

Australians at War Film Archive

William Passmore (Bill) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 16th January 2004

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1341>

**Some parts of this interview
have been embargoed.**

The embargoed portions are
noted in the transcript and video.

Tape 1

00:39 **We'll start off with an overview that we've talked about.**

Yes.

So if I can get you to take me through sort of where you were born, where you grew up, when you went to Vietnam, these sort of details.

Born in Barmera, South Australia, in the Riverland, parents had a fruit orchard, and seven kids in the family, five boys, two

- 01:00 girls, yes girls, I was the third oldest, went to school at Loxton High School, got to Intermediate [Intermediate Certificate] and left after I completed my Intermediate, that's third year high school, and started work in Barmera as an apprentice motor mechanic, I was 16 years old, three months later on the way home, a semi-trailer ran into me, I was at fault because I didn't give way to the right, but he was speeding and all those sorts of things. But anyway, it didn't matter, wrote it off and of course I'd bought it
- 01:30 through - taken all the money that I had in the bank to pay for it, and you know, there was a few thousand left over of course, and the guy said, "No, we'll just take it out of your pay so you won't have to have insurance," you know? So I didn't have any insurance on it, and the truck driver, it was a big semi [semitrailer], he took me to court, for not giving way to the right, and I had to pay his costs as well,
- 02:00 so I was in debt up to my ears at 16, and my uncle who lived over on the west coast of South Australia with his seeding time or whatever, so I hitched a lift over there and worked on his farm for about four months, stump picking, and when the work ran out seeding, you know, all that ploughing and stuff, and I thought, "Shit, what am I going to do?" So anyway
- 02:30 he said, "Well there's plenty of rabbits around, you can go rabbit trapping for a while." And I did that but only for about two weeks because the guy from Cleve that they were supposed to come out and get them used to get stuck into the booze and he didn't come and pick them up, and of course, you know, so my rabbit trapping days didn't last too long. So I headed up to Whyalla and - because I had a contact up there from a guy back home, his brother had a plastering, rendering business, and he was an Italian guy and
- 03:00 anyway, went and caught up with him and got a job as a brickies labourer basically, for about four months, but then Dad said, "There's a job going in the railways, so I want you to come back and sit for this exam," and I got the train back, and went home and did the test, and all that, passed it, and
- 03:30 then I had to have a medical and they found out I was slightly colour blind with green and red. Well of course that's no good for the railways so I went back helping Dad, but he could never afford to pay me, so I worked for my brother, oldest brother, he had a contract with the local packing shed making orange boxes, and I used to do that at nights to get some money, and then a job,
- 04:00 then the post office came up, postal clerk in training, and so I put in for that and got an interview, and

got in. So I went to Adelaide for six months training and then I got sent out after that, but I learned to type down there, which was a good thing because I had to use teleprinters, and went back to Renmark, or went to Renmark which is still in the same area, Riverland, and

- 04:30 shifted around to quite a few places for three months, four months, six months at a time in the Barossa Valley and so on, in the country. And then of course Vietnam came along and you know, I used to see it on the telly [television] and in the paper and all that, and it just so happened that I'd broken up with the girlfriend so I was hoping I'd get called up, but I didn't. So I rang the people in Adelaide, I said, "Look, what happens if I volunteer, do I get my job
- 05:00 back?" Because that was my main concern, in those days jobs were, you know, god almighty, and you know, people used to start one job and retire in it basically, not like they do nowadays, it's a completely different ball game. And anyway, they said, "No, no, you won't, you can't." So it's the one and only time I've ever been to a union, I rang the union up, and they said, "Of course you can, you're going to go and fight for Australia, your country, you know?" So I said, "Put that in writing,"
- 05:30 and I've got the letter actually, I've still got it, and so I volunteered. Two weeks later I was in. Got a letter saying, "Yep, you're wanted in three weeks' time to report down at Keswick Barracks, and you're going to be flown across the Puckapunyal in Victoria." And anyway, we did that and we did the corps training at Pucka [Puckapunyal], bloody cold over there, in the middle of winter, and
- 06:00 then towards the end, that was probably the three months toughest time that I've had, I guess, it was like corporals were god, you know? You didn't know what hit you when you got in the rookie training. Not like nowadays, but anyway. Yes, they said, "What corps do you want to go into?" I said, "What's the quickest way to get to Vietnam?" A lot of guys did, a lot of guys did the same. And they said, "Infantry."
- 06:30 So we put in for infantry and sure enough got that, and we then went up to corps training at Singleton and yes, I had my 21st birthday up there on exercise, and we went into - sort of snuck out of camp, when we came back from exercise and went into Newcastle to celebrate my 21st, had a great night,
- 07:00 snuck back in early morning and yes, it was good. And then we came - we got posted to 3RAR [Royal Army Regiment], Woodside, so we got back there and I was there for a while and they learnt that I could type, so myself and another guy, they asked us to come into battalion headquarters because they were short of people in the clerical side that could type, so I said, "Yes," as long as I could go back,
- 07:30 you know? And they said, "Yes, no worries," so it was good, because it was a bludge [it was easy], you know, we had 80 per cent of us down for like every morning for a week to go have a refresher [refresher course] down in Adelaide, so the other guys were out and exercising in the bloody cold and everything down there in the hills, and we were sitting in the office typing, you know, it was pretty good. But, then when we got to go over Vietnam, I said, "Look, I want to go back to the unit, you know, B Company," and it took me about two months
- 08:00 before they could find a replacement, yes, so I missed out on a bit really. Bit rude, only ended up being over there nine months anyway, because they cut National Service back from 18 months to - 24 months back to 18 months, and we'd already done our 18 months so they called the battalion back three months early. But in that three months I suppose we had some hairy times. Anyway, went out there and I hadn't done a lot of the training that the other guys had done, although we did
- 08:30 Canungra and Shoalwater Bay and near Rockhampton, and that was just, you know, patrolling and all that sort of stuff, I didn't have the specialised training, like in Claymore mines and stuff that the other guys did, and when I went out to Bravo company we - I was the tail-end Charlie [last in a convoy or team] to start with, you know, like this three sections and you've normally got 10 in a section, forward scout,
- 09:00 machine gunner, second on the machine, the section commander who's usually second, I think, who else? About four riflemen and tail-end Charlie, you know, we just patrolled through the jungle. But it could be a bit longer if it had been someone else, because then you've got company, you've got the three platoons - that's the section, there's three sections in a platoon, and then there's three platoons in a
- 09:30 company, then there's company headquarters as well where you've got your - usually a major and signalmen and all that sort of stuff, medics, there could have been a medic in ours, I don't know. He's also a rifleman. And yes, the first time we went out, and we - after, like we carried about 50k [kilograms] on our back, with ammunition and rations and all that, and we had to be
- 10:00 resupplied every five or six days, whatever, usually choppers that would get a secure area and choppers would come in and drop off the stuff, and we'd harbour up, send our sentries, and the first time I ever did it, at like harbour time, and you could hear all this noise inside and I went out to relieve someone, you'd be out there for a couple of hours, just watching to make sure no-one came along, and you know in your guts there's rifles out
- 10:30 there, and after a couple of hours I heard this noise behind me. And I looked back, and 10 feet away there was this huge snake, and as soon as it saw me, because I moved and it reared up like that and had a huge head on it, I didn't know what it was, and I was facing here, and my gun was out there, all the guys were in there, and I could hear the noise in there, and I couldn't, you know, I obviously couldn't shoot it in there, and so I just stared at it for probably, I don't know how long, five,

- 11:00 10 minutes, and we just stared at each other, and then I thought, well I've got to do something, because someone's going to come out soon and you know, anything could happen. And I hadn't been watching, you know, out there to see what was happening. So I reached for my bayonet, and it went back like that, my bayonet, and he took off, and he - like I was there, the company was there, and the snake took off this way, and it made such a noise it all went quiet in there because they could hear this noise, and someone yelled out, "Bill, are you all right?" And I said, "Yes, yes, no worries,
- 11:30 come out here," you know? And Corporal Ward, who was a real character, he comes out and he says, "What's the matter?" And I said, "Oh, there was a huge bloody snake, you know?" He said, "Well why didn't you catch it?" And then I found out later that he was a snake lover, you know? And he'd already caught snakes and stuff elsewhere and bloody played tricks on people with them and... Oh yes, I just thought, "It was huge," you know? A head like that and it was, yes, probably here to, what's your name? Kieran? Yes, away. And I'm on my back
- 12:00 facing this way, you know, and oh yes anyway, it wasn't a VC [Viet Cong] so that was all right. But then a few weeks later, our section leader, Sludge, said to me, "Better go and put the Claymores [Claymore mines] out." "Oh okay," I knew what they were but I'd never put them out. And you know, that's where we're in an ambush or whatever, along the track, the Viet Cong could use at night, so we're up
- 12:30 waiting for them to come, and if we could hear them we'll throw a few illuminators up, and let the Claymores off and you know, all that sort of stuff. And anyway, nothing happened that night, and the jungle machine gunner had to go and pull them in, and oh yes, yes, I don't know whether I went out with him, he said, "You fucking idiot," he said, "You put them the wrong way, it would have blown us up, you know?" I said, "For God's sake, don't tell anyone," you know, "I won't do it again." But
- 13:00 yeah, anyway, they were rounded like that, and I think I put them out that way, but the guns supposed to go the other way, whatever be it was, and you know, I never made that mistake again. And anyway, as we went on, do you want me to keep going? About this or...?

Yes, or maybe take me through kind of the major points, and then walk me through when you came home, and we'll come back and ... like I've got lots of questions about what you've just told me,

- 13:30 **so we might talk about that in lots of detail.**

Yes, well it ended up I think the last probably five months, the French who was at Fords Gap said he didn't want to do it any more, and I said, "Yes I'll do that," you know, no worries, because you know, being 21 and bloody stupid I suppose, but - and it didn't bother me then, but it did, I was, you know, sometimes you'd think, "Shit, this is the end," you know? Quite often. You know, you'd think you're already in a bunker system and you're - luckily a couple of

- 14:00 times it was an old bunker system, you know, and know it wasn't inhabited, but - and a couple of times when I wasn't leading, because we had the three sections in the platoon, the other scout was leading and we ran into a couple of bunkers that were occupied, yes, so - and that's what we used to do, was four weeks, six weeks at a time we'd be out in the jungle, and the clothes you had, you'd sleep on the ground, you'd have sentries out at night, so you wouldn't get a huge amount of sleep and you'd
- 14:30 wake at the, you know, - the jungle's so thick you could hear things coming, you know, and some areas it wasn't, but some of it was really, you know, like as a full scout I had an Armalite [Armalite M16 assault rifle] in one hand a pair of secateurs in the other, cutting my way through the jungle. And you know, just the leeches and all that sort of stuff, be wet and you know, sometimes you could put up a little hooch, you know, a little tent to stop the rain, but more often than not you couldn't, but you had to cut a flap so that it wouldn't reflect, you know, you couldn't have it that way.
- 15:00 And yes, we were just in the bush for four weeks, six weeks, and then we'd get two - four days off, which one day we'd just walk out of our clothes, get into the shower, bloody get some new, you know, all new stuff for us, and then we'd have a big piss up [drinking binge] that night and we'd be full on two - because there was only heavy beer in those days, two cans of beer and we'd be off our rocker, you know, some drank a hell of a lot more than
- 15:30 that, because we'd been on rations for six weeks, you know, and we lost heaps of weight, you know, I was the skinniest I've ever been, and probably half the weight I am now. And when I came back and - yeah, we used to go down to Vung Tau for two days, two nights, for fun and rest and recreation, and then we'd be back, we'd get resupplied and next
- 16:00 day we'd be out again. So we didn't see anything of Vietnam, and I haven't been back since but I want to go, I want to get some of the mates to go, you know, wives and what have you, because a guy at work, him and his wife are over there now, but they all go up the north, and see North Vietnam, you know, they don't even know where the Australians are, you know, it just annoys me. Because I said to this guy, I said, "Where are you going, are you going to Vung Tau?" "Oh, we're going to Saigon." I mean, Saigon was about 50 ks [kilometres] I think, might have been 60 ks above us, and we
- 16:30 used to look - the Australians used to look after one province, which was Phuoc Tuy, and we had the safest province over there because we continually patrolled. But a lot of people also don't realise that apart from us and the Americans there was Malaysians and New Zealanders of course, I think there were Samoans and a few other countries, Thai soldiers over there fighting for South Vietnam. They all

just think it's Australians and we didn't know that, I didn't know that then, I only saw Americans over there, but they had other provinces that they looked

- 17:00 after or attached to, and you know, might have been attached to American units. And yes, so it wasn't just Australians and Americans over there. And as for you know, this thing about you know, they all say we shouldn't have gone over there, but hey, I mean how can you change things? I mean whatever happened 30 years ago was the decision of the governments and whether it was right or wrong, it happened. And you know, they're sort of saying
- 17:30 that I'm - when I came back I was so pleased to be back, I realised how lucky we've got it in Australia, and most people don't realise this, I don't believe until you travel overseas and travel to a Third World country, which Vietnam was - and just one interesting thing, I went to Brisbane on work about a year ago and I was staying at the Ibis Hotel in Brisbane, and I came down to
- 18:00 book out, and this Asian lady was there, and she had -her name was Dang. I said, "Oh, you must be Vietnamese." And she said, "Oh, how did you know that?" I said, "I spent a bit of time over there 30-odd years ago." And she said, "Oh, were you in the army?" I said, "Yeah." And she said, "I wasn't born there," she said, "I was born here." And I said, "Have you been back there?" And she said, "Yes, three or four years ago. Mum wanted us to go
- 18:30 back, and I didn't like it all, you know, it's just so repressive for the South Vietnamese." She said, "I couldn't live there, Australia's the greatest place." And you know, we just talked a bit and then when I rang a taxi she said, "Oh, by the way, thanks - from my Mum, thanks very much for fighting." And I thought, "Christ, that's the first person that has ever said that to me, 'thank you for going over there,'" because all the Aussies are bloody
- 19:00 negative, you know, and here's a case where her mother was so glad to get out, and people don't realise that it was the south and the north, there was a fight between them, and as far as I'm concerned the north are the Communists and we don't want Communism in the world, and that's what they wanted to do, was take over the south, and if they'd have taken that over early, or whatever, they would have continued on. But as it turned out, the Americans were sort of forced out by
- 19:30 a lot of the people back home, and so were the Australians, really. But we were doing our bit, we were holding everything together over there, and you know, if it hadn't been from the pressure from US and people that didn't know what was going on over there, then we probably could have won it. But we're just now termed as losers and I don't - that bloody rankles me because we did a bloody good job over there. You know, now I realise that, but then it was just doing a job and
- 20:00 you know, we had to do it. And all this thing about killing kids and that, there's no way, I mean it could have happened but it certainly didn't happen with us, because before we went over we were told that the North Vietnamese, they wore black, the South Vietnamese were dressed as peasants type of thing, in grey, whatever. But the problem was when you got over there they all looked the same, and so it was - and they were saying, that you know, we couldn't fire -
- 20:30 a couple of times we could have shot people, but we weren't sure, you know, because we used to patrol all day, we never talked, always was messages, that was friendly, that was enemy, you know, and the forward scout would be the one that passed those messages on down the line. And a few times there we weren't sure, one of the - not me, but some of the other guys, and they didn't fire first because they wanted to check it out, to see if they North Vietnamese and then all hell broke loose, you know? Because once they
- 21:00 saw us it was - yeah, so we were at a disadvantage, all the time over there, because we tried - there was no way that we were going to shoot a South Vietnamese, you know, and you hear maybe South Vietnamese got bombed or whatever, you know, and all that sort of stuff, and maybe there was like the My Lai Massacre did happen, but I tell you what, when you're at war, you're them, you know, and - but we were so careful, we - you know.
- 21:30 Anyway, that's beside, but where was I?

Well tell me what the feeling amongst the battalion was like when they brought you home, I guess a bit earlier.

Oh yes, yes, everyone was, you know, quite happy, but I got - no, that's not true, because some actually stayed on, they transferred to, I think it was (Tu Ra ... UNCLEAR), I nearly did, but I thought no, I probably wouldn't have any luck, so you know, I had to go because I'd already done the 18 months, so

- 22:00 those of us that had to go, you know, I guess we could have but then we would have been breaking our terms and all that sort of stuff, but we didn't go into that. But yes, I know - I believe a few did try to stay on and they did. But yes, I mean we were just lucky to get out of there without getting killed or whatever, I suppose, yes.

And take me

- 22:30 **through a bit of the sort of details of what you did after you came home.**

Oh hell, I got pissed [drunk] (laughs), had a good time for a few days, borrowed my brother's - no, my

brother-in-law's car and he didn't see me for a couple of days, yes, I won't talk about that. Yes, what happened? Jesus. I went back to the post office, yes, got out of the army and

23:00 went back there and went back to Renmark, and was there for about three months and thought, "No, I've got to get to Adelaide because I'd only done my Intermediate," and I was in the - not the Public Service, the post office, and I had to get my Leaving Certificate then to be what they called third division, I was only fourth division and you wouldn't get anywhere, wouldn't be able to get promoted if you had your fourth division, you had to get your third division, and that was the Leaving Certificate. So the first year round I did three subjects of Leaving, night school,

23:30 and another subject, what they call Public Administration, and I got through all of them, as well as working and playing footy, and met Joy, I met a couple of others before that, but you know, we won't talk about that, and yes, I got through that and got my third division which was fantastic, you know, because I can't believe - it's all to do with education these days and I mean

24:00 so many educated idiots out there walking around it's absolutely crazy, because if your parents can afford to put you through uni and that and get this degree, away you go, you know? And you bloody, there's so many people that can't handle people, that can't - don't know how to deal with things, and they're up there running the bloody country, you know? No, that's basically what it is, running the companies, running government, mostly, they were into the government,

24:30 because they can't do anything else. But anyway, yes. And both my kids have gone through uni, so you know.

Well what we might do now is go right back to the beginning, and I'll sort of go through everything that we've talked about in a lot more detail. But I'll start off with - can you tell me a bit more about your family, what their livelihood was?

On the

25:00 fruit orchard?

Yes.

Oh, well they never made much money, because my old man was a - lived for today and you know, tomorrow will ... But that's the way he is, he's 80 years old this year, he's still on the fruit block, him and Mum won't get off, it's probably the only thing keeping him alive, every time I used to go home I'd say, "For Christ's sake, get off this fruit block and go into town and buy a house." "What would we do there? This is all we know." You know? So yes.

And what kind of fruit?

25:30 Oranges, apricots, peaches, nectarines, grapes, yes, that sort of stuff.

And what kind of a place was that like to grow up on?

It was okay, but when you've got no bloody money, Jesus Christ, you know, we'd go fishing, we had to work for nothing, you know, every school holidays and that, because he couldn't afford to pay, rarely would. The worst thing was he'd always bloody tell us off if we didn't work - "Didn't you know? Pick the green

26:00 ones," and these other people that he used to employ, nope, they couldn't do anything wrong and they were, you know...So I've really grown up in a strange environment. Mum was great, poor bugger. Anyway...having seven kids and bloody Dad to look after, Christ.

Did he need much looking after?

