrible. Any battle you go into, you don't know. You feel so vulnerable, you feel you're gonna get your arm shot off. You don't think about

19:00 getting killed. You worry about losing your arm. You go and hide behind a tree, which wouldn't do any good for you anyway. That's a horrible thing that. But people ask, "Why do you cover battle?" Well, I don't cover bang-bang battles. If you're doing a story or a film, that is a major part of a story; it's gotta be, so you've gotta get some of that. You've got to get some sequences of that to go with the rest of the story or film that

19:30 you're trying to make, the story you're trying to tell. It's not as if you're gung-ho, chasing bullets around the place, certainly not in my case.

One of your first jobs was with the ABC in Hobart?

Well, I did all the other stuff, the still work stuff before. It was the first television, filmmaking, the film department, yeah.

How did you get that job? What was it like to work there?

They advertised for a trainee or camera

20:00 assistant in the film department. There were four cameramen, one assistant, a couple of sound recordists, ten editing people I think. I think it was a two-month assignment to go there. I ended up staying. One of the cameramen wasn't very well so they used to ask me to go and shoot stuff for him. Supposedly I was quite natural or good

20:30 at it from an early age, once I learned the mechanics of it. They told me I was pretty good at it. So it just developed from there. It wouldn't happen today, because it's so difficult to get in and do these things, but because Tasmania is a small place the opportunities were there, if you're any good. If you weren't any good, you wouldn't get another take out there. So I got this opportunity at a very early age then to work on this program called Line Up, which was a pilot program

21:00 for This Day Tonight. We were doing 10-minute pieces and 6-minute pieces, it was a current affairs magazine program, so it gave me the great experience of learning filmmaking; structure of shots, making sequences, sequences make a little film and everything else. Me and a reporter, sometimes a sound recordist, and away you go. We're all learning on the road together. So if you're creative and have a few ideas, it was wonderful.

They gave you a pretty free rein there?

21:30 Yeah, they were wonderful terrific people who were all, basically they were all learning, cos it was pretty early days of television.

What year are we looking at?

1966-67. All black and white.

What kind of stories were you doing?

Such a variety of stories. I remember doing a story we did at the playback

22:00 of The Seekers [Australian pop singing quartet] were into a period of Tasmania and Hey There Georgie Girl. So we got a few models dressed up in that and took them down the beach and got them to mime Hey There Georgie Girl, and that sort of stuff. Then you go up to Launceston and do a heavy piece on the problems of the local hospital. You do 7 or 8 minutes explaining the lack of money, they couldn't afford to buy new equipment, and the political stories; the whole thing that makes up a program like

The 7:30 Report today.

What were you learning while you were doing that?

Learning more about direction, about structuring a story, a film. Getting sequences, telling a story, how a film goes together, plus learning the communication skills of people you're dealing with, whether it's the premier, the governor, the garbage collector. Also learning about new equipment that was coming out, lightweight cameras.

I was the first person supposedly to be a one-man band. I bought an Éclair camera with an Agra, where I could do the whole thing basically on my own, very pioneering stuff with handheld cameras. Before that, everything was basically on a tripod because the cameras were very heavy. Pro 600, which is a huge big thing, the box and the sound equipment to run the magnetic sound on the camera,

you had all these big boxes of equipment. But the Éclair, which is a French camera, you sat it on your shoulder and you could take it off the tripod and you could get in there and really photo verite. You could really capture good journalism; tell a story with a handheld camera by doing this. You knew what you were doing, a full stop, a comma, going down to something, shoelaces being tied up on a shoe or something. You'd have to, "Stop, do it again, tie your shoelaces."

You could do it all in one take, which is very exciting filmmaking in those days. No one was doing it before. We could do it because we had the new French Éclair camera that was made for handholding. So it was really pushing to the limits too. We just kept trying new things, totally out of convention with what was going on. Put the things into the sun and get all the flare through the lens, put a bit of music to it and try all these things. We had the support of everybody down there to do that.

Must have been good for your confidence as well?

Yes, and it's knowing when to use a tripod and when not to. You're totally in charge. You can't be any closer than using a camera. Everybody else around, but if you've got your eye to that eye-piece and you know how you can use it to tell a story, you're totally in control of the whole situation.

You were talking to important

people and people on the street, but you were a shy kid. Was this a big transformation?

I was pushing myself to try to get rid of that, "Try to kill that off, that over-sensitivity or shyness or whatever it might be". You just kept fighting away at yourself to get better and better. What

hit me all of a sudden after a couple of years was this privilege of the people you meet from the prime minister through to the garbage collector. Barry Humphries [Australian satirist] turning up one day. Having long chats with them. The next day you'd be going down to Lake Pedder to cover flooding Lake Pedder, the beautiful lake in Tasmania. The Franklin River. Bob Brown [Australian politician and environmentalist] was fighting against flooding it.

You covered that?

Yeah, all that

stuff. Then you'd be off flying in a light aeroplane somewhere else to do a story somewhere else. The privilege of what this work can give you if you put it back in and do it properly. Not just running off here and there, but it's more than that, this incredible privilege. Even a lawyer or a doctor in many ways are quite limited when you get to understand what they're about, but in this

work that I've been privileged to do, it takes you to all parts of the world. And the fascinating people you meet, but don't just think of meeting them because you've met them, but what you can learn from meeting interesting people and then putting it back in, in your own way. Or doing work that you feel might be looked at later, parts of history.

Did you ever feel the need to be in front of the camera?

Not really, I must say times, it's all in the book, I used to be a bit upset that some of the reporters got all the glory and sometimes they weren't even there or whatever. You and the sound recordist and the editor were doing all the real work. It still does upset me a bit because I'm a great believer there are some wonderful cameramen out there who don't get the credit of what they deserve. The

reporter gets all the credit. But, deep down, I know, to have control of that instrument, if you've got the freedom with it to do your own thing or whatever, it's the most satisfying thing cos you're totally in control of what comes out on the television set, even a movement. Better if you're doing the structure and editing of it and everything else. I think really it can be the most satisfying, the creative

side of it, I think. I've had a lot of my reporter colleagues even say that. A lot of reporter work is nuts and bolts. I think there is an injustice in some ways about the, some people say "I didn't know that was you in Vietnam with Mike Willesee [Australian reporter], I thought Mike does all that, or Ray Martin".

Does that bother you?

Well, it does a bit.

28:30 Not just personally, but for me and my colleagues, because you're out there in the frontline getting shot at and sometimes your colleague might be back in the hotel room. You actually are doing it physically and journalistically and I don't think, it does bother me that there's not enough recognition for other people. That's why I like going out doing stories under the 'Unsung Heroes'.

What happened after the Hobart bureau? Did you get

29:00 **transferred straight up to Sydney?**

I was appointed the ABC cameraman to be based in Southeast Asia. But I was engaged to Stephanie.

She's a Tasmanian girl?

Yeah. I said, "I'm engaged." They did say in the ad, "Single man preferred" but they gave it to me. They said, "We're pleased to announce that you've been appointed." I asked them could I get married and they said, "As long as you get married quickly." They wanted to check Stephanie out to make sure she'd make a nice ABC wife.

29:30 "Yes, that's all right."

What does that require?

I don't know. The day before we got married they said, "Asia's off because you're getting married." That was the first overseas job the ABC had for a cameraman ever in the world and I got it out of a lot of people.

They must have thought you were doing pretty good work.

Well, the Tasmanian bushfires, then these two loves, Life and Four Corners. They said,

30:00 "What would you like to do?" I said, "I'd love to work on Four Corners" so I came to Sydney and I eventually worked on Four Corners. Looking back on my life, it was probably better than going to Asia, to live up in Singapore fulltime, because I learned so much by going to that top documentary program in the country, one of the best in the world. I worked with some of the best people in the business. Everybody who's really made it have all worked on Four Corners at some stage of their life, the real

30:30 top people. There are people around doing this work, but to be right up there in that top thing, not many people get there, and the few who have worked on that program, have, Mike Willisee, Ray and Geoff McMullen, Hogan and a few others. But the Tasmanian bushfires was another big thing that I did down there. Most of the senior cameramen were on holidays on Black Tuesday near the southern part of Tasmania. I was sent out to cover

31:00 the bushfires. I felt very guilty going out filming peoples' homes burning - they're at the front trying to put the home out and I'm there filming it - tremendously guilty. So now and then I put the camera down, a Bell & Howell, three lenses. Have you ever seen a Bell & Howell? A beautiful camera. Three turret lenses: 75, 50 and a 10. 100 feet, two minutes forty seconds, that's what you had to tell a story in for news.

31:30 No videotape. 100 feet is all you're allowed, so you edited in the camera. Rough edit. Close up, wide shot, pan here, pan there. I put the camera down and rushed in to drag out paintings, furniture, books, then get it up and take a bit more film. Put it down again. I felt guilty, but I had to do a job too. When that film went all around the world

32:00 with this Vis News, now Reuters Television, that brought a lot of help and aid into Tasmania. I realised how powerful television is. This is before the little girl in Vietnam who lost her leg, got her leg blown off. And I didn't feel so guilty because I knew this did some good. This little bit of film I did here, it's done a bit of good for Tasmania. I still haven't lost that caring. I won't just keep filming. It's a big judgement call of "Do you film or do you stop or

32:30 what do you do?" Somebody's there dying in front of you and…

Have you had to make that decision a few times?

My word I have. Many times. Children dying in front of me of starvation and malnutrition.

And you put your camera down?

Well, I thought, "How important is it to do this?" I feel it's a gut thing at the time whether you do it; it's a sensitivity thing. Sensitivity is a two-way sword. It's very

33:00 painful if you're over-sensitive or sensitive. Also, in our type of work, it can be very important cos you think of the other person's sensitivity. If you're hurting, they're hurting. A lot of people haven't got sensitivity and they don't realise just the way the gene is in the brain that sets the balance of sensitivity. That's why I picked that judgement in Tasmania, "How far do I film or I don't?" When I knew I had enough, I put the

33:30 camera down, go inside, help, and I was filming this house burning down and this woman was standing there beside me and her husband was on the roof trying to get under the tin to put the flames out. A horse came around on fire. She looked at me and said, “You’re not gonna film this, are you?” I felt sick, “No, I’m not gonna film that.” Here I am, her

34:00 house burning down, her husband on the roof trying to put it out, she’s down there throwing buckets of water, all this going on. This is some of these.

What did you do?

I didn’t film that, but I rushed inside to grab things out. Getting out bits of furniture, just to help to save something. I’ve always tried to maintain that cos I remember in Somalia a few years later a

34:30 little boy who was in this camp, he was dying. He was so weak. People threw buckets of water over him just to wash him. There was no sensitivity about it.

Instead of bathing him?

Yeah, they just threw a bucket. I think, “You’re just treating him like an animal here.” There were hundreds of kids dying in that place. So I didn’t film that, but I filmed

35:00 that boy, but I wasn’t gonna film that because of the dignity. One other example of sensitivity in the type of work that I have done is once in the Sudan I was staying at this Hilton Hotel, had a buffet for lunch, help yourself to whatever you want. After that, got in the car, drive about 20 minutes to a refugee camp, and these children, I’ve got that on film here, shown on the 7:30 Report,

35:30 these children were dying while I just had a 5-course meal at the hotel. How bizarre is that? So I filmed these children. I was hanging on for life to this nurse, holding this little thing, holding on for life, so I filmed that in a very sensitive way with the eyes, the face, then close up to this hanging on, cos they’re gonna die. And they did. So I did it in a very sensitive way. But it was quite bizarre that I’d come from a 5-course meal hotel 20 minutes away,

36:00 had plenty of food, and I think, “There’s something fundamentally wrong here. We put somebody on the moon, but hang on, we can have a 5-course meal, why can’t these kids? What’s going wrong here?”

How do you juggle that in your mind?

It’s very, very hard. You feel very, very guilty and you feel very bad about that. You come on a plane, 20 hours later you’re back in Australia and how fortunate, how lucky we are in this country, which we take for granted. But the

36:30 thing that helps me I think is when that film went to air, the amount of money and aid that it brought in from people who saw that story. For instance, on that same assignment, this woman that I met, the Australian nurse, Eva Dougherty, we’re out in the middle of the desert in the Sudan and we’re in this little mud hut where this mother was in there with all her children in the middle of nowhere and she had a bad

37:00 abscess. I said to Eva, interviewing her, I said, “What’s wrong with her, she’s got an abscess.” She said, “She can’t go to the hospital cos it’ll take her six days to walk to the nearest hospital. She can’t leave the children cos there’s no one to look after them.” I said, “What can we do?” She said, “I haven’t even got an aspirin to give her.” When we ran that segment, “I haven’t even got an aspirin to give her.” the next day we had $10,000 worth of aspirin donated to CARE.

37:30 That’s the excuse, that’s what I think, I don’t think it is an excuse, I believe that’s what makes it worthwhile for me. I can tell many stories like that, even more graphic ones than that. You won’t change the world, but in your own quiet way you can help. By that going to air, to get that $10,000 worth of aspirin that went straight to the people, it makes it worthwhile.

38:00 **That has greater effect than you handing over an aspirin at the time or putting down your camera?**

Yeah. Getting the aspirin to go straight to the, just think of the pain. To have an aspirin to take the pain away for a start, let alone getting her all fixed up. That’s why I think we should do more of this. What’s my reason for being here in the year 2003 and 2004 is that television is getting worse and worse. It’s very, very

38:30 hard to get good programs on, to get good stories like that, important stories like that on, because we want ‘reality’ television, Big Brother. Thank God in this country we’ve got the ABC and SBS that you can get some of these programs up on, when you’ve got good people who believe in the same values that you do, and we’re very fortunate to have that, but it’s not getting better or easier, it’s getting harder. That’s what worried me, where we’re going.

39:00 **Why is there such an obsession with ‘reality’ TV?**

Because it’s so easy to sit and look at. It takes your mind off. People don’t like looking at, I don’t mean we’ve got to stop and look at stuff that I’ve done 24 hours a day, of course not, but there’s gotta be a balance. There’s nothing wrong with game shows or dramas or light entertainment or whatever, but

let’s never forget about doing good current affairs or good news programs and good documentaries. Whether they’re small audiences or not, it’s the responsibility

39:30 for people who own television stations, commercial and public, to put on good quality as well as the other light entertainment, the light relief stuff I call it. It’s so important, but it comes back to the dollar. It’s all to do with money. The other day Australian Idol, Kerry O’Brien that was on the 7:30 Report said when they said, “This is great entertainment.” he went one step further and said, “It’s nothing to do with entertainment, it’s to do with money.” Money, profits, making money, money, money. That’s all very well,

40:00 I understand the capitalist system, I can see how it works, economics, but we have got a responsibility for people like us to get money, to allow us to go and do this work to make people… Most people get moved by some of this stuff, it makes them realise how fortunate they are and maybe they might give a little bit of money to CARE or OXFAM to help these people, the imbalance, the suffering of people in other parts of the world. That’s why I think it’s so

40:30 important that we have good current affairs, good documentaries and good news programs. Must never let that go. Whether they rate or not, it’s the responsibility of society. It’s so powerful and we know television, we all get sucked into it, even us in the business. It’s a powerful thing, that television screen, more than radio, newspapers, more powerful than going to study at the university. There’s something about it that grabs you.

41:00 **Did you get a lot more respect from your own peers after covering the Tasmanian bushfires?**

Yes, it did. Anyone can cover a bushfire, bit it’s like a car accident, they make graphic pictures. That helped me get that job in Southeast Asia. That got me recognised of covering a bushfire. I wish it was something more beautiful or something that I’d done, but it doesn’t work that way. It’s sensationalism that people seem to

41:30 remember. Yes, that gave me the kick-start of my career onto the international scene I suppose.

Did you speak to them, say the woman whose house you helped save, after the footage had gone out?

No. I went back years later when Australian Story did a piece on me. We went back through some of the areas where those bushfires, they got me wandering around some of those areas. I thought about that. It’s like the little girl in Vietnam who got her leg

42:00 blown off. I’d love to go back and find her.

Tape 3

00:30 **David, just getting back to that transition you made from Tasmania to Sydney in Four Corners, how old were you when that offer came up?**

23, I think it was.

Did you, had the opportunity, like were your sort of desperate to get out of Tasmania at that stage, were you feeling insular, isolated down there?

Yeah, well after being knocked back on the Asian job, it broke my heart.

01:00 Poor old Stephanie, I used to blame her for that afterwards, oh, a bit cruel I suppose I was but, yeah, after I missed out on that job, and every time Neil would come back talking about Asia, I never really wanted to go to Europe or go to the United States, it always Asia, that always interested me, I just found it just fascinating. And once missing out on that job because of getting married, I really then wanted to get out of Tasmania, it was a bigger

01:30 world out there and to be talking to Neil, I always wanted to go to cover the Vietnam War, because it was the biggest story in the world.

Let’s just talk about, while you’re here, your relationship with Neil. When did you first meet him and how did that friendship develop?

Well, Neil was the first cameraman the ABC employed in Tasmania, first staff cameraman. I was quite a few years younger than Neil. Neil was working

02:00 at the ABC when I was still studying photography in Brian Curtis and Associates, the still photographers. But I met Neil in, we used to go, the ABC used to have a hotel you could go and have a drink at near the ABC studios in Hobart and I’d always be in there, so you’d always meet these wonderful characters. And, not that I was close to Neil then, but then Neil went to, then once Neil was appointed to work for Vis News,

02:30 based in Singapore, then the person who was below him, Peter Donnelly, went into his position and then somewhere there I came in, but Neil had already gone. Not knowing Neil well, but Neil always wanted to use small cameras, he started off with a government film unit where they used to do, you know, big features and, oh, small features but all 35 mm movie picture stuff.

03:00 But he always loved little cameras, little compared to the big ones you use on the..

So he liked the Rolleiflex technology.

He like the Rolleiflex and the little Arriflex SL, SR and the Bell & Howell. He was more of a, he was a real true newsman; I suppose you could call Neil. You know, he was a fine all round journalist and camera work and story telling. But mainly news was his forte, but I think mine was current affairs documentaries,

03:30 that was my main interest and that's the area I sort of spent most of the time. And I don't mind covering news, international news is fine, but I'm not going to, I did my share of filming pot plants and shows and all those, ribbons being cut on various things. And so then Neil used to come back every year, he had a very good friend, Johnny Wright, he was a cameraman at the ABC, Neil got in there, he was working at the film

04:00 unit. So I listened to, go and had a drink, listened to Neil, had a meal with them and I just got intrigued with what he was saying about Asia. This is 1965/66. And I used to listen and I learned a lot and I thought, "This is definitely the way I want to go". But years later, a very dear friend of mine at the time, we were very close, Dean Semmler [cinematographer], was on This Day Tonight and I was on Four Corners, so I thought I was more superior.

04:30 Then he left and went to work with Film Australia, this was going back, I said, "You're going backwards, going there." and then when he won the Academy Award, what was it called? Wolves? Dances With Wolves, I thought "Touché." but looking back on it, I was still, the way I went was, this sort of stuff, with Neil Davis, the real sort of photojournalism or whatever. And I learned so,

05:00 listened, and I think looking back on it, I learned so much just observing him and then…

Did you used to pick his brains in those situations?

Yeah, all the time I was quizzing him about what was going on in Asia. He had a tremendous style about him too, Neil, he was a real foreign correspondent in the true sense, and

What characteristics did that mean that he displayed?

Well he just, he was a great learner, but he knew, one thing, even some of the finest journalists in Asia,

05:30 people like Sydney Schoenberg of the New York Times who won a Pulitzer Prize for The Killing Fields, that film basically based on his life, they'd go to Neil for advice, they'd ask Neil, "What's going on, what's happening?" I remember once when Willesee and Sloss and I went to Vietnam, we'd always go and catch up with Neil. We'd go to a bar or a restaurant in Saigon, during the war it was a fantastic place, Saigon, great setting, and

06:00 all happening there. And we'd ask Neil, you know, because we'd go in, he's living there, we had to do these stories in three or four weeks, two weeks, so Neil put us onto people. And one person he put us onto was a general called Thieu Quan Tri, who was in charge of Saigon/Cambodian region. A three star general trained at WestPoint, baseball cap, big cigar, shiny boots, the whole American thing, brilliant man. We were going into Cambodia with him one

06:30 day into a battle, we met him at the airport and he said, this is a very powerful general, he said "If you're a friend of Mr Davis's, you're a friend of mine, please come on my helicopter". So that's the respect Neil had. And I knew this about him, just something, Mike Willesee got up once and said at the Logies [Australian television awards], I think he said this, that Neil Davis was the greatest correspondent in South East Asia; a big compliment from another very fine journalist, Mike. And so that's the sort of guy he

07:00 was. So every time we went to Vietnam or in Asia or whatever, I'd always watched and I always learnt so much from how he operated, not operated a camera, operated as a correspondent, and that's what made a great influence on my life, still to this day.

That's a clear role model from a…

And a real role model, not an artificial role model; somebody who I observed at close quarters. But also a very

07:30 stylish bloke, I mean the Cambodian people loved him very much, he was a very gentle person and very much an Asian in some ways in his own right, a Buddhist, a thinker, incredibly intelligent but also very practical. He took a lot of his money to orphanages that people didn't know about until he got killed. But, you know, he had, as an overall package, a great influence on me, starting from those early days in Tasmania. But not in the work,

08:00 his work, he believed, he liked hard news. Because of my time with Four Corners I realised you could do a lot more in Four Corners than you can do in news. You can tell a story better and you've got time and

you can develop it and you can hold shots and do proper sequences that will explain, tell what's going on.

So you felt like you both had your own territory?

Yes, but he's also very…

08:30 **Just pause it there. Where we were at?**

We were talking about this, it wasn't just because he was a great communicator, a great war cameraman, obviously that was part of it, his stuff was just terrific. But it was more than that, it was the whole package, just the courtesy of the man, the, I mean the, you know the example I gave you of this general, "If you're a

09:00 friend of Mr Davis's, you're a friend of mine, please jump on my helicopter. I'll take you into Cambodia." I mean, that's the sort of respect that the bloke had.

Just before we move further into Sydney, just out of curiosity, what sort of cameras were you actually trained on when you first began?

In Tasmania or Sydney?

In Tasmania.

Well, Tasmania being the smallest state, we always had probably limited, the worst gear, but it was a great training place, Tasmania.

09:30 And those days, we had one, a nightly news service and a nightly current affairs programme, a rural department, an education department, a sports department with one sound camera. Which was called a Pro 600, Oricon Pro, which was a huge big, the camera alone was about two and a half feet long and a big lens, you had to use a measuring tape to focus. You had all the associated bits with it and it was

10:00 optical soundtrack on the film, so you had a converter, so you'd try to, you had to get the camera up to speed, it might take you 400 feet to get the film up to speed. But could have it for two hours a day because news wanted it or somebody else wanted it, so we had to do all this juggling stuff. Then we had a couple of Bell & Howells and a couple of ST Ari cameras, which are a beautiful German camera, all fixed lenses. So again, it was a whole thing of a small unit having to share, just get on with it, so it was tremendous training. You wouldn't get that in Sydney because

10:30 you wouldn't have to, so, they weren't as hard up as we were.

So when you got to Sydney, what sort of gear were they using?

Well they started to use the Éclair, which I mentioned to you earlier, which, on Four Corners they were because they were a photojournalist's camera, because you could handhold them. You could get off the tripod and really get amongst it and feel it. As I said earlier, getting in there the sweat, the eyes, the hairs on the hands.

And at that

11:00 **stage there were no real rules as far as when you were allowed to take the camera off the tripod or how long you were allowed to do**

Well,

stuff on your shoulder, was it up to you?

It was up to you, it's up to you and, yeah, a lot of people say, "That's rubbish, all that handheld stuff." the old conservative people, I mean, you know, and things change, just like things changed now to mini DV [digital video] cameras, I mean, a lot of people still say, "Oh, they're rubbish, they're amateur cameras." well in many ways they probably are but I've seen some wonderful

11:30 documentaries come out on them, beautiful. We're all going through this whole change all the time.

So was handheld work considered to be state of the art and that sort of?

Well, yeah, it was starting to be that way, I mean, anybody can know how to hold a camera, but it's knowing how to used that camera. Timing, pacing, seeing things with the other eye, I mean, with the editing process, you know, building up sequences, again telling a story. There are people are good at it and people are not good at it, some people are exceptionally good at it and it's,

12:00 to me, I've been told I was always very natural. Well for me it was very natural to hand hold it, but it's knowing when to use a tripod and when not to, there's certain structuring again, it's knowing that balance. "Right I'm going to use a hand held here." bang, bang, enough of that, tripod, boom, boom, it's that whole thing of building it up.

And the whole business of putting a sequence together that's going to cut, were you given fundamental rules or was that, once again, up to you to just to sort of work out

12:30 **for yourself?**

Yeah, learn and work out. But I spent a lot of time with some editors, I mean; I'd go and have a drink with some editors on Four Corners, probably some of the greatest editors in this country worked on that programme. And I'd say to them, "What am I doing wrong? What do you need from me?" We'd sit down, I'd say "Right". To this day I'll climb a mountain to get that simple top shot, pan ten feet, pan left ten feet, pan, pan right. You mightn't use that top shot but by God, how many times an editor needs a shot to get out of something and just drop in that top shot. Little

13:00 things like that. Always think of the editor, that's the most important thing. To give enough stuff that he can play with, give him different ways of maybe cutting it together so then you can write to it and all that sort of stuff.

So you arrived in Sydney and you…

'68, 1968.

Okay, and you commenced work with Four Corners straight away or?

No, I worked on some documentaries for a while and then when a vacancy came up I went to Four Corners in 69.

13:30 And then I got talking to Mike Willesee and, he'd already been to Vietnam, and soon we went up to Vietnam then, plus all the other stuff that we did.

So that first visit to Vietnam for you, was there a specific agenda that you and Mike had in mind or did you just want to get over there and see?

No, we had ideas. We always had, discussed it with the producer what sort of ideas,

14:00 but a lot of it, as you know yourself, it's when you get out there things change. You get a rough idea but you develop it as you go along. Once I put up an idea that every, you always read in newspapers, "Dateline: Saigon." "Saigon." "Saigon." hang on what's Saigon really, how does it tick? So I suggested we go and do a story on Saigon "Life goes on" and enduring all the war around you, boom, boom, boom, all the time, people are playing tennis at the French Sportif, drinking champagne, a game of tennis and all around you there's a war going on. Life does

14:30 go on amongst all this hell. So I think, "I want to show a bit of that." because I thought, "This is interesting".

So you were in a position where you could have input into story ideas?

Oh yes, that was the great thing about Four Corners, anybody, Monday mornings would be a meeting where everybody was in there and you all throw stories around, it was very much a great team spirit thing. That's what the great success of it was.

How many would've been in the team at that stage roughly?

Counting researchers and production assistants and everybody, it's about 30,

15:00 35, 30 people I think.

So you'd been obviously keeping a close eye on Vietnam, what was your perspective on the whole situation at that point just prior to your heading over there for the first time?

Well, as I said earlier, I was brought up in that period of Menzies, Harold Holt, "All the Way with LBJ" [Lyndon B. Johnson, then President of the USA] and when you're young you're very impressionable about these things, the Communists are dreadful

15:30 people, they're all going to come down here if we don't stop them, all this propaganda and, but once I got to Vietnam I realised, and I didn't know much about Vietnam, I knew a little bit of the history about it before, about the French, the colonial powers of Indochina. But when you meet…it's their country, don't get involved. That wasn't like the Second World War, it wasn't even like Korea, this is a war we should've

16:00 never got involved in.

Did you feel that way

I felt that

prior to your arrival?

No. After I'd been there once or twice it really hit me that, this is part of a documentary I made called The Price of Victory, I talk about this in that, that it's their country. You could feel it; you knew it, let them sort it out. Let's try to help if we can in a decent way, but not to send in fighting soldiers which, all of our own people are going to get killed plus

16:30 them, because they will fight. Ho Chi Minh made it very clear that he wanted; he tried to get the Americans onside, he wanted, he loved America, he wanted Americans, he went to America, they

wouldn't listen to him. To not to get involved and to try to help us, to economically try to get us have their own society whether it's socialism or not. Capitalism will never work properly in those sort of places, it's a different system, different culture. And so I knew that and

17:00 even when the Americans pulled out in '72, and the Australians, late '72, the war went on till 1975. But the important thing for people like Willesee, myself and John Pennington and Bob Sloss to go there regularly, and we're very, you know, we're very fortunate that Four Corners could send us there, very important they did, because to try to show the true side of this

17:30 war. What was it about? What were we trying to prove? What, why were we there? At the end of the day, we were there because the politicians put us there because of this so-called…they were scared of the spread of Communism. It hasn't, you know, 40, 50 years, 40 years later. But looking back on some of that film work that we did then, it's so important that we did do it because now it's history. If you look back on some of that stuff, we can learn lessons from that hopefully.

18:00 **Did you think that prior to that work going to air in Australia, that the true story had been glimpsed, portrayed at all by Australian television?**

Properly? No, I mean it, we started doing it and a few print journalists who went up there, and most Australians believed in the war because we were told the Communists were not nice people. They'll overrun us or they'll do this or they'll do that, because you remember in that time of history that no one stopped in

18:30 Asia, they'd all go straight to London on the aeroplane, you know, you couldn't drink water in Asia, you don't stop there, so we didn't know anything about, but part of, geographically part of Asia but knowing nothing about it. And so we were scared of Asia, they were different, the Asians are different, you know, they'll come, they'll take us, squillions of them, they'll sweep down here. And I think that's why it was important for programs like Four Corners to go out on a limb, take on the government, and a lot of senior managers in the

19:00 ABC who were all for the war, they were all pretty right wing. But we did things on principle that we believed in to show both sides of this. And that's what the great thing about, we were so lucky, I was, to have that opportunity with John Pennington to go to North Vietnam and show it from their side.

So prior to your first visit, you felt that

19:30 **we were justified in having Australian soldiers involved in the war?**

When I was younger?

Prior to that first visit?

No, well, I didn't know enough about it, I didn't, the demonstrations hadn't started by then, or they only started after that, some were around about the same time. I honestly didn't know enough about it. I'd never been to a war

20:00 and growing up in the society I did, you tended to believe your politicians. I was brought up to believe that a politician was an honourable person, or a minister of the church, or a lawyer or a doctor, they were meant to be honourable people, but you look back over the…Four Corners did a story on the 40 Years of Four Corners and they had a lot of politicians in those 40 years and looking back on it now I realise that a lot of them lied for whatever reason.

20:30 So that's the important thing of having programmes like Four Corners.

So was that first visit of yours that this transformation took place in your perspective as far as how you felt about the war in general, how you felt about Australia's participation in that war and how you felt about that material

21:00 **being portrayed in the media?**

Yeah.

Was it that first visit that a lot of…?

Absolutely, because I realised that, a simple thing I realised, because you're actually there, you can say, "Oh yes, they're all very nice people". But actually when you sit down and meet people of a different culture, and we're fundamentally the same, and they're treating me with tremendous courtesy, South and North Vietnam, what are we doing? What is all this about? What are we trying to prove here? What is this war about?

21:30 What are we trying to stop here? We're trying to stop a country setting its own rules, whether it's communist or capitalist.

Did that become a primary motivation then for you, as far as the material that you wanted to produce while you were over there, to get that message across?

Yes, very much so. To try to, also being very aware not to go all one way. I mean, our job is to be balanced, I think, as balanced as you can be, unless you see

22:00 real injustices. It's the job, you can't be too right wing or too…

How challenging is that?

It's very challenging, I think you've got to keep a really clear head on that or you can, I know people who are really, who get really sort of obsessed with something and they can't see the clarity of it, the balance of it. So you've got to have, always have a balance, or leave it with a question mark. You make the decision.

Is that something the Four Corners team spent a lot of time watching

22:30 Yes.

and discussing?

Oh, all the time, yeah. Very important, it was very professional in that sense. You've got to, I mean, it's got to be a, you might say, "Oh that person's so and so, he's this or that." but it's only your view, you know, it's got to be impartial.

Is it hard to be impartial when you see something that is very infuriating in that sort of intense situation?

Well, if it's that bad, you know there's corruption

23:00 involved in it, of course you'll go out on a limb now and then if it's something like that. But when it comes to a political thing, I mean you've got to be a bit, you've got, I mean, Walter Cronkite, the famous American correspondent, he went over to Vietnam, came back, got on air, he was the most powerful man in America, he said, "We should not be in Vietnam, this is wrong". Lyndon Johnson heard it and he said, "If I've lost Walter Cronkite, I've lost the Vietnam War".

23:30 And, but it took years to, when Cronkite said that, it would've been going on for some time. And I think that really set in stone for me, again because I was pretty young, about doing all this other work that I've done. I think in a subconscious way, even if it was just on, not just on but a famine in Ethiopia or something like that.

So can you take us through the first visit? Let's just

24:00 **start with arriving in Saigon for the first time. Can you recall how you were feeling in the aeroplane on arrival, what your expectations were and, or how your feelings changed once you got amongst Saigon?**

Well, you're very apprehensive, you're going into a war and you've read about it on the front page of the newspapers every day, everywhere, on the radio, on the television, everywhere, you're going into a

24:30 war, you've never been to one before it's pretty scary stuff. You don't know what are you getting, all you're seeing is people shooting everybody. And then when you land in Saigon at Tan Son Nhut Airport where all the, that was the biggest airport in the world at the time, all this powerful military machine all around you, tanks, aeroplanes,

25:00 C5 [American heavy lift transport aircraft], the biggest aeroplane in the world, and helicopters and gun ships and everybody with guns and hand grenades; and rushing, the tension, the incredible tension, adrenaline. You know, jeeps everywhere and the whole invasion of a country. That is pretty overpowering that stuff. Did you see the film Apocalypse Now? The first half of that film's pretty spot on.

25:30 Did you see Good Morning Vietnam? Great movie.

Not all of it.

You've got to see it, I've got it here, that's a great movie, there's a lot of truth in that movie. Then you go into Saigon into the city and you book into the hotel and there's barbed wire and machine gun posts and amazing stuff, it's very hard to explain, it's a war machine in operation. Everywhere you go, there's M16s [M16 5.56mm automatic rifle] everywhere you go. Plus the civilians,

26:00 you see the beautiful, sensitive Vietnamese people walking around, trying to make a living, trying to get on with their lives. You've got this tremendous contrast. And then you go out in a helicopter into a battlefield or a battle and then you see people shooting each other or rocketing them with mortars or whatever.

Do you recall the first time you did that?

26:30 **Or one of the earlier times that you can recall?**

Yeah, I, you keep on going up the road and you get less and less people and you start to get a bit scary if no one's around, no civilians, then you run into soldiers in bunkers and everyone just sitting around and most time just sitting around or something happens, something opens up then all hell breaks out. During a lot of that you have your head down of course.

Do you remember the first time you were in a situation where all hell did break out?

Yes.

27:00 **How did you deal with that?**

Well, I think you're very, you're not so much scared but you're very much in shock because it's the noise and the smell. You're trying to film, you're trying to get, you're trying to film but you'd be silly to put your head up too high because you can, blown off.

Was it difficult that very first time to focus on the job at hand?

No, not for me, it wasn't too difficult in that sense. It was,

27:30 it's very scary but, as I said earlier, there's a calmness that came over me and it sort of, you are petrified but you get on with it, you get on with it. Because I think you've also got a camera that gives you a bit of a security blanket in a way, that you're doing something not just stuck there, standing with nothing. I suppose like a soldier with a gun.