Oh shit yeah, he was hopeless. He had no idea how to manage a place, you know, just - he'd let people ride roughshod over him but you know, he'd

26:30 think he was kid - you know, we were hopeless, we weren't, we were the best workers in the bloody town, because we'd work for other people when he didn't want us and they'd always want us back, you know? So, yeah.

Had your dad been involved in World War 11?

No, he was an only child, he had to stay on the fruit block. He was too young anyway, he was only about 16 or something, 15 or whatever, yes - '26 he was born, yeah.

And having seven children in the

27:00 **family, what kind of, I guess sort of mischief or shenanigans would you get up to on a farm?**

Heaps, yes, heaps. Yes, we enjoyed ourselves, no worries there, but you know, I used to envy the people that had money, that could send their kids to Adelaide boarding school if they wanted to play sport, they had everything. They could go on holidays and stuff like that, we

27:30 never went on them. But yes, had it pretty tough.

And how close a sort of family group were you, with the brothers and sisters?

Not very, no.

Was there a big age spread?

Yes, reasonably big, yes, I guess. I don't know how old they are, but you know.

And where did you come in the...?

Third. My oldest brother – no, my sister was oldest, then

28:00 brother, second brother second, then me.

And what sort of position does the third child take in the hierarchy over...?

None (laughs). Yes. But yes, it was just that my oldest brother left school after grade seven, and he wasn't – but he had hearing problems and no-one ever knew, you know, and that was – he wasn't

28:30 dumb but you know, he's since had an industrial accident on his farm, or fruit block, and his arm – hand chopped off, you know, squashed off, yes. Yes, in a mixer thing, a thing that was – anyway, it doesn't matter. I mean I go back to see him, but I'm not – I've got a sister and a brother up here that hardly ever see them. We're not close, we move in different circles. Go back to see Mum and Dad and probably

29:00 closest to my brother in Roxby Downs, he works for the mines. He's the youngest one, that's the one I'd be closest to, I guess, yes. And my oldest sister, yes, in Adelaide, close to her.

You mentioned that there wasn't much money around, do you have any memories of your mum sort of finding creative ways to...?

29:30 No, I think none of us would be creative. But yes, Mum just bloody worked like a Trojan, you know? And no recognition and – lovely person, yes. And she came from a family of 11 kids, so – off a farm, so you know, they were hard workers.

And tell me a bit about the local school, how it was run, what sort of

30:00 **people, age groups.**

Oh well, we went to the Bimbook Primary School, we had grade one to seven. When I was in grade seven we had six people in the – six kids in the class. One's since died of cancer, the rest, one, two, three, there were kids named Loxton,

30:30 two were twins and one was a cousin, the other was a cousin, Raelene Daddo, those are alive, Helen Fitz is dead, and I'm alive. So shit, we've done well, yes.

And how sort of close were you as a group? I mean...

Not really, no. Yes we – nothing – we haven't stayed in

31:00 contact or anything like that.

What was schooling like in those days? What was the focus on, I guess?

Didn't like it, so I didn't bother too much. Yes, I was about the middle of the class. No, just wanted to grow up and get out.

How far was the school from your house?

Oh, about a click, yep, a kilometre, we had to walk there every

31:30 morning. Yeah, that was nothing. But there were people that were, you know, 10 ks away of course, their parents had to drop them off, or whatever or they had to ride their bikes.

And what sort of I guess – what would you learn at school or what would be the impact, just around the general community of World War 11? Was there much...

32:00 World War 11? That was finished.

talked about, or – I mean I guess, you know, was Anzac Day celebrated and talked about?

Not in our town, it was too small. Up in Barnville or Loxton they always would, but no, it was never talked about in our house because Dad couldn't go, we'd lost a couple of grandfathers' brothers in World War 1, but no, we didn't have any grandparents,

32:30 they'd died, supposedly, but that's another story. Our aunt was actually our grandmother (laughs), it only came out when she died. Yes, so Dad was the only kid, yes. I think that's caused some problems, for Dad, yes.

He wasn't aware of it before?

I think he had a – yes, he grew up with his grandparents, not his Mum, I don't think, she went off to Adelaide and he had to

33:00 grow up and run the fruit block and yes, he didn't get much direction I don't think. Dad's only good thing, he played golf well, a lot better than me. Yes, he was a good golfer.

And tell me about your decision to leave school at the Intermediate, was that...?

Yes. Oh shit, I just wanted to get out of there, yes, and get into the big world and earn some money.

And so how did you come across the job as

33:30 **apprentice mechanic?**

Oh well, those days, you know, there was nothing like at school today where they have all these vocational- all this stuff, I mean we had no idea. I didn't know what I wanted to do, but I didn't mind doing mechanical work then, Christ I'm glad I didn't get through with it. Yes, because it wasn't for me. But I just found out there was a vacancy so I went over there and

34:00 applied for it, and yep, got it.

Well what were the people like that you were working for?

They were okay, no worries.

And in an apprenticeship, what's their method of teaching you? How do you start off?

I was just doing all the odd jobs before – in my first year basically, and cleaning bloody motors down and pulling things out, but not – no actual training at that stage, so yeah, didn't learn too much.

34:30 **And, did you have a car?**

Yes, I had to get a car because it was about 12 to 15 ks, well 15 ks, might have even been 20 ks I had to drive to work, so it was across the river, and then we had to go across a ferry and all that sort of stuff, so yes. And then one night, coming home, I was coming out this road and it was a big road there and there was all trees along here,

35:00 and the sun was right there, and I slowed right down, I can remember the Rolling Stones were on the radio, because I'm a big fan of the Stones, I think it was Satisfaction, and I was singing away, glad that work was over, and I just – and I looked that way and couldn't see anything coming, but there was you know – and I had a good look this way to see if anything was coming, because that was the danger area, that was the blind one, because there's more trees this way, and I just went to look back, and I looked straight into the sun, and I

35:30 thought I was stopped, but my nose was poked out over this bank, and he was travelling too, he got me right in front of the front door, and pushed me up the road, wiped the whole front off, it was lucky I wasn't – if I'd have been another two feet, I would have been wiped out. And yes, so that ended my days of going to Barmera.

And were you okay?

Yes, I think so, a few scuffs and scratches but nothing – yes.

36:00 **And what was the situation that you mentioned with the...?**

Oh, because I didn't give way to the right, well it was like that, I suppose, yes, like that, we came in, and yes, and I had to give way, there was a stop sign, and I had my nose poked out, but looked into the sun. And I knew, I didn't think there was anyone there, because I'd looked before and didn't see anything, so he must – there was a corner around, further back, and he must have – mustn't have been there the first time, and he was travelling, because he pushed me, and then I – pushed me right off the road, but

36:30 a long way up, and yes, so it was a couple of years later actually that I – oh, he took me to court, and I don't know what I did, I hired a lawyer or something, I can't remember. Anyway, I had to pay for his damages as well as paying the rest of the car off, which I couldn't sell, and so it taught me a good lesson in life.

Which is?

Which is to bloody be insured, yes. Because the people at the – said, "Look, don't worry about

37:00 you know, going through a finance company getting a loan, we could just take it out of your pay." That means, because if you go through a finance company you've got to have insurance. Christ, I wish I had have, it would have covered him as well, you know, sort of thing, my insurance. But anyway, it taught me a good lesson and here I am.

And in those days what kind of money were you talking about?

Ah, what was it? 1966? I don't

37:30 think pounds – dollars had come in then, or they might have just – no, I think they might have just come in, because it was the beginning of '67 I think. No, it might have been '66. Anyway, I think it was \$6 a week, something like that, yeah, it wasn't much.

And in terms of you having to cover his costs and what sort of...?

Oh, I came to an agreement that I would pay it off at whatever, \$6 a week or

38:00 whatever it was, you know, \$2 a week or some – whatever, I can't remember, it was too long ago. And when I came back from Vietnam I just paid him out, because I'd saved a heap of money, bought a car outright, that was another thing I learnt, was always you know, don't buy something if you can't afford it. I'm different now of course because I've got plenty of money, I can use it, you know, and borrow and do all sorts of things, but yes, it's a good lesson in life, you've got to save for what you – you know, too

38:30 many people go out and – well I'm a financial planner and I can't believe some people, racking up \$30,000, \$40,000 on credit cards and paying off the minimum and just forever going into debt, and they're never going to get out of it, you know, and you can't tell them. Because they want it, and they buy it with someone else's money.

When you went into financial planning, did this situation you'd been in when you were young sort of...?

Oh shit yes, it's helped me, I mean I've always saved, ever since, ever since I first worked I've saved money, well even

39:00 before, you know, because I had a reasonable amount in the bank by that point, but I put most of it down on the car, yes.

What kind of a sense of responsibility did it give you at this age, with the fact that you had to – you had a debt at such a young age? What sort of...?

Oh, it worried me, because until I came to this agreement that I could pay it off, you know, over time as opposed to a lump sum, I just didn't have it, you know? Yes, it might have

39:30 only been a few, three or four thousand dollars, I can't remember now, but you know, when you're not getting much it's yeah, it seemed like a lifetime.

And was there anyone sort of supporting you through having to go to court and that sort thing?

Me. Me, yes. I don't think I went to court. I think it was – I can't remember, I'm not sure if I got a lawyer, but I think it was from some – I

40:00 think it was like the Royal Automobile Association, or one of those, I think they had a legal adviser or something, and they – I can't remember. Yes, it must have been, because I can't remember. Yes, I could have to court once, I don't know, it's too long ago, yes.

Well just close there, because we're going to reach of that tape.

All right.

Tape 2

00:36 **Okay, how did this circumstance with the semi-trailer affect your life immediately, your life choices immediately?**

Well I had less money, didn't I? Jesus, I didn't have a job. Yeah, it wasn't good. But yes, fixed that.

So what did you have to do immediately, like...?

Well I was looking around, there were no jobs basically

01:00 around, you know, I could find some work on the fruit block, but I didn't want to bloody do that all my life, so I did that until Mum and Dad were speaking to my uncle over on the west coast who said he'd have some work. Because I think I rang a couple of other uncles that are farmers and what have you and so actually one of my uncles had to go down to the – that lives close to us, he's on a farm, he was going to Adelaide to the markets, and he said, "I'll give you a lift down."

01:30 Actually I didn't hitchhike, because I was going to, and he said, "No, we'll go down the markets and there'll be a guy down there from over that way that you can get on a semi and get a lift over," or hoped there was. If there wasn't, I was hitchhiking. And yes, luckily I got some guy, old guy that drove me down through the night and then when I got to Cleve, my uncle was out 20 ks or whatever out on a farm at Mangalo, and I rang him

02:00 and he came and picked me up and started in three or four months, I can't remember, four months I think, working on the bloody farm, which was pretty - wasn't good because I couldn't get - didn't sort of mix with anyone, you know, there was only those two there, his kids had left as well, and it was out in the middle of nowhere, type of thing. But, that's life, you know, you get on with it.

02:30 **What were you doing on this farm?**

Seeding (mel ... UNCLEAR), what's the other word, when you're ploughing the fields up and that, ready for seeding, and picking stumps, which means all the stumps, because it was an area that had been cleared and stumps keep coming back up and so you've got to chuck them on the truck and cart them away and you, because when they get ploughed up the stumps come up, and stones, a huge amount of

03:00 stones in that area. Good country, yes, they had sheep and wheat and all that sort of stuff.

And what kind of equipment were you using for ploughing?

Tractor, and you know, a plough behind it. And we weren't harvesting, we were putting it in, yes.

And when had you learnt to use the tractor?

Oh, since I was about six, on the fruit block. Always driven - you know, we learnt

03:30 to drive bloody cars at 10, you know, that sort of stuff. You'd just have a - like on the land you have a different education than you do in the city.

Well on the fruit farm, what fruit were you...?

Oranges, peaches, nectarines, apricots, grapes, Bordeaux sultanas in those days, but now they've got all the fancy ones

04:00 for the wines, but yes, currants even.

So how hard was it to work on a fruit farm as a kid?

Bloody hard, yes. Well you didn't bother then, but now I wouldn't want to do it, like you've got to water, irrigation, you know, channels and stuff, so you've got to change it over through the night you're working. Yes,

04:30 you know, in the winter it's bloody cold and in summer it's bloody hot, so yes, it's not good, you've got to spray for pests and shit like - you used to do a lot of that in those days, but of course they don't do it as much now. You had to prune the trees, except oranges, you still had to do some on the inside. Yes, it's not easy work. Some of it's done mechanically of course now.

And what about picking the

05:00 **fruit? What was the worst fruit?**

Oh, probably - well it depends, sometimes the apricots are up high, you're on a ladder and you had a lot of accidents. Ladders fall over and you fall with them, and that sort of stuff. A lot of them use cherry pickers now, get up and get the - and peaches and that. But grapes are bloody hard, even though it's down

05:30 there, you've got to lift the stuff up and load them, and you know, we used to dry the apricots so you'd have to cut them and use sulphur to dry them, it brings all the juice out, in a sulphur tent, and you have to lay them out to dry, and if the rain came you'd have to stack them all up, you know, in the middle of the night, and all this sort of stuff. It's not - you know, people think living on the land - gees I shoot people down when they say, you know, the

06:00 big farmers, "It's okay if you're big enough," but most people aren't, you know, to even employ people and live the life of Riley [live a comfortable life], but that doesn't happen too often unless you're Malcolm Fraser, idiot. Like the only thing he ever said that was right, and I thought it was wrong at the time, he said, "Life wasn't meant to be easy," but it's bloody true because you've got to work at everything you do, and too many people don't want to work, so they opt out and they blame everyone else. But that's

06:30 about the only thing he ever said that was true. He's a fucking idiot, what he's been saying lately, you know?

What was the effects of this on a kid? Like having to work bloody hard?

Well I wanted to play sport, shit, I was a good tennis player and football, Aussie Rules. Yes, that was my caper, but I could never - in the apricot season, that was summer, and the fruit season, mainly apricot oranges and that, sorry,

07:00 yeah, oranges, but some oranges were in the winter but - and the peaches and all that and the grapes, all summer, so you had to work through your school holidays, you know? And I never got to play in any of the tournaments or anything. I eventually did when I was 15, I think, I managed to con [convince] Dad into letting me go, and I was spewing [was furious] because I got 6-5, 6-5, 9-8, like I got to the

quarter-finals and didn't go on to win,

07:30 because I was a pretty handy tennis player.

Where did you develop your tennis skills?

I never got coached, just in the team, the local team, yes. Go down and practice at night after school.

So tell us, you mention you had a job rabbit trapping?

Oh shit, that was only for a couple of weeks, yes.

How do you trap rabbits?

What? Jesus. You've got a trap like a -

08:00 imagine a mouse trap or it's bigger and it's got a thing on it, opens the claws up and you put it on so that when the rabbit - and then you cover it with a bit of paper and a bit of sand over it, lightly, not too heavy because otherwise it will snap shut, and then like you bury it in the approach to the rabbit hole, rabbit burrow, and you cover it up so that when the rabbit comes in our out, you get him. And you go in next morning and check all the

08:30 traps, and some have been set off, they haven't been caught, so you re-set them, and others you've got little bunnies in there, and go and clean them and skin them and put them in the fridge or whatever, waiting for the guy to come, that didn't come. The first couple of times he did, but you know, I could have made a living out of it if - there was heaps of rabbits there. But it was only short term.

And where did you move from this job?

To Whyalla. BHP [Broken Hill Proprietary - a mining company] were there.

09:00 But I knew. But I knew a guy whose brother was a fruit grower, an Italian guy, Di Donato was his name, I can't remember his first name, and he was a brickie, plasterer, all that sort of stuff, and I remembering him saying to me, he said, "Ah, you stick with me, because everyone's-a-gettin' the education," he said, "But they always need brickies and plasterers," he said, "We'll be so wanted." Far out, how wrong was

09:30 he, you know, eh? But it was hard work, because it was winter again, and you concrete on you, and it just - in the cold, you'd sort of wash your hands or you scrape your hands, and you scrape skin off, oh yes, that was tough work. You'd mix the cement in a mixer and then pour the - whatever they were doing, or plaster, and you'd

10:00 bring it in to them and load it onto their tray thing so that they could plaster, and yes, the cement especially was terrible to work in the wet, in the cold.

And what was the...?

I had one interesting thing, because when I went to apply for the job he was down the pub, so I went down the pub, and here's me, 16 years old, and he buys me a beer, you know, no worries, and there was this drunk sort of guy, I was watching him, and he's trying to

10:30 pick a fight with people, you know, and then he saw me and staggered across, and he bumped into me and I said, "Hey, watch it," you know? And he broke his glass on the ground and came at me with the bloody jagged - anyway, guys grabbed him, you know, and the bartender leapt over the bar, he was well known for it apparently. Yes, I got the bloody scare of my life, you know, this quiet little fellow - you know, I'd had a few beers before, but a pretty rough town, yes.

11:00 And that was before I'd started work, so yes.

And how did this man fit into the community, being an Italian?

He fitted into the Italian community very well, like they all do, yeah.

What about the general community?

You know, some do but most of them are pretty close knit, the Italians, the Greeks, the Chinese, that's what annoys me. I mean I've got good friends that are Italian and Greek and all that sort of stuff, but you know, they're good yes,

11:30 compared to the Chinese or Vietnamese, they're probably the bloody worst, they come from Cabramatta and Townsville, Torrens Park in South Australia, crazy, so they let them live all together and they own the bloody supermarkets, the chemists, the doctors, all in the one area. The government shouldn't allow that, because they're not integrating into our society. They are developing their own - you know, the government's so bloody stupid. They've got to make tough decisions, they're too worried about

12:00 staying in bloody power, you know? And what the other - forget the other people, bloody do the right thing so that people assimilate into Australia, not bloody have little groups of Vietnamese here, and Cambodians there or Lebanese, I don't care who hears this, I'm not racist by any stretch of imagination, but I think we're allowed to say what we believe in, and you know -

12:30 in fact Darwin is a great place because we live here in harmony, we haven't got all of that, and that's the greatest thing about it, we haven't got the society and whatever, we've still got the no-hopers, but you're going to have them everywhere, the drop-outs, the derros [derelicts - no-hopers], the white trash , yeah.

So when did you move from Whyalla?

Oh, I was only there four months I think, and then Dad rang up and said, "Look, bloody -

13:00 there's this job advertised in the railways, you've got to be down here to sit the exam and all that," which I did.

And how did you go with that?

I passed the exam, but then I had to go for a medical in Adelaide. I passed the medical but when they came to my eyesight, I found out I was colour blind, not greatly, but in red and green, you know, with the signals and all that sort of caper, I don't think they want you in the railways.

13:30 **How did they test this?**

I'm stuffed if I know, the doctor, some eye specialist or something, I don't know. Too long ago.

Did you know this before?

No, shit no, not in those days, you only went to the doctor if you bloody cut yourself or you were half dead. You didn't have all the things that you've got these days.

So how had you been managing with red and green before?

Didn't - there was no lights in the country anyway, so

14:00 you know. I can still see, like I can red and green, what's the other one, orange, isn't it? I can see it okay, but apparently it was shades of some things, some shades of greens and some shades of reds I couldn't, which, you know, it's got me through life, no worries, so I don't why, but I'm glad I didn't get in the railways anyway, I'd still be there, probably.

And tell us where you went from there?