Did you feel you could do with a gun as well just sometimes as a

28:00 **security blanket?**

Not really, because if you had a gun you got captured, that would be the end of you, you know, sort of. Maybe it was naïve but never carried a gun. But then you'd come back from that and you'd go and have a nice meal at a French restaurant. So it was bizarre, to cover that war in Indochina, Cambodia as well. Say Vietnam you'd get up in the morning, put on your lovely press safari suit at the Continental Palace Hotel, go and have a lovely breakfast, drive out to the airport

28:30 or drive out some roads to film some battles, sometimes you then come back, you know. In Cambodia, you'd get an old Mercedes Benz car with classical music and the trunk of the car filled up with soft drink and sandwiches and head off to cover the war, quite bizarre, really.

Was that contrast hard to come to terms with?

Yeah, looking back on it, it was, yeah, but it

29:00 just, again got on with it. So you did that, then you'd go and maybe, then you'd go and film the Royal Ballet rehearsing, putting, if you're doing a documentary or something or a current affair story so you'd have all these jigsaws, all these contrasts that happened to make it into a, to tell a story.

How many stories did you do on that first visit with Mike?

Oh, we only did one. Oh, we did two, we'd do a quickie if we could, say, a 15 minuter and get that back. We did one on an orphanage

29:30 just outside Saigon and while we were there, they started to rocket us sort of thing. And then we'd stay and do a, work on a longer story.

And a longer story at that time was life going on in Saigon?

Well, everything, yeah, the politics, you probably interviewed say, the president or the, go out and see what's going on, see how the Vietnamese are holding or fighting the war, the South Vietnamese, interviewed the foreign minister. You just build it up like you do with any story. And try to get information on how the war is going. Is it a

30:00 useless war? Is it a winnable war? Are you winning it? Why do you want to win it? All those sort of obvious things.

What sort of things did you do to try and get to know the people at that stage?

Just tried to spend a bit of time talking to them, if you go to villages with an interpreter. A lot of that really wasn't, you didn't have a lot of time for that because you had so much work to do.

30:30 But I remember once there that it was my birthday and one of our interpreters was a schoolteacher normally and she held a birthday, with all this war going on, they had a birthday party for me at her little house in the middle of Saigon, sitting on boxes and a birthday cake. I can always remember that because life goes on and how lovely, they'd lost everything you know, who would go and do that. That's what used to hit me that these people are being so,

31:00 we blow into their country and blow out but they are being so kind to us, you know, we're the ones who should be kind to them, do more for them what they're doing for us. Just the courtesy, the manners, all these wonderful things and that's what made me feel humble but also made me want to even try to show what was going on here. How stupid this war is.

Did you ever sense suspicion from locals?

Some, oh yes of course you do. A lot of them, the people think you worked for

31:30 the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency, USA] or something with the propaganda. And you didn't know, the

thing that was going on too in Vietnam then was you didn't know who the Viet Cong were. By day they'd be patting you on the back and by night they could put a hand grenade in the restaurant and blow you up. So you didn't know, it was always tremendous tension. That's the thing about a lot of this work over the years is not so much being shot at, you get shot at, but the

32:00 tension. You were going into these tough situations year in, year out. It was incredibly…it must take its toll.

The old boiling frog sort of syndrome.

Yes.

Sitting in the water getting hotter and hotter and not realising.

Yeah, that, just that incredible tension you're under because it's, these places there are, there is tension.

Did you encounter any Australian soldiers over there that first visit?

Yes.

32:30 I'll show you these stories but we used to go down to Nui Dat to the province where the Australians were. And I must say, the Australians, not because I'm a great loyalist Australian but a loyal Australian from Tasmania but I must say they were terrific. Not just as

33:00 fighting soldiers, they were very disciplined, particularly in tropical warfare, probably the best in the world. And also very disciplined and get on with it because they were smaller, small units they've got to work together to get on with it. But what I really noticed that time, it wasn't just the fighting which they were good at, it was also the civil work they did, like building schools and windmills. We were doing sequences on that. So the local population really did like them because they

33:30 liked the Aussie attitude, "G'day mate, we'll help you build a school here." or build a windmill. And they built a school once that I was filming and they were cutting the ribbon to open it and just then the senior officer said, "Well we're leaving, we're leaving Vietnam". And the sadness that they were leaving Vietnam there, because they'd really grown to like and respect the digger, which was quite, I always remember it was quite moving. With the Americans, instead of checking something out, they see a

34:00 movement up the road, they called in an air strike because they've got the power to do that. Well Australians, they'd send up a scout to find out what was happening there and probably nothing happening, but it was all that sort of… Australian soldier is, if we've got to have war, overall, the dealings I've had with them over the last 35, 40 years it's been terrific. I feel very proud to be in their company because they are generally good. If they weren't, I wouldn't say that. And I spent more time going out

34:30 with South Vietnamese than I'd go out with the Americans because the Americans are too dangerous mostly.

What were the other differences between the Australian forces and the American forces that you observed?

Well, I think it's a, the Americans and I, American dealing and my daughter's an American but I noticed in Saigon, I sat on the veranda of the Continental Palace Hotel where Graham Greene wrote The Quiet American, and I'd

35:00 watch the Americans in their jeeps with their feet up on the dashboard, with an M16, bubblegum or a big cigar, listening to music as if they owned the city. That was their town, their city. There's no quicker way of turning people off. It was their country, not America's, but this whole thing, where the Australians and the New Zealanders are just so courteous and so decent, it's their style, they grow respect where the Americans lose it.

35:30 It's partly the same what's happened in Iraq right now. They go in, they feel they run the place and that turns people off. We wouldn't want people coming here telling us what to do, some foreign power, send troops in here. But I can always remember seeing these, going past in these jeeps, and the feet up on the dashboard and the big cigar, "This is our town, this is not your town, it's ours". Just a lack of respect, where the Australians had restraint, respect and decency.

36:00 I've noticed year in year out, same in Somalia.

What can you put that down to?

I put down to, America is like it is because America's a pretty arrogant country because it's so big and so powerful, and they think by being powerful you'll win, but it doesn't always work that way. We're a small country where we know that,

36:30 we haven't got the ego of the Americans and haven't got Hollywood. I think America's become so, overall as a nation, not individually, there's some wonderful Americans, but as a nation it's become so arrogant of itself. I noticed that that first time in 1969 in Vietnam when they came round the corner in their jeep.

Did you get an opportunity to talk much to the Australian

37:00 **soldiers on that visit?**

Yeah, yeah. A lot of Australians, we spoke to them and that was, some of the officers were a bit worried that, you know, they were very suspicious of a television crew, they might say something wrong, we might offend the government or whatever at the time, but there was always that as you know, the media and them.

So they had a concern as

37:30 **far as how they were being portrayed in the media at that stage?**

Yeah, oh they were very conscious, they always are, they're very conscious of the media. If they feel like you're there to find something wrong with them, well they won't speak from their heart because they won't get into any trouble. And they put it down to the security, that's not always the case, at least with the Americans you ask them anything and they'll tell you anything, which I think is a wonderful

38:00 freedom, to be able to do that. That's one thing I don't like about our way of doing things.

So was it challenging sometimes, to get the honesty that you were after?

Very much so, you'd always get the line, "I can't answer that sir, you take that back to Canberra." "Ask so-and-so, he might be able to help you out with that". You know, he wouldn't tell us; we had one general there who did speak a bit from the heart but it cost him his job. So

38:30 all that stuff that goes, you know, he was saying at the time that he didn't think the war was right, but that wasn't the philosophy of the government at the time. Another thing that's wrong because I know for security reasons you've got to be careful what you say, of course you have got to be or get killed. But I did feel that, I think looking back on Vietnam, if a few more people spoke from the heart

39:00 it mightn't have gone on as long and there mightn't be so many people killed.

So you know that his demotion was directly related to that statement that he made for you?

Pretty well, yeah.

Can you mention who he was?

No.

Was there, did the troops have much awareness of the degree of the process that was starting in Australia at that stage? Was that something they wanted to talk about?

39:30 Well obviously, a lot of the conscripts didn't want to be there. But we could talk to a few of them, but selected ones I think if I remember, but a lot of them, I know they just wouldn't allow us to speak to them because they might say something that they didn't, this is, the government's, you know, their philosophy of why we were there, that was the lie.

What was the morale like in

40:00 **general amongst the Australians at that stage?**

I think the morale of the Australians was pretty good, it was very good. Australians always have great morale, they get on with the job, you know, they do get on with it, whether they believe in it or not. Is that the end of the tape, is it?

No, that's our little sign to say that we're getting close to the end of the tape. Did you end up in any combat situations with Australian soldiers on that visit?

40:30 Went out on patrols with them but nothing, no, nothing happened.

Were there any close calls in general for you during that time?

Oh, then, oh you get fired at, yes, oh I mean, when we went out with the South Vietnamese we came into a heavy firefight. You know, the VC [Viet Cong] opened up nearby and you keep your head down.

41:00 **Were you the only camera covering that situation?**

Yeah, yes. But I mean that happens, that sort of stuff happens all the time but it's not, I mean it happens all the time, you come under all that sort of stuff, you go to wars, I mean, that's what happens.

Did you

I feel a bit tired, hot or something.

Well we can take a break.

Yeah.

We're right at the

41:30 **end of the tape anyway, so that's fine.**

Yeah, yeah.

Tape 4

00:37 **When you were filming Triumph or Tragedy in Vietnam in 1970, what kind of filmmaking methods did you use to show what was going on with the people?**

Before I went to Vietnam, all the stuff that I used to see coming out of Vietnam was mainly the guns going off, whether it was artillery or helicopters

01:00 firing away. You never saw people. You never saw the people who were being shot at or the soldiers who were doing it. I think we all like to look at a face, the eyes, just be part of the people. That's what it's about, people. What I tried to do with Mike and Bob in 1970 Four Corners, Triumph or Tragedy film we did was try to relate it to the people. I remember once in that film the South Vietnamese

01:30 weren't getting much of a run. It was always the Americans or the Australians. People laughed at the South Vietnamese. We didn't laugh at them. They were very proud people. It's their country. They're fighting a war in their country so let's go and have a look how the South Vietnamese operate in a war. So we did that with the help of Neil Davis, who was a general. He invited us out on a battle one day. So we went on the APCs [Armoured Personnel Carriers] into a battle and

02:00 I was getting the faces. They were very proud to have us there. They were honoured that we would come and take an interest in them. This is amazing when you're thinking about it. They were always going out with the Americans, not the South Vietnamese. We always went out with the South Vietnamese. You wouldn't go out with the Americans, you wouldn't' trust a lot of them. That's what I tried to do from my filming point of view, capture the expressions of the faces just so people could relate. Being in there close, getting the feel of it.

02:30 I call it getting the smell of it or raw filmmaking. A funny thing happened, it wasn't funny at the time, was that it was a French Éclair camera that I was using and I'd shot quite a lot of film before the camera jammed. In the tropics, the camera got so sweaty, the magazine did, the film jammed as I was about to go into battle, the film "rrrrrrrrr" jammed the magazine. So I called out "Stop, stop

03:00 the war!" and everybody stopped. Mike went over and asked them to wait a while and I got in the changing bag to change it. I was sitting on this APC, this tank, in the sweat and the heat trying to change the film and they're all waiting around. I was worried whether we'd get shots coming the other way at us. The film was so hot the bottom fell out of the roll of film, all the wonderful stuff I'd already shot. So what am I gonna do now? It was all

03:30 over the place. So I wrapped it up the best I could, took me about half an hour to try and save it, cos I'd never get that sequence again. Put it in a black bag and then reloaded and then I said, "Right, start the battle." So we started the battle again. For years later we still bring it up and say, "The day that Brill stopped the war in Vietnam." We didn't stop the war, but we stopped the battle for a few minutes. The tragedy is a lot of that film was lost cos when I got back to the hotel it was all wet and the

04:00 emulsion, I couldn't roll it up properly and light got in and fogged it all. So a lot of the stuff was lost, but we saved enough to use. The thing was, looking back on it, now that we are friends with the Vietnamese that we went out with some of their crack soldiers and it was good to show them actually doing what, not all about the Americans or the Australians, but the South Vietnamese doing it as well.

04:30 **Why would you say they were good soldiers?**

Everybody used to laugh a bit about the Vietnamese. They wear sandals, they didn't have boots, things like that, the equipment wasn't good, they weren't disciplined. The image that America has always gotta be the best; that's not necessarily so. These Vietnamese were very proud people. They were honoured that we'd come out and watch them to show what they could do, not just be led by the Americans all the time. It was good to

05:00 do some stuff on the underdog. That's why I say that.

When you said, "Stop the battle" what was going through your head? Did it occur to you that you were a cameraman telling a general to stop the battle?

No, it didn't. Mike talks about it in Australian Story about me. No, the most important thing was to wait till we're ready or there's no point in us being there. What was the point and they knew that too.

05:30 They wanted us to see how they operated so they held everything up till I was ready. Another bizarre story like that was that a year or two later I spent a couple of weeks on the USS Enterprise aircraft carrier in the Gulf of Tonkin, 7,000 people on the aircraft carrier and they were doing bombing raids

over North Vietnam. I got a helicopter to get planes coming up underneath us. I said to the pilot through the headset, I was hanging out the side

06:00 filming all these planes taking off, “Could you mind if we get right under the carrier so we get the planes coming up underneath us?” So the pilot asked the pilot via the radio “Could we move the aircraft carrier in a bit, so Dave.” he called me Dave, “Can get some more Brownies.” it was called a Brownie the camera, “Some more Brownies under the carrier?” The power, at times, of the camera. It’s a big responsibility I think, the camera, and it’s gotta be used properly.

Did you mind that you might be putting

06:30 **other people’s lives at risk?**

I was very aware of that. I didn’t just stop the battle. I would have said to the colonel at the time “Stop, is it all right? Can you hang on here?” If he said, “No, we’ve gotta keep on going.” I’d understand that. I’m very thoughtful on those things. It wasn’t just, “Stop the battle for me, I’m so important.” It was thought out properly.

It brings out the relationship of media and war.

07:00 A camera is such a powerful tool. Most people, whether they like to say it or not, the ego, they like to be filmed. You can do strange things with the camera. You can send people up or you can make them look serious and you can make people look stupid. So it’s a huge responsibility. I think it’s even

07:30 worse now because everybody wants to be in the media, on the media. “I was on television last night.” So it is a huge responsibility.

In that situation your camera was more powerful than the gun?

It was because they wanted the publicity to show that they were fighting their own war as well, not just the Americans. I’m sure that’s what it was behind it.

There was a purpose for it as far as they were concerned.

Yes.

08:00 Once the general said “Yes, you can come out with us today.” not many journalists or filmmakers went out with the South Vietnamese. It was quite odd that someone would take an interest in them. This is where the balance thing comes in; I think you’ve always gotta have balance. Whatever you do. It’s not just going for that top person or the most powerful. There’s always something underneath that, layers around that. I think it’s

08:30 very, very important in that situation. It is their country. They were fighting in their own country. Let’s go and have a look at them, how they see them.

It seems obvious that you would go and film the South Vietnamese. Was that not obvious to other media around?

Not really. They didn’t. It’s obvious, but it’s not newsworthy. No one’s gonna,

09:00 the Americans wouldn’t go out with the South Vietnamese. They always go out with the Americans. It’s getting that balance right. We could spend all the time with the Australians. We spent time with the Americans, time with the Australians, time with the Vietnamese.

As you were filming that story, were your conceptions of the war changing every day?

About how important the war was?

09:30 **What you were there fighting for?**

That got to me very early on when I went there. I realised this. Talking to the Vietnamese and realising that you would never win that war. You could win it by nuclear warfare. You could kill everybody. But in a conventional war you could never win it cos the Vietnamese wouldn’t give up, particularly the North Vietnamese after reading about Ho Chi Minh, that he wanted to unite Vietnam as one country.

10:00 The South Vietnamese Government was corrupt, but America wanted to keep them in because they were an ally in capitalism. They wouldn’t give in and eventually they would just drain the Americans out of the place. They did. I could see that, but also I could see and feel the suffering of the South Vietnamese. They wanted peace. They’d been at war for so long. They never attacked anybody; they were attacked by the Mongolians, by the Chinese, by the Japanese, by the French, by the Americans,

10:30 by the Australians, never attacked anybody until they went into Cambodia to get rid of the Khmer Rouge, then they got blamed for that. But it’s their nation. Let them work out their own problems. Let them have proper elections north and south. Make it one nation and then decide what sort of government they want. Also, seeing particularly American soldiers on patrols who didn’t want to be there, high on drugs, what they were doing to the Vietnamese

11:00 women, the raping, the burning down of houses.

Did you film any of this?

Burning out of houses?

Did you film Americans behaving badly?

In the streets, but not to that extent, but it was going on. It's like My Lai, what happened there for instance. They didn't want to be there. The average soldier didn't want to be there. They knew this was a bad war. It was like a massacre,

11:30 the whole length of that war. You could see it when I used to fly around with the Americans in their helicopters, the hatred they had for the place and the people. It took years to stop that and 60,000 Americans, 2,000,000 Vietnamese.

Some of the Americans had hatred for the people, but that's not how you felt?

I don't say they had hatred for the people, they had hatred for the people not because they were soldiers or Americans, they didn't want to be there. They didn't like the country.

12:00 They didn't understand Asia. Most of the American soldiers were conscripts; they came out of the Midwest or Deep South of America. They had no understanding of what it was really all about.

You filmed the disc jockey, why did you decide to use an American radio DJ to kick the film off?

If you're gonna make a long piece, say on Vietnam,

12:30 you've got to have a little bit of entertainment, just to break it up from the heavy stuff. You've gotta construct something that'll be interesting. What I noticed when I went there, listening to the radio, the Americans had their own radio station in Saigon. This is a war. "Hi there, you there, me here from downtown Saigon. Big goes on, you stay I play. This is Specialist Sergeant Jack Smith. 60 degrees in Saigon." It was

13:00 quite weird that this, the Americans taking over for their own radio station. I felt that would be a good opening sequence cos it was so bizarre, then particularly that music of the 70s and then cut to soldiers in the battlefields.

And some of the village people in their home environment too. It's powerful having the American

13:30 **music playing over that.**

Yeah, I think it worked. Also it got people's attention in. We open up with that and then we move in to try to explain what was going on at that time in Vietnam.

Did you find during that story that you were able to have a fairly big input into what you would be filming?

14:00 We always did on Four Corners. One thing about Four Corners that was a great thing, the team effort, whether it's a reporter, cameraman, a sound recordist, the three of us work it out together.

On location?

On location. Just get on and do it. Things develop as we go on. We didn't know we were gonna find the disc jockey till we got there and we decided it was a good way. I went up there one day and shot a bit of that stuff of him, then we constructed it back here. You build up as you go along, but it's just, it's the great

14:30 thing about lengthy documentary programs like Four Corners. You can do, you've got the time that you can develop those sequences.

While filming that story, was the adrenalin pumping constantly?

Yeah, very exciting in a very sensible way. It really is. It is very, very exciting because there's so much going on all the time. This is a war machine. There are tanks and guns

15:00 and helicopters and two-way radios and it's just, that's why they call it the theatre of war, it is like a theatre. Obviously, with a lot of shooting, it is the adrenalin. I was always aware of that adrenalin thing. I read a lot about that. It wasn't a high for me like it was for some people. Not a high in a way, "That's what I'm getting my kicks out of." like Sean Flynn for instance in Cambodia.

15:30 **Just finishing off your view on adrenaline in a war zone.**

I always try to be aware of that, because that was an artificial state. I was aware that adrenalin thing was real. It was a pretty

16:00 amazing feeling, but it's an artificial one. I knew some people who would just live on that. It was their

great thrill. Probably like Sean Flynn and Page. They'd go to war priming their motorcycles high on something or other. For me I try to put that in perspective that it wasn't the thrill of that, it was hoping that you'd come back with a really good

16:30 powerful story that would explain what was going on. That's the difference between news and current affairs. You've got the time to do it properly.

When you came back and the story went to air, what kind of effect did it have?

It was a great feeling. We'd ring each other up. We'd see Four Corners on the Saturday night and then repeat it on Sunday at lunchtime and it was really a good piece. It really sweated over. I'd walk in the paddy fields like that, not knowing if you're gonna walk on a landmine. When it went to air and it was a great success,

17:00 it's really a satisfying feeling that you contribute, showing people what's going on. The feedback we used to get on the Monday, "Did you see Four Corners last week?" They still run some of that footage to this day. That's what really makes it worthwhile, if it's something that is really quite important. Four Corners was really a show not to miss then.

17:30 **Do you feel that story turned peoples' minds?**

We heard it made people aware. We heard politicians would talk about it in Parliament House and all that sort of stuff that we did. You'll never change the world, but at least just keep people aware. Prodding away. Keep working away at it that you'll keep people aware, again because television is so powerful.

18:00 **That was probably broadcast when all the protests were gaining momentum?**

During that whole period yes. After that we'd probably go and do something with Jim Cairns [Politician and anti war protester], on the demonstrations that were going on, the one in Melbourne that he and Tom Uren [Labor politician] led, they were arrested for it. I remember filming 100,000 people in Melbourne on Vietnam after doing that.

How did that make you feel?

It made me feel good because

18:30 you're getting the message out there from different perspectives. They'd see what we did and how it affected our country. At the same time, we did the film on the bastardisation of Duntroon where they were training young men to become army officers to go to Vietnam to kill people.

Tell us about that film.

The bastardisation of Duntroon was very important at the time. It was a very important Four Corners story because everyone knew bastardisation was

19:00 going on. They were getting young kids to stuff chickens and climb flagpoles, fall down, going three hours in a cold shower, psychological damage. A lot of these young kids went from one school into Duntroon and never experienced any life. Some of them had nervous breakdowns. This was going on for a long time. They said, "This is how to toughen people up." Well, it might, but it's also mentally very damaging for some

19:30 people. So we did a story and exposed that bastardisation at Duntroon, which they got rid of it all. The commandant was sacked, was brought up in parliament, they changed the whole philosophy of the place because of what we did. It would have gone on and on and how much damage more would it have done to young cadets at Duntroon? At the same time that week, I was involved in another program on illegal abortion In Australia. We had these very wealthy doctors

20:00 in their Rolls Royces in Macquarie Street with gold plates on their front door calling themselves gynaecologists, but behind the plate they were carrying out cheap abortions and charging young girls thousands, making them feel dreadful, so they could drive their Rolls Royces. It was really disgraceful. We exposed all that, which a couple of those doctors went to jail. So stuff like that was very, very important that Four Corners was doing that.

20:30 A young Roman Catholic priest who was demonstrating against the Vietnam War, the Catholic Church was for the war, he was penalised, sent to some small town, treated very badly by the superiors of the church. We did a profile on him, which exposed what they were doing to one individual, those sorts of things.

You had a lot of power at that

21:00 **time, didn't you?**

A lot of power, a lot of responsibility. Industrial waste for instance, another one. They were putting industrial toxic waste in 44-gallon drums, taking them at 4 o'clock in the morning on barges out through the Heads [Sydney Heads] and throwing them over the side. I got onboard and went out and filmed this.

Who was doing that?

These companies were paying this company who

21:30 had these boats, taking these on these barges out to the continental shelf, pushing these 44-gallon drums over the side. But they were all breaking up so all this toxic waste was floating back into the harbour. So we exposed that. Imagine if that kept on going. It had been going on for years. So you could do all that sort of stuff.

When you filmed the South Vietnamese army, would you have been able to

22:00 **do that if you were an American journalist?**

The Americans could have done it, anybody could have done it, but they just weren't interested in doing it too much because in America that's that they think. They want to see the Americans, not the South Vietnamese. That's the beaut thing about Four Corners; we go out and give a decent balance, have a program that would do that. Like going to North Vietnam

22:30 when I was based in Hong Kong. Gough Whitlam had a minister who came through Hong Kong and we interviewed him, Lionel Bowen who was Postmaster General, said he was going to North Vietnam. We said, "Can we come with you?" He checked it back through Gough Whitlam, the prime minister; he said, "I'd love Four Corners to go in there." He wanted to recognise North Vietnam. First thing Gough did, recognise Vietnam, recognise China and give Wilfred Burchett [controversial Australian journalist] a new passport.

23:00 So we managed to get on that, to get to North Vietnam, very hard to get in. We were the enemy remember.

How did you get in?

It's a good story. We applied for a visa through Laos where the North Vietnamese embassy was in Vientiane in Laos. After a while they said, "Yes, come to Vientiane and we'll talk to you about it." We flew to Vientiane, went to the North Vietnamese

23:30 ambassador's place, sat down there for about 3 or 4 hours having pots of tea. Eventually he said, "Yes, you can go for one hour, an hour visa, just to go to the airport to film our minister on a Boeing leaving." So we went there, took 10 rolls of film, no tripod, an Agra tape recorder, and the camera, John Pennington and I. How we got there we went on an Aeroflot plane.

24:00 We were the only westerners on it. There were Chinese and some Vietnamese. There we were on this plane. We arrived in Hanoi. It was the most amazing experience. What I had been brought up from a kid as the enemy I had been filming them shooting at me. The other way down the south of Vietnam we were taken off the plane, put onto the wing with the soldiers there with their pith helmets, like that up there, and two AK47s [Kalashnikov AK47 assault rifle]

24:30 and there they were. We looked at them, "Gee were you the people who were trying to kill me?" Then we were taken into the airport lounge, just waited there. This beautiful Vietnamese woman, Madame Lin Que, came and said, "Hello my dears." Beautiful English. "You must be thirsty. Please have some beer." So we had beer. She said, "Why do you want to come to our country? You are the enemy."

She said "You are the enemy"?

Yeah. "You're fighting against us.

25:00 Why do you want to come?" We said, "We want to show your side of the conflict". So I said, "It's important to show your side." I really believed this then, to show the balance. So we talked a while. She said, "We're so busy here." It was just after the bombing of Haiphong when Nixon

25:30 and Kissinger bombed the harbours in North Vietnam to try to bring them back to the peace table in Paris. She went away and she came back with our visas that had a stay for 10 days. We couldn't believe it. To me, that has got to be the highlight of my life in one way, because not many people get to go to the other side and to be treated so wonderfully. Then we were driven into the big city and a big banquet at a table there. Talked.

26:00 We went to bed that night and I couldn't sleep. I had a couple of drinks, John and I. The shutters in the old French hotel. In the morning, I hear all these bicycles. I opened the shutters up and everybody riding bicycles, hardly any cars there. So we stayed. It was very limited what we could film, but at least we were able to show it from the other side. So we did a Four Corners. Went down to Haiphong. They had a lot of propaganda too to show us how dreadful the Americans had done.

You had a minder with you?

Minder all the time.

26:30 Everywhere I wanted to film they didn't want me to pan here or pan there because of military installations, they didn't want me to film them. They took us to a hospital, which the Americans had bombed. It was in the monsoon season so the roofs were all caved in. In the operating theatres, they're operating on people with plastic over them so they wouldn't get wet, cos all the rain was pouring through.

Was the hospital stocked with penicillin?

All that stuff, but the hospital was in a very bad

27:00 shape. They showed just what the Americans did, propaganda from their prospective. At least we could show the other side. Some good interviews and we went out to the airport to film a delegation going off to Moscow with the Prime Minister Van Pham Dong, and General Giap, who was the architect behind the war, who I met years later. It was an amazing experience. So here we had covered the war from the South, but to go and cover it from the other side

27:30 was pretty wonderful experience. It really hit me again, “What are we doing in this war?” That was in 1973. I’m sure by us showing those people, just seeing the children, they hadn't got two heads. They were just the same as us basically. That’s what makes it all worthwhile.

Did you get to speak to any of the North Vietnamese people?

Yes, spoke to

28:00 quite a few.

How did they treat you?

They were a bit suspicious, because you didn't see too many westerners there. There was a Japanese television team based there. We were the only ones every to go in there from the west. The woman at the department store, we had to buy a few things, they look at you as a novelty, but they were very nice. The camera battery broke down and the North Vietnamese television repaired my camera battery for me.

28:30 This is the enemy that I was brought up to think. It really made me realise this is more importantly about, “We’re only people, no matter where we’re from.” That’s what I’ve tried to do in all these years of story telling.

Did your philosophy of the domino theory and the communist threat change after going to North Vietnam?

That was dead in the water

29:00 for years, because I never thought that would happen anyway cos why? It’s like the Indonesians don’t wanna come here. They have a different culture. They don’t wanna go and sit out here in the middle of Australia. Desperate people, a few boat people, that’s understandable, but not as cultures.

When that story aired on Australian television, what reactions did people have?

I wasn’t here, I was still living in Hong Kong. The thing was there was very

29:30 positive to show the other side. Some politicians were, “Why did we do it? Why did we show it?” But as Gough Whitlam wanted to pull out of Vietnam and recognise North Vietnam and get on with it to stop all this, so that’s part of the reason we got there. It was easier to get in. I think they realised Australia was on the verge of

30:00 recognising Vietnam.

Did the North Vietnamese that you met know that Australia was in the war?

Yes, they did. They were quite aware. When I went back years later to be based in Hanoi in 1996, they reminded me a lot that we used to fight them. There was no animosity. I went back years later and made a documentary called The Price of Victory.

30:30 It was my first time back to Vietnam since the fall of Saigon. I was a bit apprehensive. We fought in their country. The Vietnamese were just the most beautiful people. They forgave. No animosity. Just a real eye-opener to me of the decency of people. They had every reason to dislike us, but not at all, particularly with what they went through.

Did you work out why

31:00 **they were so forgiving?**

I think it’s their nature, “Let’s get on with it. No good going back in the past. We wanna move on. The war’s over. We’ve had enough of that. We wanna be brothers and sisters, so let’s move on. Let’s become friends and work together to make it better, a better world or a better country.”

You went to Cambodia in 1973?

72.

Tell us about that.

31:30 I was based in Hong Kong and I went to Cambodia.

You were still working for Four Corners?

No, I was freelancing. I went into Four Corners for Vis News, which is now Reuters, to not replace, Neil Davis was leaving Vis News and they sent me in to replace him.

How did it feel replacing your mentor?

That was a pretty,

32:00 I was very upset to see Neil go. He had a falling out with Vis News. They wanted to recall him to London and he didn't want to leave Asia and why should he. They thought he'd been there too long, which is an easy cop out.

Was he being too friendly with the locals?

Yeah. So he quit and went freelance. He went to Germany and got a contract with the Germans. They sent me in from Hong Kong and I lived there for a while and then

32:30 I did a documentary for German television, plus I did a lot of day-to-day news stuff and other bits and pieces. It was my first time to Cambodia and I used to live in a hotel called the Monorom. I'd listen to the B52 bombers coming over every night and the windows of the hotel would shake and you'd hear "boom-boom-boom-boom". And on my short-wave radio hearing Richard Nixon [then President of United States] saying "We are not in

33:00 Cambodia." lying to the American people. You go out the next day and you see all these bomb craters flattened out all over the place.

Does that make you angry?

Yeah, because he did lie to the American people, but it was a tragedy Cambodia, how it got dragged into that war. That's where Neil went and lived there because he loved the Cambodians very much and they loved him.

What news stories were you doing?

33:30 Just day-to-day things. Again, most of my work was documentaries for Four Corners on a freelance basis. Every day you would get in your air conditioned Mercedes Benz and fill the boot up with soft drinks and sandwiches and fruit, and go out to cover the war out through the highways and come across what was happening out there, all the bombing the night before.

34:00 And human interest stories too, like the markets or the suffering. After one night's bombing I drove out and one bomb wiped out a whole family. Their children were just lined up lying there, dead. Just 8 children lined up there, wrapped in cotton. You realise then how dreadful this is.

You were allowed to film that?

Yeah,

34:30 the Americans weren't there. It's different to Vietnam; it's much more open in Cambodia in many ways.

More open to you?

It's quite western in a way. It was quite a capitalist country, Cambodia. They wanted it to be shown, what was happening. Then the Khmer Rouge,

35:00 once Cambodia got involved in the war they didn't like the government siding with the Americans, and so the Khmer Rouge started off to go to a counter-attack to them, then that all happened, fighting each other, like what happened in Vietnam.

Were you there to film some of that carnage?

Yeah. For a long time, coming and going. That was tragic what

35:30 happened to Cambodia. The king seemed to want to get Cambodia out of the war, but he couldn't because the North Vietnamese were sending all their supplies down through Cambodia. So the Americans had to stop them coming down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, so they bombed Cambodia. That's what caused Cambodia to get into the war. As you know, years later the Khmer Rouge took over

36:00 and 2,000,000 Cambodians out of 5,000,000 perished because of that involvement in Vietnam in the first place. So I did a documentary for German television on Cambodia, the whole issue of Cambodia.

Filming those 8 children who were dead, how do you

36:30 **emotionally deal with that without going away crying?**

Well, you do. You do. It's very hard to talk about it because most people are not interested or they wouldn't understand, so you don't talk about it much. I haven't talked about that one scene unless somebody who's deep and very serious, who you feel you're comfortable with and you can talk about it. Again it's an example, just that one shot, or that one sequence of these children there,

37:00 all dead. There they were lined up and wrapped up, waiting to be buried. One example. Sometimes you can do more powerful stuff. I don't say this clinically, because it's not clinical at all, it's try to show how dreadful war is by those images. One day I was going out.

37:30 The night before, in Cambodia, I had met this colonel and his wife and their children, I had dinner with them, very handsome Cambodian, very refined, decent looking man. The next day I went out on this road and he was leading his troops in a truck in front of us somewhere about a mile and a half. There were always checkpoints as you go. I asked the driver, "Stop, check at the checkpoint." "No, Mr Davie, I think it's all right." "No, it's not. Stop.

38:00 We've gotta check." While we're out there checking, there's a big explosion, boom. What happened, the Khmer Rouge had put a B40 rocket through the truck with all his soldiers on it and there he was. I got up there and his guts all hanging out, his legs are apart. He died in front of me. The night before, having dinner, this very dignified man. I didn't film that.

38:30 But they are the sorts of things that. He's saying, "Help me." "What for?" We look back on it years later. What did he die for? What for? But going back to those children, that sequence of seeing the children lined up there; that certainly made an impact. You could say, "Why show that? Did it do any good?" I don't know.

39:00 I hope that it might. If it was me who saw that, it'd make me stop and think for a bit, just stop and think. A lot of things we worry about or get bitchy about are not important. Not important. I feel that if people could see some of that stuff was a bit disturbing, it might make us try to be a bit better as human beings. That's my justification. I'm very aware

39:30 that I'm doing that. You're filming somebody else's tragedy. But I do believe that, I don't think you do it all the time, but little things like that might make people a bit more aware of how important another human being is in those situations.

You said the mother allowed you to do that anyway.

40:00 **She wanted the same outcome as you in a way.**

I'm always very polite how I do it. I'll say, "Is it all right?" I know how they react. Just respect. It's horrible, but same day I went down and to say how bad things were there, they were boy soldiers this high, 15-16 being lifted off a big truck and put into a barge to go across the river to fight. They were so small

40:30 they couldn't even get off the truck. Had to lift them off and put them down going off.

Were they 5 years?

7 or 8. Some of them were 8 or 9. That's very powerful stuff. I think we sit back here, particularly in Australia we're so fortunate there's never been a war on our shores, we've got to remember that. That's I think what the great thing of Anzac Day is in a way, that

41:00 it gets people together just to remind ourselves of what's gone. The [Australian War] Memorial now I think is the most popular tourist attraction in Canberra. What I'm trying to say here is that I'm not a war junkie. I don't get thrills out of filming that, but I think it is important to do it

41:30 in a tasteful caring way that we can remind ourselves of how precious life is.