I went back on the fruit block, just working for the old man and

14:30 working for my brother at night. I'd work from about six o'clock through to 12, one o'clock in the morning, go home and have some sleep, and then get up and work for Dad in the - yes. But he wouldn't pay me, so shit, you've got to get some money, you've to live, you know?

It was a pretty hard life?

I think it was, shit yes, compared to what my kids have got. But you know, I've brought me kids up so that they're not going to get everything. Now I'm giving them, that they're grown up, you know, but

15:00 I made them get a job when they were 15, part time, you know, and all of that sort of stuff to earn money, because I said, "You've got to realise the importance of money, the value of money." I mean it doesn't help you happiness-wise, but it can give you the options of doing what you want to do, you know, if you've got money behind you. But I hate people that waste it, like go to the race track and casinos and shit like that. They've got rocks in their heads if they think they're going to win, you know? Stupid.

15:30 The odds are stacked against them. I mean every now and again, they'd go down and spend 50 bucks or 100 bucks or something, once a year or something, that's no drama, it's good fun, but every week, you know? Anyway.

Well tell us how you got into the post office, what you had to do.

I had to sit for an exam and then they - I think it was 300 people applied and they wanted 30, so I was lucky to get in. They came up to Loxton and I had to go to the Loxton Hotel, I remember, and get

16:00 interviewed, and I don't know, made it. So went down to Adelaide and did the six months, seven months, eight-month course, whatever at Rymal House in South Terrace, East Terrace, one of those, stayed at a bloody boarding house, yes. Quite funny, I stayed at this old lady's place, because I said, "Look, I don't know anyone near there, you know, I haven't got any family or cousins or anything," they were all out, I

16:30 said, "Do you have any people?" And they recommended this old lady, and quite funny because one of the guys there was from the Riverland as well, I never knew him, but I stayed there for two months I think, and he was in the - he was in some - working for Telecom or whatever, it was all PMG [Post Master General's Department], he was PMG, I was PMG, I was in the postal side of it, training, and anyway the first couple of days I was there, I was across chatting to the bird

17:00 across the road and I looked back, and saw the old curtains, you know, so when I went in for tea that night she gave me a big lecture, she said, "I've lived here for 30 years, and I don't know anybody next door or across the road, and you're here two days, and what are you talking to - you shouldn't be doing that." I thought, "What have I got in here," you know? So I didn't last there much longer. I'd go out at

night and 12 o'clock, come home at a reasonable hour, and she'd be waiting

- 17:30 up for me, giving me a lecture, you know? I was 17, I think, at the time, yes. Bloody hell. Because my parents didn't have much - you know, I mean they didn't bother where we went, Mum did but Tom couldn't give a stick [didn't care], yes. We used to go - we had good fun as kids, but we had no money, you know?

Was that a kind of typical thing to do, to go stay in a boarding house?

Well actually I went to another one in North

- 18:00 Adelaide, I looked in the paper after that, and on a Saturday I went round, and a Pommy [British] family in North Adelaide, which was great, yes, it was really good, I had my own room, because I had to study and that, you know, and it was fantastic, stayed the rest of the time there, they were great people.

What kind of things did you have to learn in this post office job?

Type, taught you the teleprinter, everything, every procedure within the post office, you know,

- 18:30 working on the counter, all the stuff to do with running the post office basically. You went from postal clerk to senior clerk up to postmaster. But I don't know if they still do that, because you don't use teleprinters any more, you know, they got outdated, they got cut out. Telegrams, you know, sending telegrams and shit like that in each post office.

And then you had the job at the post office?

Yes.

Tell us about that?

I went up to Renmark and

- 19:00 you know, that was sort of my home base, but then as I'm unattached, I wasn't really - like if they needed me somewhere else, I'd go for three months. I went up to - I don't know if you know places in South Australia, but I went to Farmborough, I went to Hamley Bridge up in the mid-north, Balaclava, somewhere else, Angaston,

- 19:30 somewhere else I can't remember and then I went back to Renmark, I got a permanent job back at Renmark. Had the girlfriend back there so ...

Tell us about her.

She was all right, yes. No, it just didn't work out in the end but yes, she was Dutch, very close-knit family and I guess I wasn't ready to settle down, so it didn't work out.

- 20:00 **What happened from then?**

That's when I decided, because I knew my time was coming up, I was hoping to get drafted, to get out of Renmark basically, because you had to put in for a job to get out, and you're supposed to do a fair bit of time there before they'd shift you. It was all based on seniority in those days, and I was only what they called fourth division, I wasn't going to get promoted from postal clerk up, unless I got this third division. Crazy, absolutely crazy. I've

- 20:30 seen people in the workforce that haven't got the qualifications and they could go all the way to the top because they've got the initiative and the know-how and they're hampered, you know, and I feel, how crazy is the education system, you know, because there's people out there with huge abilities, but because they don't hold a certificate, they've got more nous [intelligence] than people that have got all these education things, that have never done a thing in their life, they've just gone to school and never had to experience life,

- 21:00 brought up in protected circumstances and had plenty of money, and really don't know what life's about, and they get on and they end up being bloody high up, never - those people never reach the top, but they're high up in government and you know, they really - they should never be there. Teachers are probably the worst. No, I'm truth, I'm serious, they've got no experience, or

- 21:30 very few of them. I shouldn't say all of them because some of them are great, but the bulk of them, they go through life without doing anything. How sad.

And you felt this about the post office?

Oh shit yes. After a while, yes. Anyway, what happened then? Oh, I met Joy didn't I, yes. One of our friends bloody 21st [21st birthday party] was it? Yes, it was, she was at teachers' college

- 22:00 and they were from back home type of thing, and she was staying at the hostel that Joy was at, but I had a girlfriend then, and I took her along, and what happened was they needed - well one of the girls at the hostel said, "Look, there's a few girls back there at the hostel," they were from other parts, you know, "They wouldn't mind going out." So a mate and I went around there and Joy was one of them, so we convinced them to come down to the party, and yeah

- 22:30 I thought, she's all right. So I took my bird [my girlfriend] home at the end of the day and went back there and rescued Joy from this other bloody vulture [another guy] and took it from there, yes. She was only young and easily led. She's five years younger than me, I was probably 22 or 23 or something, I don't know. Because after I -
- 23:00 after I got out of the army, yes, went to Renmark for three months I think, I wanted to go to Adelaide you know, and they were sympathetic because I'd been to Vietnam and I wanted to study, and you couldn't really do forces there, they didn't have the right ones to get into this 3rd Division, so he transferred me to Adelaide, I was on the relief staff in Adelaide, and they just had a roster, went to a lot of different post offices and worked a month, two months, whatever.

You mentioned before

- 23:30 **that this was a bit of an issue, coming back in this job. Tell us about that.**

That was just the bureaucracy again, like in the old Public Service, in those days it was seniority, you know, I've always had a thing against that because it wasn't how you do the bloody job, how good you can do the job, it was seniority. If you were third division, you would be able to go higher up, but fourth division guys that didn't have their Leaving Certificate wouldn't be able to. They would stay as postal clerks for the rest of their life. How crazy is that, you

- 24:00 know? Luckily a lot of that's gone nowadays you know, but in those days - and so I had to go and do this, you know, and the big thing was the army, I'd read all this through when we got discharged there you could get - it's funny, some guys went to uni and stuff, I believe, you know, got paid their way towards going to uni after getting out of the army, you know, conscripts. So that was okay. And I thought, "Well, I'm going to get something out of it, I'll go and do these courses at night school," and
- 24:30 I scraped through, I must admit I only just got through, but that's all you have to ever do, you know, you just get a pass mark, you don't have to get bloody distinctions and credits. And I did four subjects in the one year as well as working, and yes, thought it was quite an effort.

So before you went to Vietnam though, were you concerned about leaving your job?

Oh shit yes, yes, yes, that was the main thing, you're brought up in those days to - you get in the banks or the government or the post office and you're set for life. You know, other jobs -

- 25:00 you know, and that was the real, you know, because there was no way I was going to go on the land, unless I had enough money big enough to bloody run the thing, you're slaving your guts out at the mercy of the banks, if you want to expand and all that sort of stuff, and yes, where was I?

Was this before Vietnam? Like you mentioned there was a concern about losing your job from you boss.

Yes, that's why I rang down the

- 25:30 personnel office down in Adelaide and I said, "Look, I've missed out on getting called up, if I volunteer will I get my job back?" And they said, "No." I said, "Why not?" And they said, "Oh well, that's your decision." So that's the first time I went to the union. I thought about it and I spoke to a couple of people and they said, "Yes, ring the union." Okay. They said, "Of course you bloody will." And I said, "Put that in writing." Got the letter, I think I've got the letter there. And yeah
- 26:00 so I rang them back and said, "Hey, I've got a bloody letter here that says..." from the union, "that I'll get my job back, so what's the go?" "Oh, okay, we'll get back to you," you know? The wankers, you know? And sure enough they came back, said "Yes, you'll get your job back." So I just volunteered.

Did this affect your opinion about unions?

I hate unions, shit yes. Too many bludgers,

- 26:30 people that want to get out of everything, I've seen it all through life. Australians are the worse. They are, they don't want to bloody get ahead, you know, and so they whinge about things, it's always - unions are good for certain things but you know, they're all run by bloody Pommies, shop stewards that have come out to Australia for a better life, all they do is bring the country down to their standards.

- 27:00 **Tell us about why you wanted to go to Vietnam.**

Well, I'd broken up with a girlfriend, I mean, you know, there's more to life than being in a country town and things were going on, and you don't know who's right or who's wrong and there was - I thought why in the hell not go over and have a look for yourself. But it didn't solve things because, Christ, we spent all our time in the jungle, we were like mushrooms, that's all we were, fed bullshit and bloody, you know, what was the

- 27:30 saying? We knew nothing, you know? We were like mush - there was a saying, they used to say, mushrooms, we're fed bullshit and - I don't know, whatever it was. Yes, you knew nothing, you just got orders coming down and bang, you're going out tomorrow, you're going to go for four weeks or six weeks or whatever, and that's it. So out we went and did what we were told, you know, and that was okay.

28:00 But, I would have liked, you know, like today, there was a lot of secrecy in those days, you know?

Tell us about those first few moments when you applied. Tell us how you applied and what happened next?

What do you mean 'applied'? I just put in a letter, as far as I can recall. I had the address from where I got knocked back, just put it in, I think it was a local employment office, that's where you

28:30 went through. And yes, two weeks I think and bang, I got a reply back saying you - in fact I pulled them out the other night because I kept them, and it said, I'll read it to you, it said, "You have been called up," and I felt like saying, "Hey," you know, it was like a standard letter they sent out, and I thought, "How dumb is that, I volunteered, you know?" Anyway I volunteered for National Service, it means you do two years,

29:00 you can get out and then you can get your own job back, yes. Same as if you got called up.

Tell us what happened, where you went and that first kind of moments of being taken into the service.

Oh shit, I actually put it on paper. I was reading it out for the first time for 30 years, and I gave it to my daughter and she got to page two and she couldn't read any more. There was only three pages, but she's a prude

29:30 yeah.

Well tell us what you ...

I'll show it to you later.

Tell us just off your head now.

Oh shit, it was a nightmare, it was nightmare, absolute nightmare, you didn't know, like I've never struck anything like this before where you know, a little guy with one stripe, bloody nance jack was God. We were lower than the lowest, we weren't even privates, we were bloody rookies, and Jesus, we suffered, yes.

30:00 You know, like over there at six o'clock in the morning and you'd get woken up, and out for a run in the cold, and all this sort of shit, it was cold and dark then, you know, I mean this is Victoria back 30 something years ago, and you'd be running, I don't know, two, three, four ks, whatever, and then into the - marching all bloody day, you know, what do they call it, I don't know.

Drill?

Drill,

30:30 yes, drill, of course, yes drill, until you just about fell over, you know, you fell over from exhaustion. And bloody late at nights we'd be having sort of lessons and shit like that. Not in the first - the first thing was accent on the drill and the fitness and then later weapons, use and even grenades and all that sort of stuff, and - but yes, we'd have things at night you

31:00 know that you couldn't - and we had no phones, you know, you didn't have mobile phones in those days so you had to write letters home and all this sort of stuff, and it all took time, and it was seven days a week, we didn't have leave. I don't think I had one leave when I was there. No, I did, I had one leave because I remember I went to Melbourne. We were in a big fight, yes, because as soon as you came down you're branded as 'bloody Armies', you know, short hair, it was one of the pubs in Melbourne somewhere, we

31:30 got into a big fight with these other wankers. Don't know what started it but we were all in.

How'd you go in the fight?

Oh, we did all right. Not as good as some of them, but...

What was it over?

Oh, who knows? They probably called us bloody 'army wankers' or something, and you know, so into them.

Take us through the very first moments, the very first day...

Army life's a lot different in those days than even what it is

32:00 today, you know, I mean I know the army guys here, because we've got a big army - they go out like nightclubs and stuff and they get - still get involved, but they're you know, they've got drugs and shit like that to contend with, we never had any of that. We did over in Vietnam I might add, some of the guys when they were on leave got into it, but - in fact I remember, shouldn't

32:30 say names should I? No. One of the guys when he was coming back from Vietnam, from Vung Tau for his first bloody R in C [Rest in Country], because we used to get that four days, and two days we'd spend

out on bunkers, and he was going on – we were on the back of trucks, you know, we're coming back, and he said, "Oh, that was the best sex I've ever had." He said, "Oh, the drugs and that make it so good." And I said, "You fucking idiot." I said, "Why the hell do you need drugs to make sex good, you know, there's nothing can be better than

33:00 that?" And he didn't have an answer for it, you know? So I won't mention his name, because he's probably still alive. I thought, "You idiot," you know?

What drugs was he on?

Who knows, but yes, I've never touched drugs, I never will, and my biggest concern was my kids would get into it, and the oldest one did just, and we got her out, or she got herself out, and you know,

33:30 but the other one wouldn't, she's too – she's a prude, yes. But I'd rather have them as a prude than a bloody – getting hooked into drugs, I mean how crazy is that? I mean everyone – parents lose control over their kids, and kids lose control of themselves, and...sad.

So tell us about the very first day, the very first moments you walked into Puckapunyal.

Well I can give it to you in writing.

34:00 **No, don't worry about that, tell us...**

No, no, I can't – I remember...

Do you remember what was the first thing that was said to you?

Oh, like, "You're shit," you know? "You're bloody..." The first thing I think we had was the big haircut, it was just, straight over the top, you know, I mean it was just a shit – bloody – it was terrible, yes. The food was shit, I've never eaten such shit food, it got

34:30 better, but Jesus, they treated us like less than human, you know? But it was all to do with discipline, so that you wouldn't answer back, you wouldn't – in one of the – this was after, I don't know, probably towards the end of our period, no, it was at the beginning that's right, because I called my rifle a gun, I had to do 100 push-ups with my pack and everything on my back, you know, it was just –

35:00 and I had to kiss my rifle every time I went down, because the rifle was – yes, and say, "This is a rifle," you know?

What's so bad about calling it a gun?

Oh, you never call it a gun, no, it's a rifle. You know, it's just a different word, a different word entirely.

How would they wake you in the morning?

I can't remember, usually someone coming in, I think, banging on everything, from memory. I don't think there was – there might have been a siren, I can't –

35:30 look, I know it was six every morning, that was the latest, you know, other times we had to get up even earlier to do things, exercises and shit like that. But it was seven days a week, it wasn't – from what I remember, I can't remember if we had any time off we weren't allowed outside the gates, I can't remember us having time off. But then I know we got that two days off for something, we drove down to Melbourne in some mate's car, I

36:00 think, yes, because I didn't take my car over there. I don't know, no, we didn't come home, I'm sure we didn't come home for any leave. It's three or four months, you know?

What else did you get up to on this leave?

Drinking and you know, the usual things, yes.

How were you getting along with the other fellows?

Oh yes, pretty good, yes. We all had to get on, I mean,

36:30 you know, some of them were idiots. There was a lot of malingerers that turn up and register sick and all this sort of stuff, but you know, you could pick them out. A lot of them didn't make it through the rookie training of course, they got sent home, they couldn't hack it.

Were there any memorable corporals or those in charge that...?

37:00 Couldn't remember one of their names, could not. Nope. There was one dickhead I know, I remember him, could have punched him, but it wouldn't be worth your time.

Why was he a dickhead?

Well they thought, you know, they were regular army, we were Nashos [National Servicemen], you know, that's the thing. And in the end we, like we used to tell them,

37:30 once we'd got through enough courses and been in there long enough, we used to say, "We're here to do a job, not fuckin' get one." You know, like, "You pricks." But we got on all right, you know? It was all in jest, it wasn't - yes, because they always did this, slagged off at us, being Nashos, you know, don't know what you're doing and all that sort of stuff. But we were trained properly, you know, apart from that bit where I ended up in BHQ [Battalion Headquarters], I missed out on a lot of the

38:00 stuff, but that was okay.

You mentioned food. What kind of meals were you talking about?

I don't know what they get in the prisons, but I reckon it'd be the same, yes, like 30 years ago, not what they probably get now, yes, it was shit, it was absolute - you know, you'd get a stew that was all watery, and you know, it was just - nothing had any taste. And there was a joke going around,

38:30 they put Bromide in it, because none of us could get an erection, right? I mean that used to come natural, and in there we just couldn't, it was something, it was just - yes, don't know what they had. I reckon they wanted to quieten us down or something, or you know, but that used to go round all the time. "Fuck, what are they putting in this food?" Because, you know...

What did you say? What

39:00 **would they put in it?**

Bromide I think it was called. But who knows, I mean - I'm sure it was Bromide they used to say, yes.

How does that stop you getting an erection, Bromide?

Stuffed if I know, but you know, it worked, whatever it was. You know, I mean when you're young and - Jesus.

So there wasn't much kind of activity going on then?

Well, there was no women there, I mean shit, of course there was no activity going on,

39:30 unless there was some of those in there, but I didn't see any.

But any self activity, self...?

No, no, that's what I put in this thing and my daughter wasn't too happy about it. Nope.

And you wanted to - what section did you want to specialise in?

I wanted to go to Vietnam, I didn't care what section, I could have gone in for signals or whatever, you know, because I could type and all that sort of shit, or

40:00 even possibly intelligence or you know, clerical. Why do that when you're in the army? But there was a thing that every - one infantry guy they needed 10 - nine others, one in 10 would be in infantry, nine others to support him in the field. Then of course you've got armoured corps and you know, engineers that go out in the field as well, but infantry was the basic guys that did all the patrol and checked the - you know, we might have an engineer or a mortar

40:30 guy to call in the - or the artillery guy in the company, he'd get company headquarters to call in the artillery if we needed it. What do they call them? Forward observers or something. But yes, basically it was the infantry guys, they were out in the field. The armoured guys would go out there, but you know, that'd only be if there were contacts and stuff like that, they had to go and - and they used to just patrol the main drags and get blown up on the street, you know?

Better stop there actually, because we're close to the

41:00 **end of the tape. Do you want to take a little break?**

Tape 3

00:35 **Had many of the people who you've done the basic training at Puckapunyal with gone to Singleton with you?**

Yes, quite a few, yes.

And what were they like as a group of guys?

Great, yes. Some characters there, that's for sure.

Any particular ones that stand out?