When you say "caring." is asking the mother for instance, "Is it OK"?

Yeah, partly. That's what I mean by caring for that.

Tape 5

00:42 Filmmaking, documentary making, current affairs filmmaking, is just not for the moment. I think a lot of the stuff is being done through Cinesound and all the newsreels building up to great programs like

01:00 Four Corners, 60 Minutes, This Day Tonight. A lot of this stuff is great years later as history pieces. One segment that I did a long time ago in Vietnam for a special of Vietnam was of a little girl who lost her leg when she was three in crossfire. It had been blown off, they amputated it.

01:30 It was badly damaged. We met her when she was 7 and she was being fitted with an artificial leg for the first time. She was brought into the hospital on her grandmother's back. Until then she just got around on one leg. Imagine her seeing other children running around enjoying themselves. She didn't have anybody, I was very young, incredibly sensitive about that war and about the work that I was doing. She was

02:00 a very beautiful little girl, one of the most beautiful children I've ever seen, without any expression on her face whatsoever. She kept staring at me and the camera as she was coming into the hospital to be fitted with an artificial leg. Once they put the leg on her, she started to get her balance and she started to express a little smile. It was the first time she had her independence in her life. We ran that

02:30 wide shot and zoomed in on her face for a long time, probably a minute or so. The power of that shot, you realise how stupid all this war business is. That is the power of good current affairs filmmaking. That's a good example. Not many people did all that type of stuff. The noise and the guns going off or rockets exploding or trucks on fire. So what? It's what it does to people. I can always remember that little segment

03:00 was so powerful. On the Monday, we heard even politicians were talking about it all over the place. They still run that segment today. It made me realise just how important, how powerful good current affairs filmmaking, television, is.

Did you see any other media from other countries trying to get in and get

03:30 **stuff at that human level?**

No, not from my memory. We were the only ones doing it. We had time and resources on Four Corners to do it. Resources weren't that big, we had to fight our way to get to Vietnam at times, because of money problems. No one else was doing it, not in this country. I don't think many of them were doing it in America or Europe. For a country like Australia, then of about 18 million people, to be able to do that from our perspective,

04:00 not from the BBC's [British Broadcasting Corporation] perspective, or the Americans, but from our perspective. We were fighting in the war. Looking back on it now it's so important that we could do that type of work. That film now is in the archives and it's very important that it's brought out and shown so we could possibly learn from our mistakes. That to me now, the stuff I did then is more important now than what it was then, or equally as important

04:30 for different reasons, cos it's history. Even by Ted Serong [first commander of the AATTV] saying in the film "We have won the war, the war is over." in 1972. The war went on till 1975. More people died.

Not only is it history but it shaped the course of history

05:00 **in its ability to help people gain a new perspective. That's significant stuff.**

It is. This is why people now, who are doing this in Iraq or wherever, the same thing, doing documentaries there and the same thing in 20 years' time as well.

How do you feel about the way

05:30 **the Iraq war has been covered?**

That's a good question. That's the embedding of journalists and camera crews. I think in many ways it's a good thing; it's all live from the battlefield. It's all sensational, guns being shot, trucks running up and down roads. Good, fair enough, but hang on, where's the real substance, the thoughtful pieces of what's going on behind the scenes? The suffering of the people? The politics? The

06:00 really crafted documentary, the crafted current affairs programs? It seems now with technology we're getting away from that. We want it live from the battlefield. All very well, but what does it say and what does it mean? What can you learn from it? Nothing. That's where I feel that we've got to remember to do the real important lengthy thoughtful pieces.

Have you seen anything like that?

06:30 You might get independent filmmakers who go up to Iraq on a shoestring and hardly get anything for it and try to sell it to a network. It's very honourable and it's wonderful, thank God. But the networks still should be doing this type of work. In this country, Four Corners does a bit of it, but there's not enough of it. Not just for now, but for later so this stuff can be brought out and used. Shown to young students

07:00 or whoever, so we can learn from this stuff. Cos if we don't we'll just go on fighting and fighting each other.

How do you feel at a peak of a war, where we have access to programming like CNN [Cable News Network] where it's like watching the coverage of a sporting event sometimes?

Show business.

07:30 How do I feel about that? I'm very disappointed in that, because it's really in a subconscious way it's looking for the ratings. It's sensationalism. It's live, instant. We all get sucked in by it. Watching the last Iraq war, or even before, it was like a slow-motion movie. We knew it was gonna end up people were gonna get killed.

08:00 "We cross now live to this battle or that battle." Really it doesn't do any good for history, it doesn't do any good for trying to prevent war, it just is like sport. It's entertainment, horrible entertainment, but it is. I feel television networks have got to stop and think. They can't just believe in ratings. CNN, when

things went a

08:30 bit bad for them they need another war, cos the ratings go up and the money pours in. That's a dreadful state of affairs, I believe, to be in, because part of television should be to do with responsible things, like educate or explain to the people, whether it's Australia or America or Europe or Africa or wherever.

09:00 **When you were in Vietnam, did you have a sense of the tradition you had fallen into along the lines of Frank Hurley [cameraman in WW1] and**

Damien Parer [World War 11 cameraman]?

Were you aware of that at the time?

Yeah. I always had it from Damien Parer.

09:30 Damien Parer, then Neil Davis. Damien Parer was a great cameraman, terrific cinematographer. Not just good technically, he's a good storyteller, journalist, filmmaker. If it wasn't for him, we wouldn't have known what happened on the Kokoda Track in Papua New Guinea; the fighting that was going on up there. The Australian government was trying to keep it away

10:00 from the Australian people because they were worried about panic that the Japanese were advancing down towards Australia. The Australians were dying up there. Malaria. On it goes. He went up there, he threw away his Speed Graphic, he threw away his tripod, kept a few rolls of film and his movie camera and captured what the great Australian digger was doing under those incredible conditions. He

10:30 made a film for the newsreels which won an Academy Award. Looking back on what those great Australians did out there, if it wasn't for him that would never have been recognised. That is the importance of it. Governments will show anything to suit their cause at the time. That's why now and then people like Damien Parer go out on a limb to really show what is going on.

11:00 **Was it a source of inspiration for you?**

Absolutely. That's what I, years later when the Australian battalion went across to Somalia; it was the first then biggest contingent of Australians to go to a war after Vietnam. The media went into Somalia for a week, then they all left, so the battalion was there on its own. So I went over and did a pool operation with all the Australian networks and lived with them for a couple of months

11:30 and did a whole lot of stories, even down to the diggers' kitchen. The old cooks cooking away great food in the middle of the desert in Somalia, just to give it up to the Australian public. "This is what your defence forces are doing for you." which is very important. I got all that from what Parer did back in the Second World War.

Tell us more about your experience in Somalia.

12:00 Because of my association with the Australian soldiers in Vietnam, when the battalion went to Somalia and the media left after a week when the battalion first arrived there, I strongly felt that the Australian public should know what they were doing in a foreign country, a peacekeeping operation, or try to rebuild that country, as

12:30 they went in there as allies with the Americans. So I, through an old friend of mine, John Talbot, head of international operations at the ABC, set up a pool situation that I would go over there and supply stories for all the networks: Channel 10, Channel 9, Channel 7, ABC, SBS.

Was that welcomed by the military?

They were a little bit suspicious of me. Some of them were, which they are because they'd had a bad run at times

13:00 with some media. People glamorise themselves or they'll do some stand-ups to make themselves look good. I wanted them to know that I was there because I really cared about them. Once I got their confidence, they knew I'd been in Vietnam, they were terrific. Invited me out on operations, cos they trusted me. It's a two-way thing.

13:30 Of course I'm not gonna go there to be propaganda for them, I'm there as an independent person and they understand that. As the days went on, the respect grew and I think they were very pleased to have me there. Also, all the film I shot, thousands and thousands of feet of tape, I gave copies of it all to the Australian Defence Force.

Did they need to approve it before it went any further?

For me to be there?

No, for whatever you shot.

14:00 **Did you have to show it to them first?**

No, there was just a trust thing. I understand the military, the security operations. So I had just,

because of a two-way trust, try to be honourable and positive. Looking back on that, it was very important that somebody like me was there. After that, you remember the Blackhawk [Sikorsky Blackhawk utility helicopter] helicopter disaster a few years ago?

14:30 A year later they were doing high altitude training operations in Papua New Guinea. No one would travel with them, so I went up to Papua New Guinea and did a film a year after the disaster with the Blackhawks up there. They were doing food drops because there was a drought happening up there. Then after that, they got my confidence. I just made film about what terrific, dedicated people they were and

15:00 put that on the ABC 7:30 Report. Again, they were shattered after what happened with that accident, they didn't get much support from anybody so their morale was very low, but they were just so professional and so dedicated. That's what I wanted to get across, these really young, dedicated Aussies doing this good work. Somalia we were based out

15:30 of Baidoa where the Australian battalion was. Not there just protecting soldiers, they built a new school system, they built a new court system, the Australian Army sent over Australian lawyers to set up a legal system, police force, even supplied them with new uniforms. I did stories on all that. How the judges should operate in courts. Trails were set up for murderers.

16:00 Books were brought in for the schools. Really rebuilding a nation, which is really very good, honest, positive stuff, not looking for something negative all the time. That's where I think sometimes journalism sometimes goes wrong or some of the cheaper current affairs programs are looking for sensationalism, something that grabs somebody's attention. No, let's look for something positive too. Of course, expose corruption and various

16:30 things, but there's a lot of good, positive stuff around, which I feel is very important to do. If it wasn't for my experience with the Australian soldiers in Vietnam and getting to know them, I probably wouldn't have gone to Somalia. But because of knowing the Australian solders and really growing to respect them, that's why I wanted to go, not because I wanted to live in an old stretcher in the middle of the heat there. It was something important to do.

17:00 **After all that time, that feeling of continuity from the Australian soldier of the early '70s to the version that you were surrounded by in Somalia was clear in the feeling you got from the soldiers?**

Absolutely.

And their character?

Same, exactly the same. The Australian soldier is a really down-to-earth; just get on with it with

17:30 limited resources compared say to the Americans, cos we're a small country. Just fantastic. They just get on with it and they leave countries normally with a very good reputation.

Do you think we've been made adequately aware of how great these guys are?

No, I don't think we've done enough really of the positive

18:00 stuff on the Australian soldiers. I like to get in there and spend a bit of time with them and live with them and get their confidence that they feel that you're all right and not there to send them up, which takes time. Again, getting away from the guns going off, it's the people. Get in there, get in the kitchen, the dining room at the mess and have a meal with them, because they are,

18:30 and I'm not really here to build up the Australian soldier if I didn't believe it, I can get very cynical about a lot of things, and I've seen a lot of dreadful things, but I must say that one thing I'm very proud of is to be with those guys. That's judged over 35-40 years often of being with the Australian soldiers. That's why at Anzac Day I'll just go and stand on the side and observe for 5 minutes and watch them go past with my medals on.

19:00 **In the early 70s, when you returned and shot the material around the time the Australians were leaving the war,**

The Vietnam War?

Yeah. Had you sensed a change in those soldiers since the late '60s when you first encountered

19:30 **them?**

A little bit, not all of them. Again, I'll go back to the point that they're always very professional, but obviously they'd heard from home, or somebody had just gone up there as replacements, there was a lot of people turning against the war. The Americans were pulling out and they realised they didn't want to get killed there. What for?

20:00 It was time to go. Some of them were quite bitter about being sent there. Some of them learned an incredible experience, who survived. To be in a war gives you some incredible inner strength. So a lot of

the Vietnam veterans that I spoke to, a lot of them suffered too with a lot of various things. Depression, alcoholism,

20:30 suicide, divorce. But also, a lot got a lot out of it. It depends on the individual, but I must say to the end, what I noticed was just the sheer professionalism of them.

A lot of those guys got positive things out of the experience. Were you getting similar positive things from the experience?

Absolutely. It makes you grow up very fast in many ways.

21:00 The only frustration I find, we'll move onto this later if you like and talk about the fall of Saigon, is that no one really understands when you come back. Rightly or wrongly, why should they? People get on with going to the football or doing the normal things that we do, go to work. That's an incredible frustration of no one really understands or cares too much. I covered the fall of

21:30 Vietnam. I was, after covering it for so long, it was amazing for me to see the American flag pulled down in Saigon on the embassy, people rushing to get out of that place, the helicopters going out onto the aircraft carriers and being pushed over the side and all the panic in Saigon as that American flag came down; then in '96 to be based in Hanoi and the American flag going up again.

22:00 I never thought I'd see that. How history can change in a short time. But I was based in Papua New Guinea for the ABC when they sent me into Vietnam to cover the fall of Saigon. It was a very traumatic couple of months, because the tension was building up every day. It was getting closer. People were starting to panic. Suspicion. Are the North Vietnamese gonna come here? Is it going to be a bloodbath? Just the tremendous tension.

22:30 **How you deal with that tension?**

Like a lot of us, you go to the bar and have a few drinks at night and that's fine. It's not really a way of dealing with it. I suppose it's all right for some people. You've got to unwind somehow. What do you do? You can't go to the discothèques. I'll get onto that a bit later, but

23:00 the war that I knew that was wrong in '72 at last was coming to an end. I'm not saying that the communists, communism is worse than capitalism. But at least I felt "Vietnam is one nation now. It's one nation and they're trying to rebuild it and becoming one nation."

There was a sense of relief in that?

23:30 Tremendous relief that there was freedom, no more war, no more bombs, no more worrying about being shot at. When the North Vietnamese came into Saigon they were a very, very disciplined army. During that, all the South Vietnamese who panicked and thought they were going to be murdered, the panic to get out of the place, betrayed by us and the Americans' promise to get them out. They couldn't get out.

24:00 That followed on by the boat people, thousands dying in the oceans cos of the boats sinking. But at least it did come to an end and there is peace in Vietnam. They are gradually getting back on their feet.

Was that a particularly dangerous time for you?

To be there? Yes, it's always dangerous there in war. You don't know what's around the corner.

24:30 They have snipers, landmines, or whatever. You just don't know. Going out on the roads and the North Vietnamese are getting closer. We flew around a bit there. One dangerous experience I had was on the front cover on my book was a place called Zuan Loc, which I'd been to with Peter Couchman in '72. It was the last big city to fall before Saigon. The

25:00 South Vietnamese wanted to take a few of us up there to show us how they were holding Zuan Loc, this big city. So we flew up there in Chinook helicopters. Well, there was nothing left to hold. It was just bombed the hell out of, bodies everywhere and carnage, still a lot of fighting going on around Zuan Loc. So we stayed there all day. I was on my own there, just me for

25:30 ABC News. Allan Hogan and Les Wasley were there for Four Corners. I was lucky to get on the helicopter to even go in there. I didn't even know it was happening until 3 in the morning. I had a Vietnamese colonel friend told me there'd be a seat for me on the helicopter. So I was out at 5 o'clock in the morning in the helicopter with a bag of film and a big heavy camera. No water, no flak jacket, nothing to protect me. And a microphone in my pocket to do interviews

26:00 with, to get the sound. Walking around there all day under that tremendous tension of firing and everything, I was really stuffed. At 4 in the afternoon the helicopter was going to come in and land and take us out. They tried to land on Highway 1 but the North Vietnamese were rocketing it. So the chopper had to come in, land, take off straight away again, cos they were worried if they got hit on the ground they couldn't get off and we'd be stuck there. I was

26:30 trying to run, after being there all day since 5 in the morning, with this big bag of film, 400 foot rolls and the camera. I had no strength. The chopper would take off and even the South Vietnamese soldiers were panicking. They were pushing me trying to get rid of me so they could get on, they were throwing

off their uniforms, they were escaping. It was very serious stuff there now. I just didn't have any strength left. I went into this burnt-out truck and there was an American NBC [National Broadcasting Corporation] journalist there and he had all the gear,

27:00 flak jacket, water bottle, and the whole lot. He said, “Hey man, you need this more than I do.” He gave me a bit of his water. I didn’t realise how important water was. That gave me strength that I never thought I had. I was really stuffed. He got killed by the way, later at the massacre in Jamestown, Don Harris his name was. This helicopter came in, it’s getting late and dark. This was the last chance. There’s soldiers trying to

27:30 push me off. The mike’s in there and they ripped my jacket and I might lose my mike. Then I still couldn’t get on it cos of the heat coming out of the engine was holding me. I was clutching the camera. “Get on.” this young Vietnamese lieutenant pulled out his pistol and went bang-bang-bang, all these soldiers went back. He got me on, I’ll always remember this. I’d like to find him again somewhere too. I got on that chopper,

28:00 crashed on that chopper. We went up and up. I wondered what was happening, I looked up and all the oil is coming down here. I didn't care. All the time I was in Saigon the Vietnamese spent more time maintaining their Honda motor scooters than they did their helicopters. True I think. We flew all the way back to Saigon and I was stuffed, but we got some good material, which

28:30 goes to show that the North Vietnamese were that close to Saigon. That was the whole idea. Didn’t matter what president was saying, “We will hold South Vietnam.” I knew then it was all over. The North Vietnamese had won this war. They were so close. That was a very hairy thing of just total exhaustion, very frightening.

In a situation like that, do you have moments where you think,

29:00 **“Hang on, this is too crazy. I’m wandering off to my own demise even though I’m doing it for the right reasons.”**

You mean now?

Then.

I did feel that. I thought I was gonna die there. I just

29:30 ran out, I was totally stuffed. It’s an amazing determination that comes over you in my case. You push yourself. That chopper couldn’t have got in again. We probably wouldn’t have gone out. Next night they were overrun, everybody was killed there. That’s’ the cover of my book. If you told that story to some people

30:00 that’s the thing, it’s very, very hard to talk about it later because no one’s really interested. And why should they be? We worry about all the little things that are not important. If you’re not a really bad person. A lot of that stuff is around, that footage. Les Wasley and Allan Hogan shot a Four

30:30 Corners story which is absolutely fantastic. They were there. That was one of the few times I was doing it for news. I was sent there to do that. You do wonder, “Is it all worth it?” That film went off to Hong Kong and it somehow got lost, that bit of film, someone didn’t transfer it off to Sydney. It’s sitting around. You risk your life

31:00 for something. That’s very hard. Then again you say, “Well, think of the other things that you have done that have explained what’s going on in the world.” Another dreadful thing that happened in Vietnam for me was all the orphans. The Americans decided they’d take planeloads of orphans to the United States. All these babies, with some aid workers and some nurses, walked all these children from Cambodia

31:30 to Vietnam to take them out on a C5 aeroplane to America, three decks on that plane. I went out to the airport and all these babies and nurses happy going off to a new life. One of the back doors wasn’t closed properly on that C5, the Galaxy. When it went over the ocean in the China Sea or the

32:00 Pacific Ocean, it depressurised, so they turned the plane around. I was still at the airport talking to an American station chief. I heard a big boom. He said, “That’s just burning off oil before the North Vietnamese get down here.” What it was, the C5, when the door ripped open it depressurised so he lost all his controls so it floated back. It hit about

32:30 2 miles from the airstrip some paddy fields and broke into 3 parts. All the babies were in little boxes. So all their heads were smashed up, 500 babies onboard that thing, about 150 survived. I went out to that crash site on a chopper. I couldn’t get to it because it was getting dark and the Viet Cong were around everywhere. So I came back and I went to the hospital and I saw all the survivors. I was thinking of how happy they all were to go

33:00 and then to see with all their heads all smashed in coming into the hospital, the ones who survived, just how lucky they were to get that far to get to America and then the door wasn’t closed properly. You think of that. Didn't get killed in the war, but something like that. Next morning I went out on a helicopter to that crash site and there was hardly anything left of it because the scavengers got in over night and had ripped the metal to sell.

33:30 All those children, getting all the way from Cambodia, so happy, the women who got help, then that had to happen to it. In many ways it's more traumatic than being shot with guns.

Did that ever haunt you?

Yeah, it did a bit. I get so frustrated by it. To this day I feel,

34:00 when I think of all the selfishness and all the bitchiness, what one goes through, it's just really not that important. In the bureaucracy like ABC you get people who don't know what you've done or they don't care, there's not much support. Really they think that you're doing it for yourself I suppose, you're hoping it'll do some good. But it is a bit frustrating. Of course they

34:30 do, those babies. One minute they're happy.

Some things stay with you longer than others.

Yeah, even now if I hear a helicopter that goes around, it brings back the memories of Vietnam, not as bad as it used to be. Or a car backfires, you hear a gun go off. There's always guns going off.

Invariably it's a negative feeling when

35:00 **a memory of Vietnam is provoked?**

A negative?

It's a negative memory that is being provoked?

No, just shock, a helicopter. It's like that in Apocalypse Now, that same sort of thing. When you think of some of that stuff you did and how dangerous that all is. But you hope you're doing it for the

35:30 right reasons, to bring some of that film, you can see that it probably is. You never get much thanks for it. You get people, unless you were there, you'll never understand. Unless you find some people who take an interest in it deeply and are committed to the same thing.

36:00 **Can you tell us about your documentary Price of Victory?**

I hadn't gone back to Vietnam since the fall of Saigon. I think it was in '83. I was doing some work with CARE Australia. They wanted me to shoot a couple of bits of stuff in one of their aid programs in Vietnam, north and south. Then it was one Vietnam.

36:30 So I went up there. While I was there, I thought I'd try and do my own documentary, which I did, The Price of Victory, with the help of Michael Lou Griffith, who edited it. I gave him a producer credit on it. It was my first time back and I was a bit apprehensive about going there. I didn't want to go back either.

37:00 **Why was that?**

Just the bad memories and also I felt a bit guilty about the whole war, the suffering they all went through. When I went back there was when the embargo was on. I wondered, "Just show Vietnam for what it's like to them." The Americans wouldn't allow trade.

37:30 They were saying there was no ban on medicines, but a lot of what was coming in was out of date and the doctors wouldn't use it. Defoliants, kids were getting dry eyes. I did a real overall look of what price the Vietnamese paid to win that war. It was just a general look at that country, the best I could do it. I shot the whole thing in about 7 days.

38:00 Looking at it now, it's quite an important film because I came back and interviewed Malcolm Fraser who was then head of CARE, but he'd been the former defence minister and an army minister during the war. So how does he feel about it? He admitted it was wrong. So it was basically a look at the Vietnamese people, how they're trying to get on with it under the most incredible conditions. The embargo was still on.

38:30 The Americans said that the Vietnamese weren't helping them find the missing prisoners of war. Eventually they did lift the embargo, but it took a long time. I'm glad I did go back because it was good to go to a country that's at least at peace. I'm not gonna get shot at or bombed at. It was basically peaceful. You could travel up and down without going to two countries at war.

39:00 Very strange feeling.

There was a therapeutic dimension to it?

I think there was, yeah, absolutely. Then I went back in '96 to be based there for the ABC and to go and spend a bit of time with General Giap, the great Vietnamese military leader who I filmed

39:30 back in '73, but on that film we're talking about, The Price of Victory, I wanted to film in Ho Chi Minh's house where he ran the war from. They said, "No you can't go in that house. No one goes in there." I said, "I want to go in that house. I want to show the rooms, the ballroom." "No, come back, get permission." I said, "I'm leaving the next day. Can I film in the rooms with the pictures on the wall?" They said, "Yes". So I went in there and there was a big picture of me taken in

40:00 1973 with all these generals around me at the airport. I said, “That’s me.” They said “Yeah, that’s you. You were here.” I said, “Yes, I’m an old comrade.” so they opened up then. I’ve got it here on the film, it’s all there. So they realised I’d been there in 73, that I was an old comrade, an old friend of theirs. That was an amazing experience, the picture on the wall. I’ve got a picture of it upstairs.

40:30 I asked them, this is how great the Vietnamese are, I said, “Can I buy that picture?” “No, official picture.” they said. It’s all got a signature on it. But they’d get me a copy. I said “When, I’m leaving tomorrow.” They said, “We’ll get it.” They turned up at 5 in the morning wrapped up in newspaper, 20 by 16 print. They found the negative. Pretty amazing isn’t it?

When you did return from the first visits in Vietnam,

41:00 **how was it adjusting back to being in Sydney? Did you have a feeling that the work you may have been doing here was insignificant? Did you feel compelled to get back there?**

I didn’t feel compelled to get back there, but obviously it was. That was part of the job.

41:30 I was still doing good stuff on Four Corners. I’m glad I had the chance to go back to film the end of the war. I had a pretty good run at that story. To be there for the end of it. It’s very hard coming back. They were talking about football. I’m not saying it’s wrong, but it’s just very hard to adjust.

42:00 Like me, who really, maybe some people just went, “Don’t worry about it, get on with it.”

Tape 6

00:33 **You were talking about how hard it was when you came back to Australia. How does it make you feel when you go over there to communicate this information back to people and it**

01:00 **hasn’t had that impact?**

It’s hard to answer that. You hope it has done something good. You hope along the road somebody has, you know. I think it does, in its own quiet way, not just me, all our colleagues, I think it does in fact have an impact on people when they see good stuff. Because of what I am, and I’m quite a serious person, I can be funny, but they

01:30 tell me I’m very serious. I just can’t, “You’ve gotta move on to the next one. It’s just a job.” That’s not me, I take everything very personally, I really do, it does concern me. A lot of it’s very painful and it costs you a bit as you go along for whatever reason. I’ve found it very, very frustrating. It’s good now that I can talk about it. My book’s come out; I talk about it all in that. I go

02:00 and talk to various groups about it, which is good that I can do that. At the time you come back from a famine in Africa or something in India, you get off the plane in Sydney and you hear, “G’day mate, want a taxi?” That’s not their fault. We’re so lucky in this country, but it’s very, very hard for a person like me to unwind, to adjust. You do, but you keep trying to discuss it with people. “We’ve gotta

02:30 do this. Come on, let’s go on.” So you keep on going back and doing this type of work hoping that it will make people sit up and listen. But you do pay the consequences somewhere along the line I think.

When you come back, do you try and convince them that what they’ve seen is terrible and they should think?

I do a lot. I continue where I can without driving people mad. Some people think you’re obsessed by it.

03:00 But that’s not the case at all, it’s just you’ve gotta shake people up a bit now if you believe in it. The great legacy is, I believe, that if and if it’s not even one day somebody will drag the film out if it’s around somewhere and have a look at it and maybe use it. It might be shown to students or something like that. Like I used to think of Damien Parer and Neil Davis’ stuff, or Life Magazine. Same as me. The wonderful

03:30 news cameramen that did all that terrific stuff in the ‘40s and ‘50s. That’s how you try to justify it I think.

Did you go back to Vietnam so many times because there was so much you wanted to tell to get the message across?

There’s a different message to get across. What’s happening now? How’s the country going now? I’ll go back one day and do something else there. I’ll go back to Cambodia and film what’s going on with the amputees or the

04:00 people who lost their legs to landmines. I’ve already done that. So in the last 10-12 years I’ve done quite a bit of work in conjunction with aid agencies, humanitarian work that I’ve really loved doing. I love those people dearly. For instance during the Paralympic Games, the Cambodians were sending a team out of people, volleyball players,

04:30 who lost their legs and arms in landmines or one leg and an arm. Here they are, a volleyball team, getting their dignity back. Khmer Rouge soldiers, government soldiers, civilians, just to get their dignity. So I went up to Cambodia and did a story on them getting their fare to come to Australia for the Olympic Games. Getting fitted with new legs. A friend of mine, Chris Meko, Australian who runs this rehabilitation program in Cambodia, so I brought that story back, put it on The 7:30 Report. When they came out here,

05:00 Chris went on Radio National in the morning and that sparked Alan Jones [radio broadcaster] and all of a sudden you get the Cambodian volleyball team become the flavour of the month. A high school down in Wollongong heard about them, invited them down to play a game of volleyball at their school. Then they set up an organisation to raise money through their school to send back to Cambodia to help them build a computer room. So I went up and filmed the opening of the computer room in Cambodia. So all these things come together, which is

05:30 very, very satisfying. Never make a lot of money out of it, but you make enough to keep you going. It is really satisfying that through the power of television you can get some good stories out. Now that Cambodian volleyball team is very proud. They've been to Europe, they're champions. All one leg missing, an arm missing. They didn't have proper artificial legs cos they couldn't afford them. So they had bits cut out of wood, which were pushing into the bone of the upper part of their leg and they

06:00 were bleeding, but they still made them. They got some made out of fibreglass and people poured money in to make a factory for them to make proper ones. All that sort of thing.

Tell us about the stories you filmed and left behind where you still feel there's a great need to go back and do a follow-up story.

These three little girls in Malawi, their parents died of AIDS [acquired immune deficiency syndrome]. Their grandmother died

06:30 recently of AIDS. They live on their own in a little mud hut. They go to bed in the dark and they get up in the dark. They just cook food if they get food every couple of days. We took them some food through OXFAM. That was stolen from them. We don't know whether they've been raped.

You did a story on that?

I did a story on that for SBS Dateline. I will go back and see how they are going, that sort of stuff. See what's

07:00 happened to them, which is very, very important to do that.

For you or for them?

For me and them, and to try to get a bit more awareness of what is going on. They're just three examples of how that double-whammy, AIDS and the famine. Three, 14, 10 and 8, living on their own, nobody. Be unbelievable here to even suggest that.

07:30 **When you're filming young girls like that in their homes, how do you gain their trust?**

I normally try to talk to them first and explain through an interpreter or in this case an OXFAM person, what we're here for, we're here to help them get enough food, to get them looked after if we can and this will try and help the problem that's going on in their country. To treat them with a bit of respect. I went inside that little hut after they cooked the meal outside.

08:00 They took it into the hut to eat it and they washed their hands in a bowl of water and then they said grace. Very moving little segment as they said grace before they, just the manners. That was the last piece in the story. We've called it Time Bomb Ticking. I think it's just treating people with a bit of decency. You rush in there with a camera, you just can't use people. You can't do that.

08:30 You've gotta be very open and very decent and be respectful, because you are in a way using them, but hopefully you're using them and doing it for the right reasons.

Have you encountered a story where it was really hard to gain the trust of the locals you were filming?

Yes. One example of that, I'll just switch off from the Malawi thing now. I wanted to

09:00 film AIDS victims in a hospital, people dying in a hospital. They didn't want me to go into the hospital because of the dignity. I understand that, because it's a shameful thing to have AIDS. They don't talk about it, they say it's the flu or something, they won't say it's AIDS. So you've gotta work on that. You've gotta show people who are suffering from AIDS, gotta see their eyes. So it's just a matter of trying to explain the reason why and then you get in and do it. But,

09:30 about what other people, for instance for Blackhawk helicopter pilots in Papua New Guinea, someone from a commercial network went up and did a hatchet job of them. That makes it hard for someone like me to go in there, who wants to do a positive story, to get their confidence. You're not going there to be goody-two-shoes. You go in there as a journalist to get a balance on this. But it's the way you do it. There are so many good, positive stories to be told.

10:00 Even that little girl in that Vietnam story with the leg, that was quite positive, because she did get an artificial leg, she could get around and get her own balance. It's not all doom and gloom.

What are your most powerful moments, obviously that counts as one of them?

10:30 I can't think. That's hard.

That's powerful. That stands out.

That's in the middle of a film, so imagine with everything else in that whole story that we told. There have been so many.

11:00 I think the Berlin Wall coming down and the two mayors, the East Berlin mayor meeting the West Berlin mayor. They were quite nervous about meeting each other in no-man's-land. It was an amazing thing, cos they were embarrassed. Here was this freedom, they hadn't spoken, and here they were cos Gorbachev allowed the wall to come down. They were hugging each other. That was a very powerful thing to be involved in. The freedom of people allowed to visit their relatives in West Berlin or East Berlin. That sort of thing

11:30 is incredibly emotional. You don't realise what it's like if you're separated from your family. Some wall goes up and you can't communicate or see people that you love. That, to me, was an amazing experience. To see the love that poured out. West Berlin was very wealthy, giving the East Berliners bananas and bottles of champagne cos they couldn't afford it. It was a lovely way of saying, "Please, a

12:00 little gift from us." humanity at its best. That's the tragedy. You get dictators like Stalin in that particular case, who separate people for their own needs. When you see how happy, when a man like [Mikhail] Gorbachev [former leader of Russia], people like Gorbachev and Jimmy Carter [Former President of United States] are people who went out and did things cos of their conviction. It cost them their jobs, but they strongly believed. Gorbachev is the real hero because he knew

12:30 it would cost him his job by what he did with breaking up the Soviet Union. That's what really makes it worthwhile. When you meet individuals like that. Like Eva Dougherty, the nurse I met in the Sudan, just great people.

Tell us who she is.

She was an Australian nurse working for CARE that I ran into in the desert in the Sudan who is helping the people who

13:00 were suffering from a dreadful famine and the war between the south and the north people in the Sudan. She was there caring for these people with hardly any medical supplies and getting very sick herself. It was just the sheer dedication of that woman working with these tribal people, that's what really impressed me. You meet a lot of Australians we never hear of, all around the world, in all sorts of places. You run into or you find out about them

13:30 doing these incredibly amazing things for good.

Is one of the reasons you choose to cover war zones because you're at the sharp end of humanity?

I don't choose to cover wars. I don't choose to go to a war. Normally it's the war what it does to people.

14:00 I don't go; I wish there wasn't shooting when I go to these places. It's the suffering that it does to people. I suppose the same as you said in a way. It is the sharp end of humanity, but war is the worst that can ever happen, isn't it? What it does? It's worse than AIDS even. AIDS is a war in a way. How it affects people. Wars cause all sorts of problems, not just refugees, but people

14:30 lose, their country's disintegrating, the aftermath of like Iraq is an example now. It affects so many people. So many nations get tied up in wars. Everybody can go and shoot the bang-bang, but let's go beneath that, for instance in Serbia during the war in

15:00 the former Yugoslavia. I went in there. The Serbs were getting blamed for everything, but to me they're all as bad as each other, the Serbs, the Croats and the Muslims. I wanted to go in behind the lines with the Serbs.

You thought about this in Australia?

Yeah, I set it up here. It was very dangerous. I wanted to have a look from their side. Not to try to do a propaganda story on them, but just to see really what it was like there. What's going on?

15:30 Why is this hatred between the Serbs and the Muslims and the Croats and vice versa? What's causing this? People always ask me the question, "Why are they killing each other? They've got a wonderful country there. Why?" Tito kept them together, but it all goes back to land and history. "It belonged to us." So you try to explain that.

Did you come closer to answering that question?

I walked away from it and I realised that they're all about as mad as each other

16:00 in their hatred. That's what I came away from it with.

How did you show that in pictures?

Just the burning down of houses, homes. The hatred on the faces of the young Serbian soldiers marching off to war and all got killed. Bang. They were all gonna do this and do that. One thing I got, which really frightened me

16:30 and still does a bit, I got involved in the interrogation of a young Croatian doctor and a nurse. They made a wrong turn and were picked up by the Serbs as prisoners, this very handsome young couple. I was called in there to look at them. They were just absolutely frightened. That was an interrogation and were interrogating while I was there. I didn't know whether to film or stop filming it. I did film it because I thought, "We can show

17:00 what's going on." But I couldn't do anything to help them. I said to the commanding officer "What will happen to these?" He said, "They will be traded. Swapped." I said, "Are you sure?" but who knows? They probably were killed. It was a horrible thing. There I am with them. I can walk out of there and drive on. That's the sort of thing that's really disturbing. I couldn't do anything about it.

How were they being interrogated?

Just being interrogated in front of me. Asked where they came from, what they were doing. "You are

17:30 spies." They weren't. They were a medical team, this very handsome young couple. They were shaking. I'm there and I couldn't grab them and take them with me. I tried to. "Let them come with us." "No, no, they can't."