Higginbotham, yes, Norm. Norm Higginbotham, he lives in Carbooroo in Queensland now,

01:00 he was a character, absolute. We used to call him Bum. If he could get out of anything he would get out of it, but he had – you could never win an argument with him, you know, he was just one of those guys who knew. I could tell you some stories, but not now, no, maybe this afternoon.

And what was I guess the main differences between Puckapunyal and Singleton?

Oh,

01:30 you were treated like a human being, yes, definitely. Yes, you were through your training, you were now in the infantry, and you know, you were treated more as an adult, you know, as someone that had a bit of – well a bit of training, yes.

And I guess what sort of lessons from basic training stood you in good stead at Singleton?

Oh, you learn to shut your mouth,

02:00 you know? Yes, you didn't buck the system, otherwise you're put on a charge, you know, and then you're fined, so you know, what's the use of that?

What's the base like at Singleton?

Yes, that was all right, yes. Sixteen, I think it was blocks, we lived in blocks of 16, with a little like a sort of a big long thing, and there'd four in one compartment, like beds either side type of

02:30 thing, and then a bit of a break and then another four, and so on, and showers and all that, it think the toilets were outside I think, from memory, might have been at the end, I can't remember. Some places they were I think at the end, others they were different.

And take me through the basic things you were learning in infantry training.

Well, right through rookie training too, we learnt how to shoot an

03:00 SLR [Self-Loading Rifle] and all that sort of stuff. No, I don't think we were using SLRs, we could have, can't remember, but I know we had those bloody Sten guns [Sten submachine gun] or something, they were useless, little short things, they were hopeless.

Why were they hopeless?

Didn't have a decent range, didn't have much power, but you know, 7.62 mm bloody Armalite, not Armalite, the SLR, self-loading rifles were fantastic, yes, gas

03:30 fired. And then also Armalites we had, I can't remember whether we had Armalites here, but I had one in Vietnam, as a forward scout you had an Armalite.

How do they teach you, like what's the proper way to fire an SLR rifle?

Oh, it was sort of semi-automatic, you could fire it single shot or you could fire it quick, the same with the Armalite, you know, you could just press the trigger and keep your finger on it, then it used the 10, 20

04:00 rounds in quick fire, yes.

Any particular starts or way that you hold the rifle or anything like that?

Well there is, of course there is, yes.

Can you describe it?

Just, you know, I mean it's just a – I was right-handed with everything but I shot better left-handed, and with the Armalite you used to get the – oh shit, the case, used to be ejected right across your face, you know?

04:30 Yeah, because, mainly if you were right-handed, it's being ejected that way and this would come across, goes upright.

When did you discover that you shot better left-handed?

It would have been probably in corps training, we did a lot of long distance stuff with the SLRs, they were bigger than the Armalites, far bigger, and they had a greater range, but they were bloody accurate,

05:00 yeah.

What kind of I guess drills would they take you through to build up your skill with the weapons?

Firing from different positions, different targets, moving targets, you know, walking through bush and stuff like that, and pop-up targets and all that sort of stuff.

And aside from the weapon training, what other kinds of infantry stuff were they?

Well, gees, I know we had

05:30 grenade training and all that sort of stuff, how to throw a grenade, because you've got to know how long to hold onto it when you pull the pin and all that sort of stuff, and you know, there was – don't know if we had – see I had an Armalite where they had an RPG [Rocket Propelled Grenade], rocket propelled grenade underneath it, sort of two weapons in one. Over in Vietnam I had it, but I can't recall it in Australia.

And what's the best way to throw a

06:00 **grenade?**

Throw it at the right bloody time, otherwise it'll go off. Well you pull the pin – I can't remember what it was now, but you pull the pin, so that it's out, and you've got five seconds or something before it's going to explode, or seven seconds or something. So you used to hold it for a couple, because you didn't want it to, you know, get over there and then for them to throw it back at you, so you'd want to get it over so that as it got over there it exploded, you know?

And do you

06:30 **sort of lob it overarm, or underarm, or any particular...?**

Overarm, yes. But you know, over there it was difficult throwing grenades because there was so much trees around, you know, you'd hit one and it'd bounce back at you, so yes, it wasn't used that much unless there was a fairly open space, yes. But the rocket propelled grenade, the same thing, you know? We had RPGs fired at us in some contacts, and some went off, some didn't you know? They lobbed

07:00 in the ground next to people and didn't go off, they could have been casualties. But they didn't have as good a weapons, I don't think, as us, because most of theirs was Russian. But the RPG rocket – the AK47 [AK47 machine gun] was similar to our 7.62 [M60 7.62mm machine gun], you know, and that was pretty deadly.

And in this kind of training that they were giving you, were they relating

07:30 **it at all to Vietnam?**

Oh shit yes, yes. But first they had to train us as soldiers, because later we had the training at Canungra, jungle training and that was tough, and then we had Shoalwater Bay, which was also patrolling and you know, learning our signals and you know, if you wanted someone to come up, if it was a lieutenant you put two fingers on your shoulder, or you know, if it was just the

08:00 corporal or something you'd put two fingers here, you know? And you had to learn not to talk all day, yes.

And you mentioned at first they had to train you how to be soldiers, what's the most important lesson that a soldier needs to learn?

You've got me. I don't know. What is it? Yes. I guess, I would say to keep your mouth shut, you know, even if you

08:30 know it's wrong, you know, because officers were God, especially in Australia. In Vietnam it was a lot different, we got to know them better, but it's all too much pomp and ceremony in the army, you know, it really is. But, that's the way they want it, and you know, it's like our – you come back and guys get awarded medals, and it's always the lieutenant colonel, or the commanding officer or you know, and all he's been up through the ranks in

09:00 guys that never saw any action, never saw any – they get bloody all these medals for how they commanded the troops. Christ, what a joke. What a joke. You know, they're back in Saigon or somewhere, or bloody the taskforce team, behind the wire, bloody sitting in offices having hot showers and cooked meals and everything, for the whole

09:30 tour, and they get awarded medals. How crazy is that? No, that's ridiculous. The guys out in the field, the officers out in the field did fantastic jobs, most of them. We had a great company commander, Ivan Carl, Major Carl, he's now a – he was a colonel I think, but he's actually, he's still working for Veterans

10:00 Affairs now, because he's over 65, he had to get out of the army, but he's still working – that's another story. Yes, fantastic. I didn't get to know him very well over there, because he was a company commander and we were – you know, but yes, he's a great guy, fantastic officer and actually I've got a – of our last reunion in Canberra this last, or the second one I've been to, went to Adelaide for the battalion reunion in

10:30 1970 or '71, that's the first thing I ever – it was a 30 year return of – or of our return to Australia and we met in Adelaide, there was quite a few there. But what was I going to say? Shit.

About Ivan?

Yes, I think. Anyway, he was there, and – no it wasn't about Ivan, but anyway. I'll tell you

- 11:00 something else. When we – last year we had a platoon reunion, and I’ve got – they took photos and you know, he’s there and – yes, it was about Ivan because I’ve had two guys in my office that have looked at it, and this has only been less than a year, and one is a guy that was a commander in the Navy, he said, “I know that guy there.” He said, “Who is it?” I said, “Ivan Carl.” He said, “Yes, he used to be in the college training people when he
- 11:30 was...” He’s out of the navy now but he’s commanding one of the customs boats here, he said, “What a great guy,” you know, he said, “Of all the officers, he was the one that imparted and you could talk to and you know, he was...” and also another guy that was an ex-captain in the army in the engineers, he said, “I know that guy, that’s Ivan Carl,” you know? And also Lieutenant Ralph, who was the
- 12:00 platoon commander, I never was under him because he went to battalion headquarters when – oh no I did, I was under him but you didn’t – because the guy, the lieutenant that was in the platoon battalion headquarters when I came out about three months later, he came out and took over from Ralph, he went in and did his job, and he said, “Yes, I know him, Ralph,” he said, “Oh what fantastic people, you’re lucky to have those guys, yeah, you know, they were ‘people’ people, not bloody...” Yes, and also we found out
- 12:30 at this reunion in Canberra, in Queanbeyan, found out that Ivan was also a commander either, I think it was before he commanded a unit of US marines or something in Vietnam. We never knew, and he’s the only – apparently he’s the only Australian officer to ever have done it. And there’s a
- 13:00 write-up on him, because we had all the photos, people had brought photos down, and rekindled a lot of memories, you know, it was great.

And what do you reckon makes him such a sort of well respected...?

He listens to you, yes. Whereas other officers that thought they knew best, and because they were officers they did know best, you know, they reckon. I guess I’ve always been one for the underdog, because of my up-

- 13:30 bringing and...

And you didn’t meet him until you went to Vietnam?

Oh no, I knew him when he was in the – yes, he was at our headquarters and that, yes, I’d seen him, but we didn’t socialise, Christ you don’t – when you’re a baggy-arsed private you don’t socialise with the officers, they have their officers’ mess, the sergeants have the sergeants’ mess, and we have the other ranks, you know?

- 14:00 **And the infantry must be fairly physically fit, so how did they - what kind of PT [Physical Training] training and stuff did you get up to?**

Yes, intense, yes it was, there was no doubt about that.

How did they build up your fitness?

Well, you lost a heap of weight, that’s for sure. It was runs, you know, 20k runs and all that sort of stuff. Not often, but you know, there was a lot of short runs and marches and just

- 14:30 eating shit food I suppose and I don’t know. Yes, you were always on the go. I think it’s a lot different when there’s no war around you know, I don’t think I’d like to be in the army because there’s not nothing to do, you know, type of thing? And at least we were there, we were training for a purpose, we went over there and did what we were trained to do and yes, to me it was fulfilling, you know? And I came
- 15:00 home thinking, “Christ how lucky are we? How lucky are Australians,” you know? I remember going down Rundle Street a couple of days after, you know, I resurfaced, and I thought everyone was smiling at me, but it was just the difference was – and I thought how great is this to be in a place where people smile at you, you know? Because over there, you didn’t know who the bloody enemy was, whether it was the North or the South, and you were always wary, you know, you just didn’t know. But of course
- 15:30 now I realise that they’re not smiling, you go down to Adelaide and Christ, you know, they’re all in their own little world. Whereas Darwin’s different, Darwin’s fantastic, people say, “G’day,” doesn’t matter where you are, you know?

Well what was the social life like at the base at Singleton?

Oh, we had a booze-up, when we went out on patrols and stuff like that, we went on you know, six, seven days bloody camps and all that sort of stuff,

- 16:00 sleeping under tents, you had to put up yourselves, and just up the mountains type of thing, patrolling and you know, you had the enemy and all that sort of caper and yes, we were trained pretty well.

And did you get any leave while you were there?

Yes, I’m sure we would have, because I remember going to a couple of the RSL [Returned and Services League] clubs around that area at one stage. But I can’t – it’s too long ago

16:30 to...

And what sort of things did you know about Vietnam at the time? About the...?

Not a lot, not a lot. Before I went in I knew nothing basically, only what I'd seen in the papers and stuff like that. But we did - to their credit they did - it was called propaganda but you know, well we called it propaganda but they told us a lot about the North and the South, and whether it was correct or not, but you know, about their customs

17:00 and blah, blah, blah. Yes, yes, they did, you know?

Do you remember any stuff they told you?

Not specifically, no. I haven't got a great memory, I can tell you that. But I've forgotten most of it, like as I said, I never talked about Vietnam, because when I met Joy, we ended up getting engaged, her parents were here in Darwin, '73 I got a lift up with a guy I knew that

17:30 lived up here, he drove up, he was coming up to get married, came up and stayed her parents for a couple of weeks, met them, fell in love with Darwin in those two weeks, and went back, and then they came back at the end of the year because the father-in-law was teaching, and I said, "Well, we're getting married," so - and then after that we lived in Adelaide for another few months, it was winter

18:00 time, I hate winter, you know, I'd come home at six o'clock or something and wet and cold and dark, and there'd been a job advertised in Darwin, I said, "Joy, do you want to go to Darwin?" She said, "Of course." So we put in for it, but because I was on relief staff in Adelaide I had to wait until about April or something, May. May it was, yes, and I had to wait until I finished my roster, gees I was spewing. So we got up here, we drove up, and we arrived two weeks before Cyclone

18:30 Tracy, yes. But I wasn't leaving after that, we knew, none of us wanted to leave, we wanted to stay here and - yes.

What was Cyclone Tracy like?

Oh, pretty bad. I was staying with my sister and brother-in-law who were here at the time, who left, they've split up since, she's still here, and they had a government flat in town, it was two-storey, you know, on the top floor, we lost the roof and what have you, but yes, it was scary. But Jesus,

19:00 a lot worse than us. And I couldn't believe the devastation the next morning when we got out. Between the - we all ended up in the bathroom because yes, the water, when we heard it come, because you could hear this noise coming, you know, bang, bang, bang, and the wind for ages had been really great, and we had louvres and the water was pushing through the louvres

19:30 and I jumped out of bed and pulled Joy out, because you know, I could hear this coming and we fell over in the water because the floor was full of water. And so we got everyone into the bathroom and next thing bang, bang, it was just hitting the - and you know, you could see the thing go, and then everything going with it. We thought we were going to be sucked out of the top, you know? But in the eye of the storm,

20:00 we went down to the first floor, it was pretty quiet, but we realised it had been quiet for a while and so we knew that the thing was going to come back the other side of it, so we ducked down there and knocked on the door and they let us in, and it was better down there, yes.

And you mentioned walking out the next morning. What did you see?

Oh, cars overturned, trees uprooted, bloody you name it,

20:30 rubbish all over the place, it was just a nightmare. So we ended up getting in the car and going out to see some friends, and we were probably some of the first on the roads, out through Baggott Road, and we had to drive around and pull things off the road to get through to the other road, it was just all over. There was devastation everywhere. We just couldn't believe it when we got out to the northern suburbs, it was so bad. There was just whole houses missing, you know?

21:00 yeah.

And what was the community spirit like after it?

Pretty okay in some, but I won't mention one nationality that there was a lot of funny business going on, those people just wanted to leave Darwin, they brought in all these planes and what have you, and we heard, you know, women and children were going first, and we heard of guys of this particular

21:30 nationality that were dressing up as women to get on the plane. Supposedly it was true. Yes, look, war, disaster, brings out the best and the worst in people, you know, and you don't really know until you get in there and find out what a person is capable or not capable of doing, you know? So it surprises you, even in war, I mean I haven't until

22:00 recently called anyone a mate, because it used to be, "G'day mate, g'day mate," "mate, mate, mate." And then you get in a sticky situation and these guys that call people mates, they would chicken out, they wouldn't do what they were supposed to bloody do, and we had a couple of instances like that. And

I just – I’m never going to call a person a mate, you know, because – I guess I’m a funny guy but it’s used too loosely, you know?

What

22:30 **does it mean to you?**

Because the guys with the big mouths that are going to be the warmongers and all that sort of stuff, they’re the guys that go to water when it all happens, you know? And it’s the guys that don’t say things that just get on with life, they’re the guys that you can rely on in most cases, yes.

And what does being a mate, I guess mean to you from your experience?

I’ve got a lot of friends, but I’ve got no close friends, you know, I mean guys that I would regularly go with or whatever, but you know,

23:00 being a mate is someone you can rely on, you know, and when you see that happening. Well I’ll tell you later this afternoon, but anyway, if I want to.

Well what did being a ‘mate’ mean in Vietnam?

Well to me it was – it doesn’t matter whether it’s in Vietnam or whether it’s over here, it’s too loosely used. People call people, “Oh, g’day mate,” you know? Christ, you don’t know whether you can rely on that person in tough situations

23:30 so you know, why should he call you ‘mate’? Because mates should know that they can rely on each other.

How well did you think you could rely on, I guess, your infantry battalion? I suppose specifically the men around you?

Pretty good, except for one or two, which I said, that you know, we had a couple of incidences where guys piked

24:00 out [lost confidence]. But I mean I guess it’s them, it’s their – if they don’t want to do what they’re supposed to do, well, you know – but they’re the ones that brag about this and that, when there’s no action around, and how tough they are, and all that sort of stuff, but when it comes down to the nitty gritty, they’re the ones that want to pull out, you know? And did pull out, yes.

And were there types of I guess exercises or parts of training at

24:30 **Singleton which would try and build up that trust of the group?**

Oh Christ, how would I know ? You know, I mean, we were young, we bloody – we did what we were told, we bloody – we had good times, we had bad times, you know? Yeah, we got on pretty well, but there was an occasional fight amongst – you know, a disagreement, like everything. But yes...

And where did you go to after Singleton?

I went to Woodside River, posted to 3RAR,

25:00 RAR I should call it, if you were in the army you’re not allowed to say 3RAR, that’s the protocol and all that crap. Yeah, we went down to Woodside, in South Australia.

What was it like having a posting rather than training?

Well, it was just another step in getting to Vietnam basically. That’s all I wanted to do.

Why were you so keen to go?

Oh well you hear all these

25:30 negative things about people not being in – those bloody protestors, and you know, people that came from rich families that went to uni and never bloody – stayed at uni for about seven years and never graduated, and just had a great social life and you know, and are useless. They should be bloody shot as far as I’m concerned. And they’ve got the nerve to go and protest against things that – they should have gone over and found out what it was really like, and what life’s like, it’s not bloody

26:00 the way they lived their life. And you’d see them protesting on the telly and you’d think, useless people, you know? I guess they’ve got a place in the society, but it’s right down there, I can tell you. I remember, when we marched through Adelaide, we were so pleased, I was so pleased to get home, you know, in one piece, and we had people cheering and that, but then we had these dirty bloody protestors that were swearing

26:30 and – “You murderers,” and throwing things at us. Didn’t bother me then because I was just so glad to get home, but now, I am so angry, if that ever happens and I’m marching on Anzac Day, I will pull out and I will hit them. I don’t give a shit any more, because they are useless people, they haven’t done anything in life, you know? I don’t know, you just can’t – they’ve got no right to protest, it’s something they don’t know.

27:00 **How do you feel when you see, like when protests for anti-Iraq and that sort of situation?**

The same, those people, those bloody stupid women and people that said they were going to go over to Vietnam (sic) and put themselves in the spots, and they got over there, what do they call themselves? How bloody stupid were they? They got over there and Saddam said, "Okay, you can go here, you can go there, you can go there," and then they realised it was going to be the

27:30 spots that were going to be bombed, and they wanted to come out. They wouldn't put their life on the line for their own cause, no way, they're gutless. And you know, they just want to get in the paper and they want to be something that they've never been anything in their life, and they want to get promoted in a - nope. And a lot of them were church people too, you know? I've got no time for the church, whatsoever,

28:00 bloody - I could - yes, I'm an angry man, who cares? All those paedophiles and the bloody Catholic and Anglican - I'm brought up an Anglican, but no, I would never ever go to church except for a wedding or unfortunately a funeral, I will never, ever go to church, it's caused so much problems with people in power. And that stupid Pope, how old is he? He can't even bloody mumble properly.

28:30 And my wife who's a Catholic says, "Oh, they can't get rid of him until," you know, "he dies." What stupidity. What stupidity. Get a man in there that's capable of doing the bloody job. You know, the Catholic church owns more property than anyone else in the world, you know? Nope. It's caused more harm in the way the people are brought up, I've seen so many -

29:00 I know a lot of guys that are Catholics, they've got split personalities, they're brought up they have to go to church, had a case after Cyclone Tracey a guy came up from somewhere, I won't say where, he was up here for a year, the first couple of months he went to church every Sunday, because that was the right thing to do, and then he discovered there was more to life, you know, there was booze, there was sex, and once he had a couple of beers, all he wanted to do was

29:30 chase women, didn't matter who they were, and he - I think he had his first sexual experience up here, and quite a few after that, and then before he goes back to where he came from, we said, "Oh, what are you doing this weekend?" And Sunday would come around, "Oh no, I've got to go to church." I said, "What?" I said, "You haven't been to church for the last nine months." "Oh yeah but you know, I should have, and Mum and Dad, you know,

30:00 when I get back there I'm going to have to go to church." He's a 22-year-old person. How crazy is that? And then he went back and married a good Catholic, and he can never ever do anything in his life that he wants to do, you know. It stuffs people up in the head. Crazy.

Were you religious when you were younger? Were you brought up...?

I went to church, but I wouldn't say religious, Jesus

30:30 Christ. There wasn't much - Dad never went. But now, the hypocrite, he's going with Mum, you know? Because Mum always went, but...

Was there any time in Vietnam when religion or faith or something became a bit important?

No, only - no, it's only coincidence, that's all. We got in a contact once - we'd gone on R&C, rest and recreation, and we

31:00 came back to Nui Dat and then they said, "Okay, you're going out on this exercise, and we go through one of these towns on the back of armoured personnel carriers," and a bit later we get dropped off at this jungle, so in we go, and we'd only gone about 500 metres, I wasn't leading, but one of the other guys, the signal came through, you know, enemy? friendly? Didn't know. The next minute, bang, all hell broke loose. So we all rushed up and bloody formed our thing, and out there sheeting it, whatever was going,

31:30 you know, and so the lieutenant's on the phone to get the armoured personnel carriers back, who had gone on their way, because we didn't know whether they were - or the guys up the front didn't know whether - because they were so close to this bloody Vietnamese camp, but every time we ran into a bunker system, it was just in the jungle, close to a Vietnamese town, where they'd either come in and stand, you know what - lord over or whatever, you know, and either kill someone

32:00 so they'd get all their supplies or the South Vietnamese were sympathetic to them and you know, helped them and didn't tell us, you know, so who knows? But yes, I was firing away and next thing I get shifted, and "Oh shit, I've been hit," you know? And about 10 minutes later, I wasn't game to look down, because I thought shit, I can't feel anything, you know, maybe it's numb, I don't know. And I just kept firing at whatever was moving out there, and the next thing the APCs [Armoured Personnel Carriers] come through

32:30 and start firing at them, and well they'd probably gone by then, I don't know, but by the time the APCs crashed through and - so when the firing all stopped I looked down and I had this great big hole in my greens, and I thought fuck, there's no blood, you know? And so I felt around, and of course when we got into contact, I'd pulled some magazines out of my pouches and put them into my pockets because they were easier to get at, and the bullet smashed into

- 33:00 there, and I've still got the AK47 tip and all was smashed up, but I looked for it the other night, I know I had this army bag which Joy said, "Get rid of that," you know, and I said, "Well no, I don't want to." But she said, "You've got all this stuff in it," and I put it away somewhere, and I thought I put it up the top of the cupboard and I looked there two nights ago and couldn't find it. She said it's in a plastic bag, but I can't find it. But otherwise I would have shown you that. And you know, the AK47 tip of it. And all it
- 33:30 was, I had a big bruise for weeks on the side, and it just so happened, I didn't even know, but the padre had come out with us that day, but I think it was just coincidence, because apparently he used to come out for a day or two or whatever, and next resupply he'd go back, and I've never met him, never seen him. And I thought then, "Oh shit, it must be not my lucky day because he's here." But no, I just think that's fate, you know,
- 34:00 it's - and then we just got on with the job. And then when this - you know, somebody got interested in Vietnam a couple of years ago, and Joy said this thing was coming up, a museum that was photos and all that sort of shit, and I saw this newspaper, the Sydney Morning Herald or something, here was this guy, big Australian army guy, back I think it was 1969 or '70 or something, and it's got a front page where the national newspaper, and he had some
- 34:30 cigarette case or something in his pocket, and he got hit, and he was there showing all this and a big write-up on him, and I thought, I've only told about three people, you know, and just went on another four weeks out in the jungle. I think I kept the greens somewhere home, back in Mirook, I must go and look for them one day, you know, with all the - and I've got to find this stuff now, I'm determined I've got to find it, I don't know what I've done with it. Shit, I hope I haven't thrown it out, because you know, I've only realised the significance of it now,
- 35:00 especially when I saw that, I thought, "What's the big deal," you know?

When it happened, and you'd realised how lucky you'd been, what sort of reaction did you have?

"We've got a job to do, let's get on with it." We had another four weeks to go, or whatever. That was the first day out, you know? Yes. I mean, that's life.

Was there any sort of like not to that

- 35:30 **situation, but any kind of superstition about you know, your luck, and how long your luck would hold?**

No, not really. Look, it could have finished the next day, it could have finished the next month, I mean, we took chances every day, I mean - and especially as a forward scout, I mean you're leading the guys and you've got to keep your eyes and everything open and stop and listen and all that sort of stuff. And you

- 36:00 you know, there were booby traps you had to look out for and all those sort of things. And yeah, I mean you'd literally, I'd say shit yourself, literally, two or three times a day thinking this could be the end, because you'd think, "Shit, this looks like a bunker system," but you couldn't do anything other than stop and look and then go a bit further and you know, and you say, "Shit, they can see me, I'm dead," you know? But

- 36:30 I got into a couple that were old bunker systems, there's a lot of bunker systems where they'd been, yes, in the jungles, yeah, we'd find them, and that's all our job was, to find the bunker systems, they'd wait for us to run into them, and then if we saw them first we'd open up, if we could make sure they were North Vietnamese, and if they saw us first, they'd open up. And that'd be it, and then we'd call in the - I mean not only bunker systems, but patrols and we'd have ambushes at night and all that sort of stuff.

- 37:00 But often the jungle was way too thick to even have an ambush, it wasn't like - like somewhere where we had a bit of protection and there was a track or a road, so we didn't get into that many ambushes. But even in the jungle we bloody had to put the sentries out every night, and we knew it was hopeless, we could hear people coming, you know, we couldn't sleep properly anyway, and that's affected me, you know, now.

How?

Well, I haven't been able to sleep for

- 37:30 ever since, I mean I toss and turn, it'll take me two hours sometimes to get to sleep and when I got to 40, I've been - used to get up and go for a leak [urinate] about five times a night. Here, and I went to Adelaide for a work function and stuff, and I was staying down near the in-laws in their caravan, they were in Adelaide then, they're now in Canberra, and it was the middle of winter and it was freezing cold and I'd get out, and I had in the
- 38:00 fridge in the caravan, I had water or orange juice because I couldn't quench my thirst at night, and I'd been doing this for years up here, thinking, you know, it was just something that came on, and thinking that's because of the heat, you know? We haven't always had air conditioning. And I spoke to someone about it, I thought this is crazy, because it's cold and I'm doing exactly the same as what I did in Darwin. And they said, "Oh, you've probably got diabetes." So when I

- 38:30 got back to Darwin I went to a diabetes (sic) and I think I was 23, you know, you're supposed to be three to six four to eight, and she said, "Straight to your doctor and go to the doctor," and he said, "Oh, three years ago you came in and had some tests and your sugar levels were high, why didn't you do anything about it?" I said, "Come again?" I said, "No-one ever told me." And he looked on it and obviously there was nothing there written that I'd been advised. And he
- 39:00 said, "Oh, okay, well..." You know, I could have been away, they could have rung, but you know, might have had little message left to ring, but you know, if I'd have caught it three years earlier I reckon I would have been a lot better, but that was when I turned 40. I'm 55 this year, and I've suffered a lot since because with diabetes I've got high blood pressure, I've got high cholesterol, all on medication of course, and I've
- 39:30 moved from tablets to insulin for my diabetes to control it, which is good, and I had more energy, like I used to coach junior cricketers up here on Saturday mornings. It got so that I used to have to - I had the gear and used to take the mats out and shit like that, and I just used to get later and later because I couldn't - Saturday mornings I couldn't wake up, I was so tired, and I worked, I used to work like day and night kind of thing in my
- 40:00 job, to establish myself when I first joined, I was a life insurance guy you know, and then built up to be a financial planner and you know, in the early days you had no clients, you started with nothing and you just had to build it up. Now I've got one of the biggest businesses in Darwin, and I've got too much bloody work, you know? And I've struggled and struggled, you know, I'd get to work later and later, because I used to make the appointments at 8.30 and start. Now, 9.30
- 40:30 is the earliest I'll have an appointment because I'll be lucky to make it by 9.30. But anyway, six months ago I thought I was going to be right forever and a day because I've been diagnosed with severe sleep apnoea, where I've got to have a mask over my face, because all my things in here used to block off and I would stop breathing for up to 40 seconds a time, about 50, 60 times every hour.
- 41:00 You didn't wake up literally, but subconsciously you woke up because something sent a message to your brain that, "Hey, you're not breathing, you know?" And yeah, ever since I've had that machine for six months I've felt much better, and I can get a decent night's sleep now, but the last three weeks, I'm still tired, Saturdays, Sundays, I've got to sleep in. I've also got no energy, so I'm going through [Department of] Veterans'
- 41:30 Affairs now. Because he was a guy, he's a doc's doctor, he's a psychiatrist, said, "You've probably got sleep apnoea," when I first saw him two and a half years ago, and I didn't go straight away thinking, "Oh yeah, enough of him, what does he know?" But it's right, and he's diagnosed that, and I went back to him the other day and he's looked at all the medication I'm on and he said, "You're on three different blood" - you know, some for
- 42:00 blood

Tape 4

- 00:38 **You were talking about some of the effects that you had with the sleep apnoea because that was caused from your Vietnam service?**
- Well no, I don't know, I don't know, I've spoken to the advocate that I go through now, and I'll get to that, but I've put in for a pension, I'll start to tell you that in a different thing.
- 01:00 And - I'll tell you that this afternoon. Yeah, he said that I should have it done because he thought it was, so I it, and the guy come in and he said, "I've got some bad news." I said, "What's that?" He said, "You've got severe sleep apnoea." I said, "Thank Christ for that," you know, because finally I'd found out why I was so tired all the time, I was getting two and a half to three hours sleep a night, maximum. And you know, the body can't handle it.
- 01:30 And so anyway, I got this machine, Sleepac machine, and ever since that I've been a lot better, I get a decent night's sleep, but I still get tired, real tired like at the end of the week I've got to sleep in Saturdays and Sundays, and I couldn't work out, I thought, "This is going to fix me," you know, this sort of thing, and so I went back and saw the Veterans' Affairs, or the psychiatrist you know, that I had to go and see every three or four months, and he was an ex-doctor and he said,
- 02:00 "You're on too much blood pressure, heart pressure, whatever, medication," he said, "There's one there that can cause tiredness." And so he said, "You'd better go and see the GP [General Practitioner] who originally prescribed" - you know, I've had a change of GPs and all that sort of stuff, but it was the heart specialist, they thought I'd had a heart attack. It wasn't, and they took me to Adelaide three years ago or
- 02:30 something, for - I was on the golf course and I felt all faint, and I've always had chest pain and stuff like that, and I had no energy, and it was actually - and I had to give up, you know, I had to go back to the

club house and so I went to the doctor and they said, "Oh, you probably could have had a slight heart attack," or whatever, so they sent me - they didn't have the facilities up here so they sent me to Adelaide, had an angiogram which showed there were some small blockages in the small arteries, but nothing too bad. Well,

03:00 he said, you know, the way I got it from him was that - but he wanted to monitor me for the next year or so, which he did, and he prescribed this one, something for the heart, and this is the one that can cause - and he actually took me off it once because it also made it very hard for me to lose weight, and also he put - I'm on insulin which also makes it hard to lose weight, and the guy that said that I've got severe sleep apnoea, he said, "Oh,

03:30 you'd find it hard to lose weight," and I said, "Christ, have I ever," try and try, you know, eat the wrong foods at times but...he said, "Yes, well that's another thing that makes - because you're always tired, you haven't got enough energy to go walking and stuff like that." So I really felt, well after all this, how the hell - "Why am I still tired," you know? I'm on insulin which is looking after my diabetes, I'm on this heart stuff, and I've got this

04:00 Sleepac machine, I'm getting a decent night's sleep, why am I still tired? So this psychiatrist said to me, he said, "Well this one is..." So went back to the GP, he was a relief locum, and it was quite funny, because he also was overweight and he said he'd been on that and he had to go off it because it made him tired. So I said, "Look, I want to go off it at least for a month," so two weeks into it and I'm already feeling better. I've got another two weeks I've got to go back and see him, and

04:30 if it continues on - the only thing, it's giving me headaches in the morning, but who cares, you know, I'd rather have headaches than bloody feel tired all the time.

Do you relate this to your Vietnam service, a lot of these health problems?

Ah yes, the sleep deprivation as they call it, most definitely, yes.

What other things?

Oh, irritable bowel, you know, I mean I go five, six times a day, I've got to. Not every day but most days, I've always got diarrhoea, it's not -

05:00 yeah. So this rash, it's not there at the moment, you can see part of it, it's always on this left hand going up here, it just comes and goes, and sometimes it's really bad, it's itchy, I've got to scratch it all the time. I've had tests, 25 years ago at the Royal Darwin Hospital, couldn't find out what it was.

What do you think it's from?

I've got a record - I've all my medical records from the hospital and I had records of

05:30 a week after I was up here in Darwin in 1974, just before the cyclone, going to the Darwin Hospital with stomach pains and everything, upset stomach, and they didn't know what it was. So that's eventually been diagnosed as irritable bowel, but that was only in 1985, you know, 20 years after I've come home. Who knows? You're sleeping on the ground over there, you're eating - yeah, who knows? You know, the water was -

06:00 we had to sterilise our water and you know, all that sort of stuff, and mosquitoes and leeches and yeah.

What about the rash? What do you think's caused that?

Wouldn't have a clue. The specialist didn't know.

Ever thought of maybe Agent Orange [a herbicide used in Vietnam]?

Well, when I came back, you know, you hear all these things, because I came up to Darwin a couple of years after and I've never had anything to do with anyone for basically

06:30 28 years, you know? I saw two guys up here in the street, one was Kev - no, not Kev - Anderson, he owns a station up here, he was a jackaroo, he was a forward scout in the 4 Platoon - Keithy Anderson - I think his brother got called up as well and went over there, and when I saw Saving Private Ryan, I thought, "Shit, they could make a film about these two guys," you know? But

07:00 I don't know how they went, but Keith's got three big stations up here now, he married the boss's daughter, and I think he inherited one or bought it or whatever, and I heard that he - I saw him once in the street in 19- late '70s, early '80s, in Darwin. He said, "I must look you up." The next time I saw him was 1971 at our reunion with his big Stetson [hat] and his boots and you know, he was a cowboy. Great guy, and he was a great forward scout from what everyone

07:30 says, you know, because he had the bush skills. And Bobby Drinnon, who grew up in Murray Bridge, he copped three slugs in the stomach and chest and lives in Hervey Bay now and he's president of the local RSL down there and does a lot of work, he's pensioned out but yeah...

Why didn't you see anyone for 28 years? Or see just a couple of people?

Because I never spoke to anyone.

- 08:00 You know, when you came back and someone would say, "Oh, where have you been?" "I've been to Vietnam." "Oh." You know, they weren't interested, they didn't know, they didn't understand, and you didn't want to talk to anyone about it, it was a waste of time, so you just locked it away and went on with life, you know, got on with life. And then you hear about all these people and Agent Orange and you know, I used to think, "Oh bullshit, that's just the bludgers," you know? Because you hear that a lot of the navy guys had never set foot on Vietnam,
- 08:30 got TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Pension] and a lot of the air force guys, and even the army guys that lived back on base, that never saw any action, never you know, they were all getting TPI, that's what I heard. But it was really the guys out in the field, the engineers, the army, the you know, those sort of guys, the dog trackers and stuff like that, the ones that saw everything, and they were the ones that were under the pressure day in, day out, you know? But I used to think, ah, they're just pogos [people not involved in contact] that are getting this
- 09:00 TPI, and a lot of them are, and they got it early when they came back. Like our company cook, I believe, when I went to the reunion last year in Queanbeyan, I heard that he was the first guy from 3RAR, about three years after he came back, he was pensioned off. Never. That was when we used to get a crook meal, when we used to come back off - and he had it good, hot showers, bloody - well he was cooking his own meals I suppose and you know, no - how the
- 09:30 hell could he be pensioned off? It's crazy, you know, and so I used to think that it was just the bludgers, but then when we had our first - well the first battalion I didn't go to any of these reunions or bloody anything before because I thought no, they're all bludgers, you know, and I'll just get on with life, and I couldn't work out why I was getting crook all the time, it must have been just old age I thought, because I work hard in my profession, and always have, and I just thought it was just old age, but it's not, it's all this stuff that they tell
- 10:00 me - well, I'll give you a classic. Went down to Adelaide for this third battalion reunion, I booked into the hotel, I'll just digress, probably about three or four years before that I'd started marching, because I used to get up, say to Joy, "Where's my medals?" you know, the night before Anzac Day, and she'd say, "In the cupboard where they always are." I said, "Right, I'm going to march." So I'd go and make sure I had them there, and next day and next day, I'd be too buggered to get out of bed, you know? I said, "No, I'll watch it on telly, you know?"
- 10:30 And then the kids eventually said, "No Dad, we want you to march." So ever since I'm so bloody glad I've done it, it's just you know, occasionally you meet someone that you knew in there, which is good, and it's just good talking about your experiences now, because it's all been bottled up inside. And I get down this pub and I was going to this pub I had to meet someone, was sitting talking there and I had to go and get one of these books, and I walked through this first bar,
- 11:00 the first time I went down there, and I saw these four guys at the bar, and I looked at them, they looked at me, no, don't know any of them, so I went into this other one, came back an hour later and I walked back and, "Bum, how are you going?" He said, "Who are you?" I said, "Bill Passmore." The first thing he said to me, he said, "Are you TPI?" I said, "What are you talking about, I've got a business, I run a business." He said, "You fuckin' ought to be, what you went through." They were his words, you know? And he said, "Let me tell you a few things." And ever since then, like he said,
- 11:30 the government has recognised now that the wrong people have got - when they came back, all the bloody guys that didn't see action, and now all the guys that are getting in their close to 50 or over 50s and that, are starting to have real medical problems, it traced back to coming back and not - you know, my son-in-law went to Timor for two months when it first broke out, from here, he was living here, and when he came back he had a couple of days counselling and stuff that he had to
- 12:00 go through. Counselling? What was that? You know, I mean we came back, marched, went on a couple of days leave, went back and got discharged, that was it. You know, it's just a whole different ball game. I mean, and we went back to live and - yeah, mates back home in a country town, big deal, you know? Go to Vietnam. And you couldn't talk to anyone because they just weren't interested.

12:30 **Would you have appreciated counselling?**

Ah, probably not at the time, but shit, I think I would have now, yeah. Yeah, for sure, I mean I'm like any young fellow, you know? Bigger than Ben Hur [invincible] when you know, you know everything and...

Did you ever suffer from bad dreams, nightmares?