Do you know what happened to them?

No, never found out.

Was that broadcast in Australia?

Foreign Correspondent.

Did it have an impact here at all?

Not for long. That's another thing. It goes on and then they're

18:00 onto something else. It was a good piece. Again, it goes back to what's happening on television on the show next week.

How do you overcome chewing up stories that are really important?

It breaks my heart. This is what I think is more important. For some people to just make one-hour documentaries; get them on, get good promotion for it. That's got some substance.

18:30 A bit of time has gone into it. Things have changed and it's really just another show next week.

It's always been like that.

Yeah. Well.

Do you disagree?

I think things are too slick now, too pretty, too lovely and too smart, the right music. I think we make it a bit rawer again and try

19:00 to let things run a bit longer. Not have everything so polished. People might stop and listen and look a bit more. Now it's boom, boom, boom. A shot doesn't run longer than three or four seconds. In that Vietnam, that shot, the little girl, one of them ran a minute and a half in the original story, something like that. People can see, look into their brain, stop and think the next morning before they go to work, maybe. It's all this show business creeping in.

19:30 **If you were to take a young cinematographer with you to Iraq now, what lessons would you try and impart to them on covering war?**

If they were really deep and dedicated and really had a big heart and was sensitive, what I'd try to get across is

20:00 try to get him to the emotion of the people so people who see that with emotion will understand and pick up on it, and be very, very passionate about it if you really believe in it. That'll make it a better piece at the end of the day. Not just, "We've had enough of this; we need a bit of that." Even do it on one person, or two people, where you can concentrate on. Also dealing with people I think.

20:30 I think there's too much stuff on politics, nuts and bolts stuff where we're not really getting into the souls of the people. We're talking about the academic side or the politics of a place. It's a balance. You

need a bit of all that, but try to think of the camera too as just a part of you. It's what your

21:00 head and what your heart is trying to get across.

You said you come back with an inner strength after having seen war. It gives you an extra dimension. Can you explain what you mean?

21:30 We all fall back into the old habits, but it tries to make me have a bit more dignity and be a bit more thoughtful of other people. Stop, instead of just rushing here. I'll go into the office or studio and say, "How are you today? You doing all right?" to somebody else, try to be a bit more thoughtful of other people's little problems. If

22:00 they're feeling a bit down, build them up a little bit because of stuff that I've just witnessed. Pass on a little bit of information, for what it's worth or a bit of support. I think that's what I mean by an inner strength. Without us all being me, me, me. Easy to say, very righteous, but we end up going back into the old routine a bit. I try not to, I try to pull myself into gear and just think,

22:30 "Hang on, this is what I've just observed" whether it's last year or 20 years ago, I just try to be a bit more decent and thoughtful. Like walking a woman across the road and hold somebody's arm or something. Use that as an example of manners of caring. Little things like that. Doesn't take much because you realise

23:00 that we're so lucky I suppose in a place like this. Never been through anything like that. Those people, when you see them with nothing, they can still offer you a cup of tea or come into their burnt out house. I say that's like that young lieutenant who put his pistol up to hold the soldiers back so I could get on that helicopter in Vietnam.

Was that confronting?

I remember it clearly. I remember his

23:30 face clearly. It's like why I shook hands with that officer who looked after us that day when we were in the battlefield. I'm not gonna dump him there "See you" get in the helicopter and go off back to Saigon. No, "Thank you very much, colonel. I appreciate it very much." Those sorts of things are so important. He'd remember that.

You got pulled into the helicopter cos you were white and had a camera.

24:00 **Is that why?**

I was a guest.

So it's cultural?

It's a cultural thing. Also it's he's a professional army officer. You're a civilian, you're there, he's meant to look after you. I will treat you with respect. It's like an old lady or man walking across the street, if you can help. It's something to do with that. He knew I was stuffed and that helicopter was there for us. Under those conditions then, war,

24:30 he didn't have to do that. That's why, when I've been accused of stopping and talking or going and having a pot of tea, "Let's go." "No, we're not going anywhere. We're having a pot of tea." "We'll miss so and so." "We'll miss that." You miss a lot of things, but you also gain a lot of things. I know from experience what is needed to make a film. There's no need rushing here and there, just, unless it's necessary to do that, if people are good enough to give you their time, you be

25:00 good enough to thank them or whatever.

Does that come from experience or have you got an innate sense?

I think I've always been a bit like that if I do say so myself. I think I have been. It gets better when you come from experience and age I think. I was pretty young when I shook his hand. Those other two didn't, they were gone. I'd forgotten, someone reminded me of that, years later somebody pointed it out to me.

25:30 **You seem like you'd do that instinctively.**

And I think I did. I think I do. It's just respect. He looked after us all day, made sure we didn't get killed out there, he was there with a weapon, he would have protected us. It's also we were there doing a job and you want to thank people. You hope what you're doing is going to somehow help them.

You hope they know

26:00 **that it will, that you haven't just gone and taken…**

That you use it. I worked on one Foreign Correspondent story once where the producer there was just treating people like talent, "Get here, get there." I said, "I don't work that way." People have feelings and I think one's gotta remember that.

26:30 **I want an insight into your relations with Australian soldiers.**

I've got one friend I see every now and then, David Tyler. I met him in Somalia and he's now

27:00 moved into personnel in the army. Do you mean have I got any military friends now?

Yeah, and why you may have developed a relationship with them.

I haven't. I move on, they move on. I've lived around the world and these things go. It's why on the Anzac Days, it's my way of give a bit of... The journalists march and they got me to march a couple of times and that's really,

27:30 I did it out of respect to my colleagues, war correspondents, but I find it very embarrassing because I'm not a soldier. It's their day, I'm just an observer. I won't do it again because I felt. They say, "Do it out of respect to your colleagues like Neil Davis who got killed." Well I can send my respects to him in a different way. But I do like to go along on Anzac Day and just stand on the sidelines.

28:00 I look at them very closely on their faces, the older ones, the younger ones, particularly the Vietnam ones now; they're looking like me, getting older. I think that's my way of doing it. The reason I went to Somalia, I went to Bougainville and did stuff on the peacekeeping forces there because it's a genuine respect and I'm very cynical and critical on certain things,

28:30 but I can't, just watching them under tough conditions like in Vietnam. We flew up to the northern part of South Vietnam to pick up some refugees. We landed our C130 [C130 Hercules medium transport aircraft]. They all panicked. You saw a bit of it on the film. I was on the C, but I didn't go off because they were scared I'd never get back on again. The troops started to rush the plane. They could have shot the tyre, we go nowhere. It was gonna be overrun by the North Vietnamese.

29:00 What would happen then? I was on the back of the plane and mothers were throwing their babies onboard to get them away. Soldiers are going onboard, hand grenades falling all over the place. The loadmasters on this plane were fantastic when the chips were on. They were there organising babies, dragging people on and just taking total. I filmed all that. All that film we gave to that particular

29:30 squadron based out of Richmond. So that was great. They got a lot of that film for their archives. When the chips are down, how great those people were and how good they have been to me in situations. The trust they put into me because of the respect I have for them as well. Examples like that, you never really,

30:00 that's why it's important that we go and do stories on Australians attached to UN missions around the world, because they don't get much recognition. In Timor, what an incredible job the Australians overall did up there.

You were up there?

I wasn't up there for that; I went up there afterwards.

30:30 They are recognised around the world and I've spent a lot of time with different armies, including the French Foreign Legion in parts of the world. The Australians are recognised as really great soldiers. I don't mean soldiers because of shooting people, but just good organisers and get things done in a very quiet unassuming way.

31:00 **You mentioned the lack of respect you saw American soldiers show the local people in Vietnam. Did you observe that later on in other conflicts?**

The Americans? What upsets me, in many ways I love America dearly, but just the loudness. Chewing gum, their "We're the policemen of the world" attitude to conflicts. You do notice that.

31:30 I was in Grenada when the invasion of Grenada happened. Most of the reason with Australia, because we are smaller, we've got to be more disciplined and more organised instead of before you check it out blow it up as the Americans will do. Australians will send a scout to have a look at it and see what it was and then report back and decide what they're going to do.

32:00 **More cautious?**

Yeah, a little bit more cautious and more organised. I think as Ted Serong said in that story you saw, "The Americans say 'if you wanna learn how to fight a guerrilla war, go and ask the Australians,' " which is very true. I'm not saying that because I'm an Australian, it's a fact.

32:30 We're only a small nation in the big picture of things, it's how well and how decent they do it, overall, how much respect that is given to the Australian soldier. I've noticed that everywhere I've been.

You were reporting in the first Gulf War. Tell us about your experience there.

33:00 I went up there before the war started with the peacekeeping mission with Tom Uren and Janine Haines [Democrat member of parliament], a delegation to free 'the Australian guests' they were called, hostages. It was an amazing experience to do that because I spent, just going around with the

delegation trying to get permission to get the Australians out. Try to see Saddam Hussein, but we didn't get that far. We got to a few senior ministers, really pushed to get them released,

33:30 the ones that were coming up from Kuwait as well. They were put into a secure house and were watched very closely by the Iraqis. So I was doing stories on that every night, sending stuff back for the [Derryn] Hinch program and for Channel 7 and the ABC. When the war started, I covered it from Israel. I had one story there which, as the Scuds [missiles] were coming in

34:00 and there was a curfew on, I decided to go for a walk one night around Tel Aviv on the Mediterranean waterfront there. I heard this music, bomb, boom, boom, discothèque, no one else around. I opened the door and there were people all there, life goes on. So I started interviewing, "What are you doing?" "We're Israeli, life goes on." The Scuds were coming in, the war was going on in Iraq, bombing Israel.

34:30 So I did an 8 or 9 minute story about 'Life Goes On'. It did, because they're always at war. Their life's got to go on. It was again one of those amazing sidebar type of stories about people surviving.

By blocking?

By blocking it out, also saying "We're going to enjoy life." They were used to it. That's what they had all the time going on around them.

35:00 That's the sorts of things I like to do. There were no Australians involved in that of course. It's easy to go and film the Scuds where it blows up, get footage of that, but again it goes back to the people.

In Vietnam or Saigon you mentioned people would be playing tennis?

Yeah, playing tennis. All around the war going on.

35:30 **How do you deal with seeing carnage and then having a nice drink with nicely dressed people and music playing?**

It is bizarre. How do you what?

How do you deal with it in your mind?

36:00 You've got to try to go along with it. You sit down and have a drink. It's a bizarre thing. You get up in the morning, put on a fresh safari suit, go and have a nice breakfast and then go out and look at the war. Then come back at night and go and have a nice meal in a restaurant. It is bizarre.

36:30 I remember Tony Joyce came into the fall of Saigon. He got killed in Zambia. The Time magazine and Newsweek, Time had on the cover "Into the Road, Saigon." Newsweek had zeros on Saigon with a big thing. If you read that you think, "God, it's all over." You weren't there, but you look around amongst all this, people having babies and

37:00 restaurants are working away, people playing tennis. It is very, very strange, but you just go on.

Do you have a problem being a westerner and having the privilege of being able to fly out of that country?

You know that too that you can always go, normally.

37:30 That's always a bit of guilt comes in there. That's happened many times. I remember when we left Saigon when the embassy staff was ordered out. We drive to the airport and I filmed the ambassador shaking hands with all the drivers and the sheet going across the Australian flag for the last time, "Goodbye." Left the staff there, which was outrageous, all the staff to the Australian Government. We get on the plane and go

38:00 to Bangkok. What happened to them? Those sorts of things are dreadful. That affected the ambassador's career cos he wanted to take his staff out with him, rightly so. He was told he couldn't cos of political reasons. That happens a lot. I left the three little girls in Malawi. I drive two hours back to a

38:30 very nice hotel, just the imbalance, the injustice of it all. It's not getting easier. The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer and the middle class is dying out. They're gonna have this incredible gap. You see it from that three little girls to going back to the five star hotel. There's something wrong here somewhere. That's why I've gotta find a way of bringing a bit more balance.

39:00 **Have you ever developed a close personal relationship with any of the women that you've filmed? Did you have a girl in every port so to speak?**

No. I didn't. I didn't want to get into that situation because I know I'll be leaving

39:30 or something. It's a very delicate thing. You don't want to hurt somebody; say, "I'll be back" and you wouldn't be back. I like that independence too much. You don't want to hurt people like that. No, I didn't have a girl in every port. I didn't.

When you were going away, were you leaving someone, a wife

40:00 **or girlfriend behind, who was gonna worry about you?**

Yes, I was married. I've been married twice. Probably in my case I shouldn't have been married at all because I was more in love with my work. I've even been accused of taking the camera to bed with me, which once was true. Someone said they woke up and saw me cradling the camera box in bed. I think

40:30 the work was very important to me, more important than a relationship because you didn't want to, well, no, I shouldn't have probably got

41:00 married because the work was more important, which doesn't make your life easy.

How do you deal with being away from people for a long time overseas?

Not easy. My first wife was very lonely, eventually left me for somebody else. Even when I was back I didn't, I was more wrapped up in my work.

41:30 So you pay the price. You get to a stage where you try to put things in balance, but it costs you a lot and other people as well, on the way, because you can't have it all. Because now and then, somebody asked me, "You care about the suffering of other people

42:00 a lot, but you didn't care about it with your family very much." It was a very good…

Tape 7

00:35 **Some one accused you of being selfish in your career as far as your devotion to your work was concerned.**

01:00 **Is that selfishness necessary?**

I suppose if everything was perfect, I should have been honest enough and said "I won't get married cos I know I'm not going to be a very good husband just yet." But like anybody, I needed somebody and I've had two

01:30 great women in my life. I knew deep down, I had a couple of long-term girlfriends that used to say to me, "Haven't you done enough of this? Why don't you just" but something drove me so much cos I felt it was

02:00 a calling to do this. It might be very artificial but I felt that. Much as I wanted to have a woman in my life, they came second to what I was doing. I wish I had married somebody who worked with me, who could come with me on the journey if they wanted to - that would have been fantastic - who was

02:30 into the same thing. Stephanie, who I loved very much, didn't really understand what I was doing. I feel you need somebody who's on the same wavelength a bit. Maybe that also made me not a good husband or partner because there's not much appreciation of what I was trying to do, understanding. Same with my second wife, but that's still no excuse for being as independent or selfish as I was

03:00 about the work. A cliché thing to say, but probably I should have been a bachelor because when someone makes a commitment to you, they want you to be there a bit. The work was obviously more important and at times I regret that.

Have you paid other prices for the work?

03:30 Yeah, you pay prices. In my case I can't blame, I had a problem with alcohol. I like to have a drink like anybody else. In the ABC we grew up on it. I know people who could drink much more than me, but it didn't affect them the same way. It took me years to realise that alcohol can be a disease for certain people. Not a weakness at all, I'm not a weak person. But drink used to make me feel a bit better, made me feel a bit happier, made me feel a bit more

04:00 secure. In the type of work I'm doing, if you had a hard day and nothing waiting for you but some scungy hotel somewhere in the middle of nowhere, to go back and have a few drinks. It's terrific, but with me it became more than that. It took me a long time to realise that drink was a problem. It took me a long time to learn the lesson to say, "That's it, I won't drink anymore" and I haven't had a drink for quite a few years. And I feel much better for it. I wish I'd done that

04:30 before. Not really, sometimes I had a great time with a few grogs. I never killed anybody, I wasn't a nasty drinker, but it affects other people around you as well and it stuffs things up like relationships and irresponsibility, you let people down. All that. I think there's a bit of Hemingway in me in a sense that there was a bit of a destructive side. Everything in that world

05:00 of that romantic side of drinking as the sun goes down and it's quite exciting, but it's also very deadly. But I can't blame any of that on my work, I think it's just the way that I am. I've got that disease and it took me a long time to realise that, or to accept it and say, "That's it." I should feel very proud that

05:30 I stopped. Most people don't. Few do. It doesn't worry me at all. But you pay a big price.

Did the tendency to need a drink at the end of the day tie into the sensitivity you carry around with you during the day?

06:00 All the time, yeah. It makes you feel, it takes that over-sensitivity away a bit. Takes the pain, makes you feel better. But it's an artificial feeling.

Helps you sleep?

It probably does. It helps you crash. Don't know whether you call it really sleeping, but it does make you feel, that's what drink does, you have a few drinks to relax. Some people can handle it, some people can't.

06:30 I'm one of those people who can't so I'm much better off without it. It kills the pain, but it catches up.

As a child you were a loner. Are you still a loner?

Yeah, I am. I do like my own company.

Has that been an asset for your work?

07:00 That's a good question. It has when I've worked on my own. I quite enjoy working on my own. It's something very special about it. In television, as we know, you can't always work on your own, or you shouldn't, because you need a team around you. If you've got the right people it's a fantastic thing. I've never been very good at taking orders. I don't like people telling me what to do. It goes back to my schooldays. Cos I know what to do. I work very fast and I know how to do it very quickly

07:30 and very efficiently. You don't need big meetings or producers, directors, everybody running around. Just get on with it and get it done. One thing I have got confidence in is knowing how to put a story together, how to make a film. It used to drive me mad all these committee meetings and discussions of how you go around to do it. You just get on with it if you've got that talent to do it. I

08:00 believe that to me, the camera is juts an extension of what I'm trying to get across. The instrument to use, it's a beautiful instrument, like an artist with a paintbrush or a writer with a typewriter or a computer. But I look back now and I realise that you pay a big price

08:30 to get to the so-called position where I am or whatever. You've gotta sacrifice a lot, but without sounding a smartie, you've also got to, a lot of people get out there and make films or take pictures or do this, but it's only a very, very small breed who get to a certain stand in the world, for a lot of reasons. It comes down I believe to incredible dedication. If

09:00 you've got the ability and the creative and the intellectual skills to do it. There are a lot of people doing it. You don't' get there just because of luck. Luck helps, to be at the right place at the right time, but you've still got to have the ability to be up there on that level of Neil Davis in our country, or a Damien Parer, or in America people like Eddie Adams, the great stills photographer.

09:30 You've gotta be a bit more than that. Like a top sportsman in an area that is tuned, Ian Thorpe [Australian Olympic swimmer] is tuned for that in particular, he's got that. But I go back to the point, it's costly. That's why now, with my experience, it's very important for me to give it all back, pass it on, plus

10:00 make, I've never made the perfect documentary, yet that I want to, that's beautifully crafted, beautifully edited. All my stuff's mainly been bang-bang-bang, rushed, never get time to grade the pictures properly. Little things. I've never been happy with anything that I've done, never. Now it's time to get a rebalance and maybe pick and choose to do very important work. If I can afford to do that

10:30 financially. With the work I do, you never make a lot of money out of it. That's another thing; you never become financially successful. All those sacrifices. It's got to a stage, it would have happened to Neil, if he's still alive, where you get a good balance on life where you can really contribute in another way like lecturing or

11:00 group discussions with people who are very keen or got the same passions, or on the same wavelength. Talking to you two, I feel that you understand where I'm coming from cos I can see it in your faces that we are basically on the same wavelength. It can be very hard to talk to people who are only interested in commercials or very narrow-minded journalists who can't see where I'm coming from.

11:30 If you meet people like you, it makes it worthwhile. You look back on it. I'm 59 years of age. Shush, don't tell anybody. Where you feel, that's why I was very pleased about the book The Man Who Saw Too Much because there's a lot of stuff in that book which I know will be very useful to a lot of people. Also about what makes a human being tick.

12:00 So that makes it worthwhile. My cadetship's finished now, it's time to do, and there's nothing like experience. As Ray Martin said that I'm probably in some ways very lucky to be alive because your number gets called up sometime. If you've done as much as I have in disasters and wars around the world, you look at John Little who wrote

12:30 a book on me and his son goes to his first war and he gets killed just starting out. Here's me, going on for years and nothing. Not nothing, but.

What do you put that down to?

I put it down to experience, but you've gotta get that experience, it takes time. I put it down to that I think I've got pretty good instincts. I can

13:00 see things, I can watch. I know when it's now safe or I don't like that person. I can see through them, if I say so myself, I'm very good at that. It's a tremendous gift to have, plus really getting to know people as you're out there. Getting to trust. First thing I always do is go and make a point of seeing the commanding officer, say "G'day." If I like him and get that trust, I'll say, "Oh, I'll see how I go along here for a day or so." If I don't, I won't

13:30 hang around. In columns going into a place, I'll never get in the first car, I'll get in the third car or something like that. Judge those things. Of all that, the suffering that I've gone through personally, the pain, with all that

14:00 the good side of it is that a lot of the stuff I've done will be around. I'm only one person. A lot of people do this, a lot of great people. I'm just one of a lot of people who's stuff is out there and might be useful one day for people to have a bit of a look at or a listen to. That makes it worthwhile. Try to get a bit of, and that's why humanitarian work is so important to me, because

14:30 we're people. All the other bullshit really doesn't matter. I don't think in my case I was ever a selfish or nasty person where some colleagues are very ruthless and become very wealthy. They'd go through carving people up as they went. I've never been like that. I didn't expect to do the things sometimes what I've done, or to get to where I supposedly

15:00 have got. To write a book about you. I think I should take that for a bit of a pat on the back in a nice way and thing maybe that you have contributed a bit in your own way to humanity as an Australian, contributed to the landscape of Australia, added

15:30 something, like a teacher does, or something. It's not teaching, but it is communicating, that's how I've looked at it. It's not a job, it's more than that. It's a calling in its own way because there's yards and yards of film there around that I, one of me and my colleagues, have filmed that I think is important for the history. Not just of Australia, of the world.

16:00 **What are the more important things you think that you've shot?**

Obviously the Vietnam War as a young guy, that was pretty, that was a very powerful assignment to be involved in, particularly to cover the end of it. I think of the Berlin Wall coming down. Even in a fun way, the Americas Cup when we won it in Newport many years ago.

16:30 Some of the work I've done for aid organisations, which I think is very important. More important than a lot of the political stuff I've done because you can help people to understand or raise money for these charities. There's been so much. But also

17:00 it is a tremendous privilege how the doors open up to you in this work that we do, and don't take it for granted that people let you meet and learn from. I say again that's why it's important to somehow give it back, to put it all back again, share it. Neil Davis is one of those who was in many ways a very proud man,

17:30 and he was very stubborn. He wouldn't tolerate fools, but he was a very generous man. He was confident enough in himself to share everything. We'd go to Vietnam; he'd share all his stuff with us. He didn't have to do that. He was competitive when it came to shooting in the field, but shared, that's a wonderful thing to be able to do.

What would you like to share at this stage of your career?

18:00 With the right sort of people who have got the same passion as I've got, people who are not just doing it to get some trips around the world or plenty of overtime or aeroplane travel, but passionately believe in an idea, a story, there's nothing more important I don't think that for somebody to go away, say to do a story or make a film on something right now, say in Iraq or here

18:30 in Australia, a documentary where it's on somebody or something that will be around, I would like to be able to part of me, plus I still want to go out there and do main things, but really share. Sit down, have workshop discussions with people for what it's worth. If I've been out and done a bit and people see that, to pass that on to the people who really want to listen, not waste my time.

19:00 I used to talk about it when I'd come back from tough assignments and people think, "You're bullshitting, you didn't do that." People sitting in bars, machos talk about football, nothing wrong in talking about football, but let's keep things in perspective here a little bit. That to me would be very valuable to do that.

You want to be selective about the work you

19:30 **do on your quest to make the perfect documentary. What material do you want to deal with at this stage?**

A story I'd like to do? I mentioned about this woman in Ethiopia. I think it's a terrific story because she's over there, an Australian woman, four feet nine or five feet, married to this tribal chief and runs her own charity

20:00 there in the middle of the deserts in Ethiopia. That's the sort of thing, because I think it's a terrific story of her because she's such a passionate caring person. Hard to believe anybody can work that hard, be so dedicated, and doesn't worry about the profits, the money. That to me is a real person, not doing it for financial gain.

20:30 I think somebody like her, I only met her briefly, to see her in a documentary would make people sit up and stop to think about their own lives. When I did the story on the three little girls in Malawi, when that went to air the phone calls I got from cynical old colleagues, saying they were so moved by that, saying, "Gee, David, it must have been hell for you out there. God, those poor little girls."

21:00 Brought them to tears, that got them going. These people have seen a lot in their lives themselves. That makes it really worthwhile cos television is so powerful. That's the sort of thing I'd like to do, but it's not easy to do that. You need money, you need backing to do them properly. It's hard work, but it's worth it if you get that sort of stuff funded. Get them to air.

21:30 That's the whole. It's getting harder and harder to get good documentaries on television, even on public broadcasters, it's getting so hard to get the serious work that I like to do. I've been accused a lot of my work's dark. I like shooting dark too, but I try to balance it a bit with a bit of light relief in it. I think,

22:00 not that you have to have all this dark stuff on all the time, but I think it's important to get a balance and just to shake people up a bit. There are people out there a lot worse off than us and we've gotta remember that to make us a little bit better. Stop and think that the two Rolls Royces are not very important. Nothing wrong with a BMW, but it's not the ultimate. In our society you have a drive to make money and

22:30 "I'm gonna be a millionaire by the time I'm 30." they say, and all this. That's all very well, but there's got to be a balance. Stop and think a bit. I think that over the years I've done a bit of that, a bit of the work that does make people stop and think, so I've been told.

You said things can be competitive

23:00 **in a situation like Vietnam amongst other press people. Can you comment more on what it was like in Vietnam from that point of view?**

You mean how are people competitive? The networks?

Cinematographers trying to get the best stuff.

I think that's only just being competitive. I want to get something that somebody else hasn't got. I don't think there's anything really

23:30 bad about that. That's just trying to be "I'm better and I'm good." it's healthy being competitive like that. I don't know what you really meant by that.

Did you end up in a situation where something was happening and there was another camera there, where you were jockeying for a certain angle?

I didn't. If they went

24:00 that way, I went the other way. I hated all that. Not me. They were on a different wavelength. They were not interested in the story as such.

Is that the gung-ho mentality that came to the fore in that situation?

Probably. Just to get it on first. What effect it may have on the people they are

24:30 filming. You talked earlier about people like Frank Hurley. He was still going down to the Antarctic in his 70s doing those wonderful pictures. If Parer survived, I wonder what would have happened. That's the great tragedy of people like him and Neil Davis. It's a shame that they're not here. Damien Parer's wife died the other day.

25:00 If Neil Davis was here, just think what he could offer. It's such a waste that he got killed in a silly coup in Bangkok. I don't know what you mean when you said about being competitive.

Whether you sometimes

25:30 **ended up in a situation where you observed some of the camera guys became obsessive about outdoing the others.**

All the time they do that. Not in a nasty way, just in a healthy. The news guys do that. I was never into that sort of scene. I like to look back and observe. In a theatre I won't sit in the front row, I'll sit back so

I can get

26:00 an overall look there. Same as when I'm filming. A bit of foreground in the shot as they say.

26:30 **Tell us more about some of the other work that you've done that we haven't touched on that much so far. Some of the work that you've been proudest of.**

I suppose the work I've been proudest of is some of the little bits and pieces I've done in the last few years

27:00 in conjunction with OXFAM because it's been really worthwhile stuff. It's getting the message out there for these aid programs of where they are working in Africa or the Middle East or Asia or wherever, in the Pacific, up in Papua New Guinea, Timor, because there are so many wonderful Australians that you never hear of that I run into in the middle of nowhere working on a water

27:30 recycling thing or something like that. Some engineer that's retired and he's working for OXFAM somewhere. Just really passionately doing it. You do a profile piece for them, somebody like that on television, just a terrific feeling. They're such down to earth, good, decent Aussies, nothing pretentious about them. That's very satisfying. I went to a do the other week full

28:00 of aid people at a hotel. It was a beautiful feeling. When they smiled it was a natural smile, there was nothing artificial about it. That to me is terrific. A lot of television programs now have become so programmed and it's just churning it out. Just onto the next one. Not much thought put into it, but not enough passion or discussion between the people, it's just,

28:30 "What's on next week?" sort of thing. Not as bad as that, but that's the general thing. I feel that it's nice to be around really sensitive, soft, caring people. It makes you feel good. I remember once giving a little talk when the book came out to a group of people. They were all so moved by the talk I gave. Only just a simple talk about what's going on, but

29:00 they were all so nice, really good-hearted people, that's what makes it worthwhile. If you can contribute a bit through this business, why not? Why not?

When the recent Iraq war developed and broke out, did you feel you needed to be there?

Not needed to be there. It's not as

29:30 bad as that. A part of me did. We were going to go there at some stage, but I went away on something else. They wanted to send me there, SBS, early on before it started. Now I'd rather go back afterwards. Everybody there, running around doing all that stuff. I'd rather go in six months down the road or something and see how is this place going? Like what happened with the earthquake in India the year before last.

30:00 All the news crews rushed into India to cover the earthquake and then all left. I went up three months later to have a look at what happened three months down the track, did a piece for Dateline on SBS to see how things are going, that's what I like to do. I'd like to go to Iraq, everybody's there at the moment, why not wait a year or a couple, then go and do something different of how is it getting back on its feet, if it's getting back on its feet. Those sorts of things, not rushing around

30:30 just for the sake of rushing around, just covering a new story for the sake of it. Something which is a bit more deep. No, I don't want to do that, to answer the question. I haven't got to be there, no.

With future conflicts perhaps you haven't drawn the line?

No, I think

31:00 if it's the right story and something I believe in, I'll go anywhere, do anything. Yes, definitely, but not just go for the sake of going, no.

Can you anticipate a day where you won't be interested in the work anymore?

Sometimes I often think of that. That'd be nice to just go and have a lovely shack or something on the east coast of Tasmania on the rocks with a fireplace,

31:30 just read and think about it. When I really think about that, I think "No, while I stay reasonably healthy, I want to still be involved in the big stories, but not do them in a news sense, but in a reflective way." Just something different. Then the trouble is to get it to air.

32:00 **How did you personally respond when the Australian troops returned from Vietnam and were treated the way they were?**

I thought that was absolutely disgusting after being with them, same with the Americans. They were spat on. Again, it's just ignorance that people just didn't understand. They lather off before they even realise or

32:30 take an interest in why they were sent there in the first place. It's really good now, too late after the

event, but at last the Vietnam veterans are getting recognition and particularly on Anzac Day the last 10 years or so, the applause for them has been terrific. But it doesn't take away the sadness they

33:00 all went through after their return after that. They were sent there, change of government brings them back, rightly so. But I think of the psychological damage that it's done to a lot of them. We should never forget that. War, in battle, I don't care who says it, but it must leave a scar with every soldier,

33:30 just the sheer noise alone and the smell, let alone the screams and stuff like that. I think veterans should be treated with kid gloves and looked after very properly.

Have you had an opportunity to talk with any of these guys?

34:00 I don't mix with them socially too much, but I do talk with them. Over the years I've spoken to them. We don't make a big deal about it, talk war stories or anything like that, just talk about, at one stage the RSL [Returned and Services League] were gonna take a group back to Vietnam and were gonna recognise Vietnam. I was going to go back and film these Vietnam veterans returning. Some of them would go, some wouldn't want to go, some of them just want to try to forget it. I think it's a great healing process to

34:30 go back. I'm glad now that I went back when I did. I'm glad I went back and lived in the north. The Vietnamese living in Hanoi looked after me there. Our office staff cared for me, invited me to their home to have dinner with them, meet their children. Wasn't that long ago that we were fighting them. They had every right to hate us on their soil, but they don't. It's amazing to me, it's very humbling that.

35:00 They don't dislike you, they like you. They say, "Please come to my home, I'd like to have you over for dinner tonight." and their father was killed by an Australian soldier.

What perspective do they have on Australia?

They like us very much, cos we're decent people. Everything was done on a handshake with the Australians. The Australians were in there early to rebuild Vietnam, Telstra and people like that. The Americans came in and thought they could

35:30 win her over with money. The Vietnamese say, "Sorry, we've got our deals with Australia, thank you very much." That's the sort of people they are. Done on a handshake. They have great respect for Australia because we are, I go back to the point of being quite courteous and basically decent. Money doesn't buy everything. The Vietnamese don't want that. We think we're pretty smart in the West, but Asians have got much more

36:00 culture and history than we've got and it's something we can really stop and learn from. I think we are part of Asia. We're not the same as Asians, but we are part of Asia. As Malcolm Fraser said many years ago when he was the former defence minister during the Vietnam War, he said that, "Our future is in Asia." Me spending the last 30 years in and out of Asia I agree with him.

36:30 **Did your contact with the Vietnam vets give you insight into post-traumatic stress disorder?**

With them? Some of them are pretty knocked around, very knocked around. I think a lot of them, talking to them, I think maybe I'm wrong; maybe I'm right, it was the way they were treated when they came back. They felt they were

37:00 spat on. That knocked them around a bit. That's something that really hasn't been really examined a lot. When I would come back in the ABC, there was never any debriefing or anything. I remember coming back from the fall of Saigon and one of my bosses said to me, "You were a bloody fool to go there, weren't you?" I said, "Well, you sent me there. Thanks very much. Where's my cup of tea and my biscuit?" That's one thing I've always tried to remember when people

37:30 come out of situations is just to sit and listen a bit. Put your arm around them or something.

Do you think that still needs to be addressed?

Absolutely it does, very much so. Now there is counselling. There was never any counselling for people like us. The army had it very good in many ways because they were looked after properly. A lot of us correspondents who cover wars,

38:00 we go through the same thing, but there's never any support there, not even insurance at times. At a time it's more dangerous to do what I do than being a soldier, much more, cos you can easily walk on a landmine because you're not with the military machine. You might step in front of them while you are doing something else. It's something I think has got to be really looked at.

38:30 **Do you feel some of the scars are still there for you?**

I am bitter about the way me and my colleagues have been treated, been used a bit like cannon fodder or not getting the respect one thinks they deserve, because war is life or death.

39:00 You can get killed. And you do it. You don't go there because you love doing it, you do it because it's part of the job and you want to be respected for that and looked after for that and treated properly. That's what I feel is missing. Not to be patted on the back and told how good you are, I don't want that.

You want somebody who'll be there in a management role to support you and care for you and your family. Not talking about me, I'm talking about me and my

39:30 colleagues. I think it's very, very important. The recognition particularly of cameramen who are out there in the firing line, not the reporter up there with the microphone. "I'm here, I'm there". He pisses off. The poor old camera is still out there doing it. Or the sound man. Never hear of them and that's what I think has got to be readdressed. There are some wonderful people in this

40:00 country alone who are out there covering wars who never get the recognition they deserve, I believe. I'll go to my grave fighting that one.

What have you learned from your experience with war?

How fragile we are as people. From war is the worst anybody can ever do or

40:30 go to. It is a theatre of war. It's a strange thing. We put it up on a pedestal at times too. Look at that time eh feature films that are made on wars. The heroes and all this stuff, foreign war correspondents. They glamorise it at bit. It's a theatre of war. I've tried to learn from it, still trying to learn from it, is just I think most

41:00 people are good people. If you get through and they get a bit of trust in you and you like each other and just be nice to each other, try to be a bit gentle with each other. That's what I've tried to learn from it anyway. We have 5 minutes to go?

Only seconds to go this time.

Are you gonna talk about the book?

How do you feel about the book?

When they

41:30 thought about doing a book on my life, I was apprehensive about it but I thought if it was done in a sensitive tasteful way it might be a good thing for me and my colleagues. I'm one example of a lot of my colleagues and a book that people will be interested in reading. Cos what makes somebody tick? I hope people can learn something from it about journalism, filmmaking, about a human being who's gone through quite a bit of hell in his life,

42:00 plus some wonderful times as well.

INTERVIEW ENDS