Well they reckon you know, I have dreams, but I can't remember what they are, no. I used

- 13:00 to and since I've been on this machine I reckon I've had really good sleeps, yes, most nights.

Do you ever wake up in a cold sweat or anything like that?

Not that I can recall, no. I mean, you sweat, yes, sometimes when, you know? But I turn the air conditioning - no, I don't think so, I mean I'm not - I don't know what my dreams are about you know, but I do know I have plenty,

- 13:30 and I've put that down on all my records, I can't say what they are, I'm not going to lie. But I just

couldn't get to sleep, I'd wake up so many times, and light sleeper, but then usually get a couple of good hours sleep at about five o'clock, six o'clock and that's it.

Are there any things which take you back to Vietnam? Sounds, smells, anything?

Ah shit yes, of course. Bloody helicopters going over, you know, choppers, especially an

14:00 Iroquois [Iroquois helicopters], you know, something backfires when I first came back I'd you know, just about hit the deck. I wouldn't because you'd just be started and you know, you were on edge for a long time, yeah, you'd go to a restaurant I've always got to get the one against the wall, you wouldn't be facing the wall with people behind you. And just shit like that, you know, it was just - yeah. I still do it today, I won't go into a restaurant, I'll demand

14:30 to bloody have the...

Do you this with other mates of yours in Vietnam?

Well I don't mix with anyone up here, that's the problem, you know? I don't know what they're doing. But that first reunion we went to, Christ it was unreal, you know, just catching up with guys you haven't seen, and you couldn't recognise most of them, bloody - yeah, a few you could, but they'd aged and I'd aged, and it was just - yeah. And then you start talking and of course everything

15:00 fits in, you know, it's shit, of course, yeah, I remember that now you know, and all these events, I was saying, "What about - remember so-and-so down at bloody Swan Reach or somewhere like that?" "No, I can't remember that." And then they'd gradually it'd all come back. Yeah, and so that's why I want to go back, because there's still heaps more that I don't remember, you know? I've lost a lot, it's not there, it's there but it hasn't come out, you know?

How important are these reunions for you?

Very, most

15:30 important, yeah. But I don't want one every year or anything like that, but it's been '71 battalion, and now last year we had... '73 we had the platoon, but you know, those other guys that - like even when we had the battalion one there was A company, then we knew guys that we were in rookie training and corps training and in other training with, but you never got to see because you were always with your B Company guys, you know, and we did march, admittedly, we marched in the companies, and did catch up with a couple of

16:00 people, but a lot of them weren't there, like this - in fact I meant to bring this photo in - actually I might get my daughter to bring it home, she can drive home, just to show you some of the guys, and there was I think about 23 of us there in our platoon, there was a heap missing but there were nine that weren't at the battalion, and Bum wasn't there unfortunately because he couldn't come down, and Jungle wasn't there, because he was in Carbooroo as well see, and one of my other mates, or guys,

16:30 Neville Walker who got awarded a medal for bravery, he was a funny guy, we didn't know whether he was gay or not, but he was immaculate, he was a male nurse, so you know, you just put two and two - but anyway he was a fit super bloody schmicko guy, he was fit, really fit, always looked the part. He got - and I saw him in Adelaide and I thought, "Fuck, I know this guy," then I looked

17:00 at the badge you know, and anyway, it's Walker, N Walker. Christ, he's fat, and he's bloody bloated and he's got health problems, and you know, this all comes...How the hell could that happen to him? You know, he wasn't a big drinker or you know, stuff like that. It's just what he went through, you know? And he's probably the same, put it to the back and yeah, even after the march I said to Jungle, I said, "Where's Neville?" He said, "Oh, he's gone back home, he said he's too crook," you know? I mean,

17:30 I'll get down and see him in Cargill one day you know. I want to travel Australia, but I've got my business and I'm bloody - yeah, I don't want to give up work, you know? I enjoy it too much.

We've got to stop there because it's 10 past 12, so...

Okay, yep.

Ok, so we were just talking off camera about the birthday you had during infantry training.

I actually had it while we were out in the bush at Singleton,

18:00 yeah, corps training, I think, yes, August, April, yes yes, it would have been then. And when we came back off the exercise we weren't allowed - weren't supposed to go on leave but we got out and went into Singleton. We didn't have any time off, but we just went in for the night, from Singleton to Newcastle, never been in there before but we didn't have much money because we hadn't been paid, but we found this nightclub that

18:30 was gambling upstairs, and we might have had about 10 bucks between us by then, you know, and we had a good night for about five or six hours, because we won money, and we lost everything again, but we had a good night because we - there was about three of us, four of us, and we won easy money early up and did it all in the end but then had to sneak back at about six o'clock in the morning and we weren't supposed to go in as civvies [civilians], you know, we were allowed out but we weren't supposed

to – we were

19:00 supposed to be back before that night early, but we got back in the next – yeah. So I remember it was The Black and White Café or something, in the main street of Newcastle, upstairs, and it was a gambling den. So yeah, it was all right.

And you snuck in all right? Like how did you sneak in?

Yeah. Oh, we sort of bullshitted to the – we were in a car obviously, and we bullshitted to the – we changed back

19:30 into our army uniforms and everything before we – we made up some excuse that you know, how we – I can't even remember whether the car had broken down and all this sort of stuff, that's why we were late, you know, because we had curfews and all that. We got away with it, put it that way, that's the – yeah.

And what about your training in Canungra and Shoal Bay?

Oh well yeah, well after, what's that bloody place I was just at? I

20:00 forget things, you know?

Singleton?

Singleton, yeah, we went to Adelaide, Woodside and then some of the other guys had some exercise – I got – because they approached me and said, "Look, we can see on your thingos that you can type, you know, we're short, we need a couple of guys that can type up in the battalion headquarters office." I thought, "Well that'll be all right," you know, because a bit of a lurk, won't have to go out on the exercises and all that, and they were pretty rugged I tell you,

20:30 those exercises. And so yeah, we stayed up and just two of us, another guy from Melbourne, him and I, and we did all their typing, all the headquarters, you know, the lieutenant colonels and the majors and all that sort of stuff, and just about operations, and sort of intelligence stuff. And then – so I missed out on a lot of – a couple of exercises down at

21:00 Swan Reach and Murray Bridge I think, yeah, and up in the – some forest, I don't know how they have any forests in South Australia, but – and then the next major one, that the battalion was we went to Shoalwater Bay, and that was out from Rocky [Rockhampton], and we flew up there in Hercs [Hercules aircraft], and you know, it took ages, and – but we had

21:30 six, I don't know how long it was, eight weeks or something, maybe longer, out in the bush, and we just got to learn all the stuff that we needed to know and then came back to Woodside and then a couple of months later we went up to Canungra for our final training, that was pretty – yeah, we had to run everywhere, we couldn't walk, and with packs on and rifles and it was just a lot of physical fitness, obstacle courses and

22:00 all that sort of stuff, and getting fired at, you know, with real live bullets type of thing and you know, going above you, not endanger you, but just to get you used to the – I'm pretty sure they used live ones, I can't – I'm pretty sure it was, I can't remember, you know, I'm just – there's a lot of things, exercise, we had, what do they call it, simulated, you know, the sound would be there but there was nothing, simulated bullets and what have you, and simulated grenades,

22:30 in Singleton I had one go off underneath me and burnt my bloody – took the skin off my butt, and yeah, so I wasn't – but that, you know, just as well it wasn't a live one, I wouldn't be here. But yeah. And Canungra was really, I don't know, I think it was six or eight weeks or something, but it was full on jungle training, yes.

Were you receiving any expert advice from people who had been in Vietnam?

23:00 Yes, I'm sure we did. Look, I can't remember back, but I know we had a lot of sessions in various times with different people and that sort of stuff. I think we did, I'm sure we would have, because it was toward the end of the Vietnam War and there's been a lot of people that would have gone over there, been over there and you know, we were taught about the Vietnamese people and all

23:30 that sort of stuff, the type of country and the terrain and all that, map reading, you know, all bloody camouflage, you know, the whole – we were all pretty well trained I thought.

And with the admin [administration], what were you learning about admin?

Oh, not on exercises we didn't, I wasn't on that, but when I came back to Woodside I'd be just doing clerical stuff and typing, yes.

And what were you learning about the army, about methods and

24:00 **procedures?**

Bureaucratic , shit, yeah, so you know, I said to them, I said, "As soon as we get to Vietnam I want to get back." But that didn't happen for a few months, two months I think, yeah. And then people are sick, and

they needed people and you know, all that sort of stuff and they get reinforcements in. A lot of guys got sick over there, you know, my mate Jungle, Barry Spry from South Australia, he was our machine gunner, he did the whole tour, but towards the

- 24:30 end, he'd get in and have a couple of beers, and he'd all turn red, all his arms and face and everything, and he was crook and you know, but Jungle, he wasn't a whinger, he was a great guy, and he toughed it out and he got back and had to go and see doctors, and he told me - I did stay in touch with him for a couple of years before I came to Darwin, but then never saw him after that until lately, for the first reunion in '71, and been up down to his place since
- 25:00 once, and talk to him on the phone occasionally now, and he told me that he's out on TPI last year, I think, last year? Yeah. Because his boss told him, he said, "Look there's something wrong with you." He'd been - a few years before that his boss said, "There's something wrong with you, you've got to go and see someone, you know?" And Barry said, "No, no, I'm all right." But he was, he was having problems and he was a carpenter, and he said he didn't realise how much
- 25:30 problems he did have, you know? And now he reckons he's on the right track, he gets counselling every month and he - what was I going to tell you? He - oh yeah, he told me that he was eventually diagnosed, after nine years of going into the Dawe Park that he had scrub typhus, whatever that was, but they couldn't find out what was wrong with him. And yeah, we had a lot of guys like that that got diseases or whatever
- 26:00 and - it's just the way we were living, I think over there.

Tell us about the lead up and receiving the news to go to Vietnam, in Australia, you know, how did you feel, what happened?

Couldn't wait, yeah, excited, like most of the guys, you know, there's very few, and you know, you see all this bullshit that you know, people were sent over there, there's no way the army would have sent anyone

- 26:30 over there that didn't want to go. I mean it would have been stupid. But then there was people that got over there and changed their mind and wanted to come back, yeah, and then you know, it gets dragged out that they didn't want to go in the first place. Bullshit. People basically went that wanted to go, yeah. We had one guy, who got over there and I won't mention any names, but he ended up in admin company as a few did,
- 27:00 but this guy just, you know, he said he was dead against war and all that sort of stuff, so they just put him in admin company and he's probably on a bloody pension now, I should imagine. I don't know, who knows? You know.

And so tell us about that last few days before you left Australia. What were you doing?

Shit, I don't know. I remember what I did the last night, I went and saw Dustin Hoffman in a movie in Adelaide,

- 27:30 shit, what was it? John Voight, Midnight Cowboy. Never forget it. Yeah.

Why not? Why don't you forget it?

I don't know, I just - I was just excited about going and I was in town and I didn't know what to do, I didn't want to get on the piss or anything, and by myself, and - because I think we had some leave before we had to come back into town and - but it was definitely

- 28:00 the - because we had to report I think at Keswick Barracks and then bang - no, that's right, we had to go to, we had to go down to the harbour of course, because we were on the HMAS Sydney over to Vietnam, and I think I just spent my last night in town doing a bit of shopping and stuff, and just went and watched the movie and yeah, saw it and I'll never forget it, you know, because that was the last night before I left.

Well tell us about leaving.

Oh,

- 28:30 had a bit of family down there from the country and what have you and my sister was in Adelaide and her family, and yeah, we just got on the boat and took off. That was it.

What was the boat ride like?

Pretty rough, yeah, I'd never been on a boat, you know, a big boat like that, and through the Great Australian Bight, she was rocking and rolling, yeah. And they reckon even the sailors said that's, you know, he said it'd be up this way and then back that way

- 29:00 and it was really weird, we went through a huge storm and stuff. Yeah, I mean we had a good time on the boat, we didn't have much to do which was great, and we were supposed to do a lot of jobs, but we didn't turn up to them most of the time, and played cards and bloody just had a ball. And the food, Christ, navy guys complain, Jesus, they get it laid

29:30 on for them, unbelievable compared to the army. Jesus. They must have had a bigger budget or something because it was bloody good. Yeah, and we crossed the Equator and we had this big games day and all that sort of stuff, it was a bit of a laugh.

And tell us about coming in to Vietnam?

Oh, we harboured offshore, and helicopters came out

30:00 and flew us into Nui Dat, yes.

How'd that feel?

Oh, all right, yes.

Kind of exciting, or...?

Yes, shit yes. We didn't know what to expect. But yeah, no, it was okay.

And what were your first impressions of Nui Dat?

Different, yeah, I can't really think, I mean I suppose you know,

30:30 you've been you've been around the army in bases and that, it was different than army bases of course, but I was still in BHQ and they had pretty reasonable - well they had the same lines you know, but we were closer in the middle, than the guys in the rough - platoons were out on the - near the wire and stuff like that. And they all went out on what they called operations, but about three days there we got

31:00 two bloody killed, yes, and several wounded. I think inexperience, I don't know. One was a big officer, about six foot four or something, yeah.

How were they killed?

Shot yes, in a big you know, firefight.

And they were from your ...?

That was in D Company, yeah, one of the - from the battalion but a different company, yeah.

31:30 **Did they have to come over with you?**

Oh yeah, yeah, they were all in the 3rd Battalion, yeah. The battalion contains about 1000 people, you've got A Company, B Company, C Company, D Company, which is the infantry, they were all infantry but they were the battalions that go out - and you've got support company and admin company, they were the pogos, they'd give out the stores and the rations, look after the beer and look after the you know, the messes and stuff that when we come back we'd get a decent feed and all that. And the paper shufflers.

32:00 **How did this affect morale, a couple dying?**

Well, I wasn't out on the rifle platoons then, but I would imagine they probably didn't even - well, they should have known about it, because it would have gone through, but some of the average soldiers wouldn't even have known about it, I don't think. Because we never got told anything, that was one of the big things. But we at battalion headquarters all knew, because we were typing up things about it and what happened and you know, all that sort of caper. You know, they've got a huge

32:30 communication system and all that sort of stuff. So - I mean everything had to be documented and all that.

How would you document something like a - I don't know, the officers' deaths, for example?

I don't know, I didn't have to do that, I mean yeah, that was left to whoever. But I mean I just had to type stuff that the officers

33:00 wrote about you know, the operation and stuff like that.

What kind of things would they have to write in the reports?

Look, I can't remember, quite honestly, we did heaps and heaps, we just churned it out, and the I said, "I want out of here, I want to go where the real men are."

Did you feel that kind of sentiment, that you weren't really fighting?

Oh shit yes, yes, well you know, to me the army is guys fighting, but of course it's not that, it's only about, you know,

33:30 probably a quarter of them would do any fighting, really, when it's all said and done. The rest can be in support and all that, but you know. And I just wanted to be where the action was, I mean I was going over there, I didn't want to come home and say I sat behind a bloody desk the whole time. I could have been in Australia doing that.

Is there a difference in the men who sit behind a desk and the men who go out?

34:00 There shouldn't be, but yeah, I think there is. Yeah.

How would you describe that difference?

Well it's hard, but I've got a book here that - these five ex-Vietnam veterans wrote in the Territory [Northern Territory], and one of them who never went out reckons that the grunts, the infantry, had it a lot easier because they were actually out there fighting, but we were out there - we didn't know what was going on, you

34:30 know, I mean, it was just stupid. I mean, we were the ones that - and he was sort of saying that they actually got it tougher. But I mean, hey, they were behind the lines, bloody having movies most nights, or they had a pool and you know, stuff, had a mess that they could eat in, and you know, yeah, it was just different, it was just like being in Australia, I think. But you know, they could have

35:00 been mortared, but I don't think they were, used to be mortared early in the days, but I think you know, with the continual patrols we pushed the Viet Cong out further and further, you know? The previous battalions and stuff had done that. So yeah, I just think - we used to call them pogos, you know.

What did that mean?

I don't know, just - you know, when I was in the rifle company we were pogos,

35:30 and I didn't like being called a pogo, so there's no way I wanted to stay there, I wanted to be out there, and - but when you're out there a lot of people want to be back in - you know? So yeah, I guess for someone that got shot up and that, that's pretty rough, but you know, you take your chances.

Was there resentment amongst the Grunts to the admin guys or any of the other men?

No, not over there, not over there,

36:00 but I think what happened when they came back, a lot of the pogos ended up - I think because they didn't fight, they had this conscience thing, I think, and they you now, reckon they had dreams and stuff, and all this, this is what I was told, and that's why they put in for pensions and all that earlier than the guys that did, you know, who just got on with life. Most of them, some of them - I mean some of them were animals

36:30 anyway before they went over there, so you know, they were pretty ordinary guys, but - and when they came back to Australia because life was so cheap over there, they couldn't adjust to the Australian way of life again, they couldn't bring themselves back up and they just wanted to get on the grog and the drugs and stuff like that, and they thought Australia owed them a living, which it didn't, and they just didn't conform, you know? And so they dropped out of society, a lot of them. And they're the ones, I don't really

37:00 particularly - whether they were grunts or whether they were pogos, I mean you don't do that sort of stuff, you know? So you went through some tough times, you'd get up and get on with your life. No-one owes you a living, shit.

Apart from calling them pogos, were there any other derogatory comments made about admin guys?

Oh, not really, no. No, we'd give them stick when we came back in about the meals, you know, the cooks and that, but they all take it in jest, you know, I mean

37:30 having our first hot meal for bloody six weeks, you know, well hot meal, when I say, we used to you know, use the little thingos and - what did they call them, the little fire - I don't know what they were, we'd just light them and they'd give a bit of heat, we'd have a brew or mix corned beef with bloody some curry and rice and shit from the ration packs, so we'd have a - could have a hot meal out there but it'd be pretty basic, no fresh vegies or anything like

38:00 that. And dry biscuits and yeah, it was all - so we always looked forward to a meal but then we'd tell them off for dishing up that shit, you know? But yeah, it was all in fun. But I think a lot of guys too, you find that you know, they went to Vietnam and they'd come back tell stories and all that sort of stuff, and I think you got a cup and a

38:30 half-half with a lot of the guys. A lot of them - you know, I've caught a few out, how they've been over there, and you know, I've said, "What unit?" "Yeah, you know, 4RAR or something," and I now take their name, I've got this book that's got all the Vietnam vets [veterans] in, and often people have told me they've been over there and I'll look up, their name is not in there. And I think they're just making it up, to make themselves look - because I said to one here in Darwin, I said, "Oh, do you have any problems medically?

39:00 you know, I've just started going through this system and..." "Oh no, I don't want to do that, I don't want to do that," you know? And this guy, he was with 4 Battalion and all this sort of stuff, and been over there and - no, no, he didn't want to be involved in it. And when I looked up the book he wasn't there, so you start wondering why? I know our lieutenant, our platoon commander

39:30 in Canberra said to us, he was the guy that was at battalion headquarters then he came out later, and

he said he often gets things from the Veterans' Affairs, people put in for pensions and stuff like that, and one of the guys that was down at Vung Tau which is our rest and leisure section, was working in some intelligence office or something like that, and he's put in for this - because he has nightmares and all this sort of stuff, and he's based it on -

40:00 he had to be an escort or an armed escort on this group of trucks, a group of convoy trucks that had to come and get 6 Platoon B Company 3RAR out of trouble, and that never, ever happened to us, you know, someone coming from Vung Tau. I mean we either got choppered [transported by helicopter] out or we walked to the edge of the jungle and APCs came in and we'd jump on them. But usually it was choppers, we never ever got trucked out. And the officer

40:30 he said this, you know, he said, "No, no, we never, ever did that." This guy is basing his claim on he had to be an armed escort on this truck convoy that went out to the jungle, never happened. And he said the worst part about it is he told them this, he doesn't get any feedback, you know?

We'll stop there, it's the end of the tape.

Tape 5

00:41 **Tell me about what your first impressions of Nui Dat were when you got choppered in.**

Just glad to be there, I suppose, yes. Really, I mean it looked a bit depressing, but you know, what the heck, we finally made it, you know?

What did it look like?

Well it was just a

01:00 rubber tree plantation, and there was a, you know, we came into the helicopter pad and there was a little airport, there was a runway and over further - we didn't even go over further for the whole time we were, we just were really in 3RAR lines and that was about it, went over the PX [Post Exchange - American army canteen] a couple of times, because we weren't in long enough to enjoy it there. We really

01:30 were on the move all the time.

And what was the kind of orientation that they gave you around the place? I guess you were with the base...?

Oh, we were at the base, yes, there were plenty of rules at the base.

What were they?

Vehicles couldn't drive faster than 10 miles an hour or something, past any crossing, or I don't know, whatever it was, it might have even been 10 or 20 kilometres, any vehicles, and you know, it was just -

02:00 yeah, it was just sort of, how can I put it, sort of you had to home back in bed or whatever, like the beds were - there were crates on the floor like wooden slats, and then sandbags up the side and then some tent over the top. And then there four, three of four beds in either corner - in each corner and

02:30 a table in the middle, and that was it. And so - then there was further out on the wire there were machine guns and stuff that we had to do pickets if we were ever in there for a few hours a night, and that was it.

And what was your first night like in Nui Dat?

Can't remember it. Wouldn't have a clue.

And what were the guys like that you shared a tent with?

It was

03:00 admin guys initially. Yeah, they were okay. You know, they had it pretty good, let's face it. You know, they'd get up in the morning and go down the mess for a meal, and then get to work - you did a lot of work, they did a lot of work, it was always seven days a week, it wasn't, you know, you didn't have time off there.

03:30 But when they knocked off that night or whatever they could go down to the pool, parlour or whatever or boozer [bar] or whatever, but you know, the poor old guys out bush, nope.

And what's it like to have to share a tent with four other guys?

No drama. You get your strange ones but you know, yes.

What do you do if you really don't get along with someone?

04:00 Tell them, yes. Just stay away, you know, just tell them stay away from me if you're going to carrying on, you know? You had the occasional fight, blue, but Jesus, you know, you get dickheads everywhere.

And how was the camp set up in terms of - like what were the showers like and that sort of thing?

Oh, they were just sort of outside showers with a bit of a screen around. I think the water

04:30 came from - had to be carted in, because there was other guys, pogos used to do that, they were the water guys from admin and all that, and I think it used to have a tank and then we'd - I don't think it - it wasn't turned on, you know, like it was just cold, it wasn't - over there you didn't need anything else anyway, we'd only have one every four weeks. Well you know, like for the four days we were in we'd have one every morning, but you know, yeah.

05:00 **And in terms of I guess the environment around you, were there sorts of creepy crawly snakes, bugs, spiders...?**

Oh shit yeah, all that, yeah.

Like what kinds did you see?

There was out bush, yeah, there was heaps of insects. Well we get them up here I suppose, a lot of the tropical stuff, yeah. But you know, you can hear the cicadas going now, you know. No, they were all right, they were no

05:30 problem. But we had scorpions, centipedes, bloody snakes, plenty of green snakes, green ants that we get up here, they bite, yeah, that was the first experience with green ants was over there, they'd hang from the trees and you'd go in and brush against them and they'd just crawl all over you. But you know, that's all right, it only lasts for a while.

06:00 There were pigs, yeah, I was leading once and I'd sent the message through, there was big thick grass and stuff, I could hear these noises coming and I didn't know what the hell it was, and so I sent the message, you know, down, and we all crept down and I was waiting there, the next thing two pigs came straight through at me, I nearly shot them, you know? And then bang, they saw me and bang, they were gone, you know? And that's the sort of stuff that

06:30 you had. Buffalos out there, you know, water buffalo, that sort of stuff. There was even places with elephants and stuff, but I didn't see any out in my areas. I saw domesticated ones, but not out in the jungle.

How about in the camps at Nui Dat? Was there much problem with the wildlife?

In what way?

Crawling into your beds?

Oh, that'd be the least of our problems.

07:00 I don't know, I didn't have any. Mozzies [mosquitoes] and all that sort of stuff, yeah, I mean we had mozzie nets up over the bed, we had to keep the bugs out.

What was the worry about malaria?

Oh yeah, we had to take malaria tablets every day.

Do you know what kind of tablets they were?

Oh, give us a go. No way, I don't know, they just - you did what they said, you know, and that's it. If you had to take these you took them, you know? We had to

07:30 sterilise our water and some guys didn't I think. I don't know. I did.

How would you sterilise it?

We had tablets that we had to put in the water, yes. Carried probably six, eight water bottles while you out in the bush.

And you'd just put a tablet in at the beginning?

Yes, yes.

08:00 From memory that was the way we did it, yes.

And during the first few months when you were working in admin, can you take me through I guess what would have been a typical day for you?

Typical day? Look, I couldn't remember but I know we got there pretty early, we knocked off for lunch, went across to the mess, came back, straight back into work and we'd probably finish at six o'clock or something at night. Yeah, I don't know, it just all seemed - and some nights we'd be back there working and it just seemed to be all work, yeah. There was always

08:30 heaps of stuff to – because you know, we were getting fed from – to type up.

Is there anything in particular that stands out in your mind that you had to type?

No. It didn't register a lot with us, you know? We just typed it and you weren't reading it or anything, you were typing it, you know, so you didn't – unless it was really interesting then you might, you know, but a lot of it was operational stuff and couldn't understand it or whatever. You could

09:00 sort of, but – yeah, intelligence report about D445 somewhere or – all that sort of caper, you know?

And what was that admin area like at Nui Dat? I mean who was based in your area of the admin?

Well that was part of admin company, but it was battalion headquarters where we had the lieutenant colonel, who was the commander of the whole battalion, we had the second in charge, the adjutant

09:30 also who also, who looked after the admin area, one officer who – you know, like we have officers and non-commission officers and we had the regimental police in there and all that sort of stuff, yeah, it was just different jobs people had to do, that's all.

Were there any particular ...

Intelligence was in there, had a few intelligence guys, but they were just normal bloody

10:00 Grunts I suppose, you know, they might have had a bloody degree or something.

Was there any particular time of day or event that would take place that would really sort of...?

Oh, if someone – yes, if there was a bloody shoot out, they'd all come over and everything would be – yeah, really going, yeah.

How would you describe that kind of an atmosphere?

Pretty chaotic, yeah. We'd all want to know what was happening, you know,

10:30 but you could only get bits from here and there and everywhere.

How hard was it initially to get a whole sense of the country and of...?

Well, until you got out in it you didn't really know how bloody hard it was to actually patrol in it, you know? There'd be bamboo bush that had spikes – I still get – you'd come up against this bamboo and you had to cut your way through it, and I can

11:00 face spikes, you know, I'm just – you had to cut a path through it, you couldn't cut your way through it you know, and yeah, that was bad, because I can't – if I look at anything sharp, I don't know, it's never – we used to what's it called, end up in it like at night, because we knew that the Viet Cong

11:30 couldn't get through there you know, we'd get in and have our sentries at the entrances type of thing, so we were pretty safe those nights that we were in the bamboo, but that wasn't too often. You know, they had open paddy fields, we didn't go across them or anything like that, we went around, in the edge of the jungle, you know, we wouldn't get in the paddy fields, we'd be mince meat. We travelled

12:00 probably 10, eight, six to eight metres apart, you know, through the jungle, could just see each other, the next one could just see the next one, and so on, and it was just hand signals, it was rugged country, you know, mountainous and all that sort of stuff.

And what kind of briefings would you get before these patrols?

Well, the section commander – the officers would have a meeting, go up to the battalion

12:30 headquarters or whatever, then they'd have the company bizzos [meetings] and they'd bring others in and then those that came down to the platoon level and so on. So we just said, "Right, we'll be ready to go at six o'clock in the morning," or something like that, and that was it. We didn't know where we were going.

What was the purpose of the patrols?

What do you mean the purpose?

Well what was I guess the mission?

Ah search, basically. They talk about this search and destroy, we never went on one of those, you know,

13:00 where you search – we didn't ever search. They might have done it before I got there, in the a few months before I got there, but don't think so, search towns or anything like that, we never, ever did that. We searched the jungle, so that seemed to be all we were ever doing.

And can you take me through the first patrol that you went on?

Well that was that one I think that -

- 13:30 where I put the bloody Claymores out wrongly, yeah, and the one with the snake, because I remember that was definitely my first one. The claymores might have come with the second one, I'm not sure, but I can't remember, everything was the same, day in day out, you were just - I was tail-end Charlie...

Tell me about the position of...

and just covered the rear, you know, when the guys were going forward I just used to walk sort of backwards type of thing to make sure they didn't sneak up

- 14:00 on the back, you know?

What does it feel like being tail-end Charlie?

It's all right, yeah. You still get, you know - you wouldn't get like when you're leading the platoon, the platoon relied on you, you know? Or the section, because we did go out in sections sometimes with only eight or 10 of us, you know? But at the end I think we had about 13 or 15 in our whole platoon of 30-odd left. You know, guys had gone home, their

- 14:30 time had finished up, we couldn't get replacements, guys had got sick and gone home, guys had got shot, wounded, that sort of stuff. And we did have one possible huge contact that we could have had the best kill of the lot, and we weren't allowed to do it because it was right at the end of our tour and it was all too political. It probably was the right decision, I don't know, because it was a huge bunker system,
- 15:00 but we had - it was pissing down with rain and we were in the swamps and we'd been in it for days, we were wet, and bloody - we were just glad to get out of the swamps, and we all poured - you know, we'd got the little tent up so that we could get a bit of dryness and sergeant, no corporal Ward took a couple of guys out to do a reccie around the dry area, and bloody half an hour later he was back, you know. So,
- 15:30 they'd run into and seen all these nogs sitting on their hammocks and stuff, and we had I think 12 or 13 of us left, so right, we were going to get up, it was down a hill, you must remember this is hugely thick stuff, a little creek down the bottom, and up this hill about five, 10 metres, we were 10 metres away from these nogs [Viet Cong],
- 16:00 there was about 10 or 13, round about the same number that we could see. And the decision was made yes, let's go get them, you know, because - and we went down, we lined up and Jungle says to me, "Bill, get over here, get over here," because I was forward scout, I was on one end, and I said, "What's going on?" and I looked back and there's a guy who was Jungle's number two machine gunner, he was
- 16:30 still down in the creek, he wasn't coming up. This is what I was talking about earlier, and so when you're number two on the gun, you've got to put our gun on your back and you've got to hold these rounds so that they go through the machine gun, and we'd get up and we'd go, you know? And I'd never done that before, but I was the one on the end so Jungle wanted me to do it, and fair enough. All you could see, they were sitting there smoking and we were just lined up in the wet, waiting to go, and what had happened,
- 17:00 the bloody - we got an order to go back, withdraw from our battalion commander who got a big medal, I might add, the lieutenant colonel, because they reckoned it was too political, the size of the bunker could have been huge, the didn't know whether there was just these 10 or 13 there or there was 100 there. And we would have been wiped out if there was 100, you know? But we were in such a
- 17:30 frame of mind we wanted to go through them, we reckoned we could kill them and get the front end of the bunkers and hold off anything. Because also we were a long way away from other friendly elements, and that was I think their decision, they didn't want any injuries so close to us going home. And I've always regretted that, I don't care what - others I know said, "No, I'm glad you didn't do it," but I said, "No, I wanted to," because had they shot us,
- 18:00 we'd fired at them, we'd shot some of them, but we didn't know, we never collected any bodies, and it was one of those things, it was them or us. And anyway, what happened, we had to pull back, it was just huge, we marched, not marched, we tracked back up this bloody mountain, and what they decided was they'll call the US bombers in in the morning, 100 metres directly, 100 metres north of this big bunker system, we put a balloon up through the - like the canopy is
- 18:30 100 metres basically, that's why earlier today you know, someone mentioned Agent Orange, I didn't believe because I never saw them spraying anything, but you couldn't see above the jungle anyway. But I think they'd already finished before we got there. But it would have been - they did - I know now that they did spray heaps of it, and it was bad for everybody, and I'm reading some books on it, and so I've turned, you know, whereas I used to think it was a load of crap, I now believe that it is true, and the government of the
- 19:00 day bloody hushed it up and said no, they said they didn't spray anything and then they had to concede, and then they had to concede that it was bad, and that's why they stopped it, and - leading onto another thing about kids' problems and all that sort of stuff. But this particular - we put this - I think we were one of the first to use this balloon, and we filled it - we put some water bottles in it, and the stuff inside of that reacted and blew the balloon up, and so it

- 19:30 forced its way up through the canopy, and so a big huge balloon, that sat above the jungle, and the planes could come in the next morning and 500 metres directly south of that, there was all these bunker systems for them to bomb the shit out of. And at first light we started down this mountain to get there, and we could see the bombers coming in and everything, the US forces, and when we got there, we were the first there, the
- 20:00 closest bloody bomb was 500 metres away. But we pulled out of the bunker system, it was huge, all this stuff, you know? But others came in, you know, we sort of couldn't - I don't know, we just didn't get a chance to - we had to move on, you know? It was as though you just had to do what you were told. We didn't sort of - able to have a good look at the stuff, and all that sort of stuff, you know? It was just -
- 20:30 and we were angry that they missed, because on the way down we'd go through these big craters and, "Oh shit, what are they doing here," you know? And 500 metres was the closest - we gave them a gift, and Jesus, and of course all the nogs had gone, you know? They got the biggest shock of their life, I guess, but it was in pretty rugged terrain.

What does a bunker system look like?

Just people dig down and you know, they've got shooting alleys and they cut

- 21:00 the jungle so that they can see out, and they've got shooting - clear shots - and people - when they see that, they can't see it unless - they always had the upper hand really, yeah. And you know, it connected underneath, and they did a lot of that sort of stuff.

Connected with tunnels?

Tunnels, everything, yeah, the whole box and dice. They could live there for months, years, yes.

Is any of it

- 21:30 **protected with booby traps and stuff?**

Yes.

What kind of things?

Well the engineers would come in and do that, we didn't do that. But there were booby traps within the jungle that they'd set up around these also, but within the things they had booby traps whereby if they wanted to scamper through and go, they would set things off so that you'd come through and you know? But the engineers, that's their area you know, we'd call them in, we had our own stuff to do, and that was just patrol.

- 22:00 **And you mentioned in the earlier part of the story that Jungle, that his second...**

His number two.

His number two.

It's quite funny, because his name was Edwards, I'm sure it was, and I didn't like him because he pulled a knife on me in a card game when we were back in Nui Dat, and he's an alcoholic, and you know, just gets full and all that sort of stuff, and he was losing, so he had to - and yeah, and all the guys

- 22:30 grabbed him, I grabbed him and beat a bit of crap out of him, and yeah, he's disappeared off the face of the earth. Because his best mate, was Stretch, six foot seven Stretch, and I met him in Canberra this year, and I said, "What's with Eddie?" That's why I think his name was Edwards, there was an Edwards in there, in the battalion book. I never really had anything to do with him, but he said, "I don't know any Edwards." But I reckon he -

- 23:00 I don't know, he was a bad bastard, yes.

And why had he not come up when Jungle needed his help?

Because he was frightened. He didn't want to get shot.

Why had he only done it on this occasion?

I don't know, I don't know. Who knows what goes on inside people's heads?

What was the repercussion for him?

Nothing, no-one knew, Jungle and I knew, that was it.

And why didn't you say anything?

- 23:30 Why would I?

Well wasn't he putting your life in danger in a strange way?

Your life's in danger anyway, I mean, Jesus, you know, you can't - yeah. I just had no time for him, that's all. Well I didn't have any time for him before that, but you know.

And why was Jungle called 'Jungle'?

Because he was about six foot four, bloody tall, dark and hairy, and that's why they called him Jungle.

And what was he like?

He was a great guy, still is.

24:00 He's a good basketballer, he played for South Adelaide before he went in, he continued on till he was about 40, I believe, playing basketball, even though he was crook [sick] and his son plays, and he used to coach, and yes, he was a good basketballer.

Did you have a nickname?

No. Nope.

Were there any other nicknames in the group?

Sludge.

And why was he called that?

He was our section commander,

24:30 lance corporal, because he was a sludge. You should see him now . Sloppy, yeah.

Any other...?

Not really. Jonesy, no, he was just - no. Oh, there was Mouse and fellows like that, but you know, had big ears . Good guy. Yeah, there were others. Bum was the

25:00 classic, yeah, Higginbotham. I'll tell you some stories, but we'll probably be off this camera.

Tell me about when you were on patrol for that length of time, tell me about how you - I don't know if dig in is the right word for the night, but how do you set up the camp in the evening?

Oh, we hardly ever dug in, you know, the ground, we didn't have time because it was just about dark by the time we had to cook a bit of a feed, you know,

25:30 and you had to go out on sentry, you never had enough time, that was it, never - couldn't rest. And when we slept, we'd just go off like that, you know, we were so tired. We were tired all the time over there, that was the - probably the biggest thing and I don't realise it now, but you're always bloody tired over there because you wake up before light, first light, and stand to, you'd wait for the light, you know, out in the jungle you wait for it to become light so you can get accustomed to the surroundings, because

26:00 that's when they usually attack.

Why's that?

I don't know. If they knew you were there. But we used to try and - like we used to bury all our cans and shit like that, we didn't want to let them know that we were there, and then we'd put it over with leaves and stuff so that we left it as it was. We didn't want them to know we were there and they were probably the same. So you know, because if they could get you and track you and all that sort of stuff, because they moved around as

26:30 well, they weren't just sitting in the bunkers all the time, they'd leave some in there and some would have to go and get supplies and they'd usually do that at night, that's why we kept the ambushes up and what have you.

Well tell me about what the process was in sort of setting up for a night.

Well we'd harbour, if we had the three sections, one section would take that, one would take, and the other would take that, and there'd be a

27:00 few in the middle, you know? If it was a company it would be just bigger with company headquarters in the middle, but we hardly ever travelled as a - if it was platoon then there was one platoon, two platoon, three platoon, so there was probably 90 people there, but that would hardly ever happen, it was more a section, four, five, six section, would travel together, and there'd be say, 10, 20, 30, often there was only six or seven in the platoon, so you know, might only be

27:30 20, yes. We were down to about 14 I think in the end.

Who would decide where you were going to stop, when you were going to stop?

The section commander, or if we were a company or platoon, the platoon commander, the sergeant or corporal, or could be the lieutenant, second lieutenant usually.

And why was it called the harbour?

Stuffed if I know,

28:00 yeah. It was just the safe harbour I suppose, you know? Well we were protected you know, from the elements, then we'd have one, two, three sentries out for a couple of hours, and then we'd go and relieve them and all that all night, yeah.

And you mentioned that you'd bury cans and that sort of thing? What kind of rations were you given?

We used to get the American ones eventually, they were better than the

28:30 Australian crap, they had cigarettes in them as well, which was good, because we all smoked then, a lot of us, in the army it was one of those things that you did, you know?

So what kind of food was it?

Tinned, canned, little cans of peaches of a bit of rice, a sachet of rice that you'd boil up and then you'd have

29:00 camp pie or something like that or, what's the other stuff, corned beef or - there was even some chocolate, pretty awful chocolate but - what else? Tuna, so we often had curried tuna you know, with rice, or curried corned beef and

29:30 rice, so that's usually the standard, that was it, yeah. That's about all I can remember about the ration packs. But we never used to eat, you know, we didn't eat much really, we all were as skinny as anything, over there.

And how would you carry enough, I mean food alone for

30:00 **you for four weeks?**

No, no, not for four weeks, for about six, seven days, and then we'd get resupplied. We'd find a safe place, the choppers would come in and drop stuff off and go, then we'd split it up and away we'd go again, yeah.

And how about water?

Water, yeah, they had to be - because there was the Song Rai River there but we went for a skinny dip in it once but after we protected it all, but that was the only wash we ever had out in the bush,

30:30 yeah, and we stank when we came back, you know? We couldn't smell it, because we were all the same, but the other guys, shit, you know?

Was that part of your blending in, in a way?

Oh shit yeah, we had to blend in with the surrounds, yes, most definitely.

So could you use soaps and...?

Nope.

How about smoking?

Yeah, we smoked during the day,

31:00 yeah. Not at night, the glow of your - you know, they could see it. But there were glow worms over there and all that sort of stuff, you could see at night, often you didn't know, there was bloody noises all the time out in the jungle, so you had to be alert all the time, even if there was nothing there, you know? No danger.

And can you tell me about your first contact?

Which one was that?

31:30 **Aside from the snake.**

Oh no, that wasn't - which one was that? We had one big one, we nearly had one big one where we - which I told you about which we could have bloody - that would have been the biggest kill by the whole battalion, you know, and we wanted that.

Was that something that was discussed a lot?

Shit yeah.

Body counts?

Yes.

What sort of talk would there be?

Well we wanted to go back with the best

32:00 body count, not ours, but theirs. Every bloody platoon section wanted that.

What was your body count at the end?

We didn't really have one, we never got a body count, we fired at - we ran into bunker systems, we fired at people, but every time we had one big long fight up on Long Tan where we had five or six wounded, we had helicopters shot

32:30 down, two people were killed in that, it was just - I've got a photo of it coming down through the - it was resupplying us, we were running out of ammunition, it was huge, it went all day, and that was five platoon came in and got into it, and we were behind, we came up the back, and yeah, that was - and there was a huge bunker system there. And yes, this helicopter was supplying us with new ammo because we were running

33:00 out really bad, and they had us pinned and - by the time they got the armoured corps up to go through, they all had their escape routes and what have you, and away they went, and the dragged bodies, there was blood and all of that sort of shit there, but we never had a bloody count. So you know, they had some contacts before I got there, but the first one I'm just trying to think. I don't know which one was the

33:30 first, it certainly wasn't that one, and the last one - there was one where we'd harboured up for resupply and Smokey Dawson went out to be the sentry, and this is, you know, we're getting resupplied and next minute we hear all these shots and we ran - a couple of us ran out, Frenchy and myself ran out and

34:00 said, "Smokey, are you all right?" He said, "I'm shot." So we ran out and bloody dragged him back, and what happened was - never seen him after that, he got shot in the shoulder and - but what we actually heard, well I didn't know what had happened, but he just said, "Three Vietnamese were coming along a track and they saw him," he said, and fired, and he fired back, and he got shot.

34:30 But at this reunion in - I don't know whether I should be putting this on tape because if he hears this - but I don't know whether it's true, yeah, bugger it, he - Sludge told me that he'd seen Smokey, and Smokey said - because we were supposed to challenge them, without just opening fire, you know, I was talking about this thing about identifying, and he wasn't sure whether they were South Vietnamese or North Vietnamese,

35:00 and he basically asked them to identify themselves, you know? And bang, they just opened fire on him, you know? And he fired back but they just disappeared. Silly bastard, he should have just shot them, you know? I know I would have, because they were wearing black, because there'd been another big contact somewhere and we were needed to stretch across and block

35:30 cut, block out their escape route. But we needed supplies so they brought the - and they obviously didn't see him or whatever, because they came right up to their camp basically. So I don't know, they were in a hurry I suppose. That might have been my first contact.

What was it like to hear gunfire when they fired at Smokey?

Pretty awful. The worst thing is when - maybe it was the first contact was when I got shot.

36:00 No, that couldn't have been, because all the gunfire, you know, you have tracers, and you could see it just coming over your head, so you were ducking as low as you could get, you know, to fire at all these moving shapes and bloody things, but the jungle was too thick, you didn't know, unless you had a clear shot, you know? And there was bodies there, you wouldn't know whether you killed them, you know? Probably wounded some, but I don't know.

And what's the kind of the adrenalin like during a contact?

36:30 Yes, pretty hyped up, yeah, shit yeah. Yeah, especially this Long Tan thing, that went for a bloody whole day.

How do you keep going?

You have to, yeah. I wish I had that photo of the chopper, because you could see it hitting the trees and stuff like that, and it smashed, crashed down, and Sergeant Griffiths from admin company came out and another guy I know, he's in Adelaide

37:00 now, he told me that he was supposed to be on that plane, and Griffiths said, "No, I'll do it," and he'd been over there before in an infantry platoon, you know, but he was a sergeant in admin now, and he broke his back. But he got repaired because I saw him in Adelaide, I couldn't recognise him of course, but you know, got introduced, ah shit, Griffo, you know? And he looked terrible, but he was walking and all that sort of stuff. But

37:30 that was in '71, and then I see in our book he died last year, he was riddled with cancer, yeah. Poor bugger.

What was the feeling like of seeing that helicopter?

Amazing, yeah. It was 20 – probably 20 feet away. And then – they had it loaded with ammunition and a lot of it went off, you know, stuff went off. I think it was two guys got killed there, yeah. Three it might have been, I don't know.

38:00 **And what happened to Smokey, like immediately after he was shot?**

He got evacuated and went back to Australia, or went down to Vung Tau, to the hospital, and would have got sent back here, because once you were wounded you were out of it. A lot of people were hoping to get wounded, you know, but not seriously, and they could get back to Australia. But – well I haven't seen him since, because he didn't come to that reunion and then

38:30 I thought he might have been – there was also another – what's his name, Graham Dawson, there was also another G Dawson in four platoon, and I thought Smokey was going to be down there because they sent me a list with G Dawson, and I didn't even know this other Dawson guy. And I thought Smokey was going to be there, but they said, "No." It was Kevin Dawson I think, whatever it was. And then I thought he might be at this platoon reunion, and someone said, "No,

39:00 he won't, he's not involved in anything, he won't..." You know, a lot of them won't, but that's crazy I think, they should be there, bloody – you don't have to get drunk or anything like that, which we do anyway, but – and I don't drink normally, because of my health and stuff, I very rarely have a beer.

How did you call for a medical evacuation for Smokey?

Oh, I didn't, they got signallers, you know, radio men and all that sort of shit, you know?

39:30 Commands are going everywhere, left, right and centre and you know, wounded and blah, blah, blah and all that sort of caper, yeah, they've got the set system. Oh, for Smokey? I was thinking of this other – yeah, well no, I just said he's wounded, bang, you know, call evacuation, medic – what do they call them? Oh, I forget what they call them, medic...Stopping?

Yes, we're just going to run out of tape, that's all.

Tape 6

00:37 **Okay, yes.**

Yes, well Smokey got medivaced [medical evacuation] out and I haven't seen him since.

What was the process for the medivac?

Well he would have gone back to Vung Tau I suppose or direct to probably – yeah, direct to Vung Tau I would say, that's where the medical hospital was, and he would have been hospital and then when he cleared up he would have been shipped back to Australia.

In the field, what's the process from the minute someone

01:00 **gets wounded? What do you do, from that minute?**

Oh, you just yell medic, medic, medic, you know, sort of thing, injury or whatever, you know, you've got a casualty, and try and get a medic out. If you can't you get them back in, in to the safe which we did, you know, we dragged him back, and you know, they were already calling the wireless operator, no, you know, what do they call them, the

01:30 radio operator would have been calling the medivac in and then we used to – usually when we'd harbour up we'd have a spot there in the middle that a helicopter could come in. I don't where, I know he was taken off, but I don't know where, to another area, and the chopper came in somewhere and we'd always tell the chopper with sort of smoke – just to identify the area, because it was bloody thick, and sometimes the nogs would see our smoke and they'd let off the same colour, you

02:00 know, and confuse the helicopter pilots, but this time it didn't happen, you know, because they were gone. And yeah, Smokey's gone and never knew what happened to him. Still haven't, I mean he's alive, I know that, but I was hoping to meet him in Adelaide, didn't, and I was hoping to – I've actually got a phone number, I've now got a phone number, but a lot of the phone numbers are out of date and that, but – I ring a few but, yeah. If I retire I'll have more time to

02:30 bloody – I'm too busy working all the time.

Would you stay out there?

What?

After a firefight?

Oh shit yeah, yeah, yeah.

Any emergency evacuations situations?

Only in Long Tan, the big one we had, yeah, there was plenty there.

And what would you do in an emergency evacuation?

We'd call in the helicopter would find a spot where they could

03:00 land and call them in and get the guys out if they were killed or wounded or you know?

How would you set up a defence for a chopper coming in, knowing that the Viet Cong could see the smoke? What kind of defensive positions would you take?

Well if we didn't have one, we'd make one, yeah. But if we were already in one, you know, then sure the chopper would come in, the landing ground would be in the middle. But usually

03:30 it's pretty tough, because they've got to - if there was no clearing they'd have send a thing down, like the rescue helicopters do in the cliffs and that, and they'd have to be loaded on it and winched up.

I guess how you'd protect like one, the wounded man and two, the helicopter from ground fire?

Well I think the easiest thing was we'd keep the heads down, you know, and just the natural terrain, you couldn't see, the jungle was that thick,

04:00 20 metres away you couldn't see up above the trees where the helicopters were. They got lucky I think, when they shot that one down in Long Tan, because there were there a hell of a long time throwing this ammo out, and I think they just got a lucky shot because they wouldn't have known exactly where the helicopter was, because it was too thick, it was terrible. But there'd

04:30 been a lot of - we'd had helicopter pilots sending in the bloody rockets and stuff into the bunker system, and there were trees cut down everywhere, and it was just like a - it was war zone, you know, it was really - yeah.

What did you think of them as an enemy, the Viet Cong?

It was them or us. They were smart cookies, yeah, they were resourceful, well all the Asian countries are resourceful,

05:00 you know? I know plenty of Asians up here and what they - the amount of food they eat compared to what we do, they use the whole bloody lot. We don't - like a fish, they use the whole lot, we don't, we throw out half of it. Because they grew up not having anything, they're way in front of us with conservation - not conservation of the country, but conservation of food, you know? I mean if there's something there they'll make use of it, but we'll throw it out,

05:30 we're pretty wasteful really. Yeah, they were pretty good.

What did you think of them as a fighting force?

Yes, bloody oath they were good. We thought we were pretty good, but they were as good. And we were lucky, we had the tanks, we had the bloody aircraft and that, if we didn't have them we'd have had a huge number of casualties, compared to what we had, Jesus, they were you know,

06:00 they were unlucky I guess.

How were they good in the way they fought?

They used - they used to call us hookdalai, Australian, you know and they used to say hookdalai weak, you know, and all this sort of stuff, we could hear it. Oh yeah, they were - what's the word? Psychological, was it? Yeah.

06:30 Yeah, they were bloody good, you know, hard to see, hard to spot, bloody they lived on nothing, next to nothing, you know, and lived in a lot rougher and tougher conditions than us.

How would they do this communication through the jungle, like...?

I don't know, I never knew whether they did the same communication as us, I wouldn't know.

No, I mean where they

07:00 **talked to you and say, "Hookdalai..."?**

Hookdalai, hookdalai, yeah?

What would they say and how would they do it?

Oh, you'd just hear it, yeah. You know, I mean, shout, yeah. Didn't happen often I mean because we weren't that close to them that we, you know, in contact but yeah, they were what's the word,

07:30 shrewd, yeah, that's all. And life was cheap to them, you know, they didn't mind getting shot or killed, it

was all for the cause, that's why we probably never could have won, didn't matter even if the Yanks [Americans] hadn't have pulled out, we probably never would have won because the South Vietnamese didn't have their in it, we had one of those, what do they call them, trackers, Vietnamese tracker,

08:00 Bay, I don't know what happened to him, but he was supposed to be, like he was supposed to be, like he was with us for a fair while, and one day he disappeared, and down in Canberra Sergeant Ward said he knows where he went, because he fixed up. So I don't know what he meant, but no-one liked him, because we got in that Long Tan fight and he hid behind the tree you know, he wouldn't do anything. So

08:30 whether Wardy got him or not, we don't know, but he was pretty gung-ho, old Glen, yeah.

When they'd shout this out at you, which was, what was it again?

Hookdalai.

What does that mean?

Australian. Yeah, in Vietnamese.

When they shouted this out at you, wouldn't they reveal where they are?

Not really, the jungle is just, you know, you'd hear the voice, that's it. No, no.

09:00 Yeah look, sometimes you couldn't see more than three or four feet in front of you, so you know, other times, like in a fire fight a lot of the foliage would be cut down and you could see, but they never hung around long enough, they'd hit us and we'd walk into them and bang, we'd shoot back, and as soon as we called the tanks in or, you know - the one at Long Tan we called the helicopter

09:30 gun ships in, and they, gees, the firepower that went into there was unreal. And we don't even know whether we killed anybody, there was blood there and all that sort of stuff, but they dragged them all away and you know, before the tanks come through. It was nearly dark I think, when the tanks came through that night. This happened first thing in the morning.

What's it like to think of the idea that you could be killing someone?

10:00 Oh now I mean it's different than when you were over there, you've got to put yourself in the position that you're over there, you know, it's them or you, you wouldn't think twice, no way, you're trained to do it.

What were the stress levels like for the guys out there?

Oh, at 21 who gets stressed, you know? I mean I didn't, I got scared at times, you know, thinking shit, this is it, you know? But

10:30 no, you'd come back thinking, "Christ, I'm lucky I came back," you know, from operations, and you know, some of the guys didn't want to go back out that first time, I won't mention anything, but yeah, some of those guys that you think are the toughest and the - but that's another story. No, you just - you do your job, you know? Another thing around

11:00 the lines, you know, when you get back, there's always this thing of if an officer's bloody giving his men a hard time, there's talk that he's going to be fragged, you know, they're going to throw a grenade in his - but that didn't happen to us, well it didn't happen, but apparently one of the officers in our company, I don't know which one, but there was - I can't remember but it certainly wasn't any of ours in our platoon, heard that there was going to be one that was

11:30 going to get a grenade right in him, but whether it happened I don't think so. It might have been another company, I don't know, there was talk going around the whole battalion, you know, talk's cheap, you know? I can't even remember who it was, some of the other guys might remember but not me.

Would there be any of them there who would lose it, when they got back, or kind of become unstable?

12:00 Oh yeah, we'd go to bangers and get roaring drunk and you know, taste some of the local bloody whatever, delights they had down there and yeah, we'd try and forget about it and you know, some of the guys when they came back from leave, didn't want to go out bush and all that sort of stuff, yeah. Did various things so they couldn't. But as I said, that's another story.

12:30 **Tell us about that.**

No, I'd rather not.

That leave, not about...

Oh no, no, no.

Yes, what was the leave like?

Oh, it was full of bars and bloody, you know, the South Vietnamese, I mean the kids would rob you blind,

you know, if you were stupid enough, they'd come along and if you had a watch on with a leather thing, they'd have a sharp razor knife and they'd cut the thing and your watch would fall off and they - as I said, it didn't happen to me, I always had a metal

13:00 band, but guys got caught, because there's plenty of stupid guys, they'd have two or three beers and you know, they'd be half-charged because they're not used to it, but they'd drink a hell of a lot and get - and you know, they'd go to change some money, you'd have to do it at the money lenders to get any decent - but the kids in the street would offer you more than the money lenders so yeah, they'd say, "Okay, how much," blah, blah, blah, and then they'd get this bundle of money given to them, it'd be counted out in front of them, and then the kids would

13:30 wind it around, but only the top notes would be genuine, it'd be paper underneath. By that time they'd realised, he kids gone, and all sorts of things like that. Watches, pickpockets, I used to carry my - went down there with my money in my shoe, or in my sock basically, any notes, because you'd get pick pocketed just like that, it was incredible, the South Vietnamese down in the Vung Tau and that, I mean they looked

14:00 to rob you, whatever, blind, you know? So we didn't have a great opinion of the South Vietnamese, but you know, obviously closer up to Saigon and that, obviously they had their own regiments and all that. We didn't really work with them, but the ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] was there. But we didn't think much of them, the ones that we got to know.

What about the bars, what were the

14:30 **bars like and that?**

Oh yeah, pretty good.

What would go on in them?

Oh heaps, you name it. Anything. There'd be pornographic movies on the walls always set up, and you'd be sitting there drinking and next thing you know, you'd be either upstairs or whatever, yeah.

And what were the girls like?

Well, when you're a couple of thousand miles away from home, yes sure ,

15:00 yeah.

What would they say to meet you and take you upstairs?

They didn't have to say much, I can tell you , because you never knew whether this was going to be your last one or not, yeah. Of course I would have been different if I'd have been married and all that, you know?

Was it a good release though?

Shit yeah, yes, bloody hell, because you felt well that might be your last one, so you'd

15:30 make it a good one or whatever, or two or three or whatever, you know? Yeah. I didn't really - one time I went there and I was with Lockie I think, and turned this corner and virtually this war was going on, you know, there was our guys, and there was these South Vietnamese and one guy had a bloody machine gun aimed at our guys and they were yelling and shouting at each other. Apparently a couple of our guys

16:00 beat up - got robbed in the bar, and beat this guy up or something, and next thing they went to go out to the bar and this South Vietnamese - and we walked up to them and yelled at them, and they turned the gun on us and bloody - but our guys started moving, you know, and so we moved too, you know? There were no shots fired, but - the regimental police came at that time, we heard the sirens come and you know, someone's phone them. Yes,

16:30 so we so we hightailed [escaped quickly] out of that, but you know, it looked like there was fighting going on, but no shooting, you know? They had baseball bats and god knows what.

I was going to ask, did you have to watch yourself at night?

Oh shit - well that was on leave, yeah. Oh shit yeah, there were curfews and what have you, we were supposed to be back, I can't remember what time, but I remember the first time I went down there, we overstayed, and we got in the back of a -

17:00 what do they call them? One of those little things, a motor cycle with a little - Lambro [Lambrettas] with a little cover on the back where you sit in a hutch at the back, and this is when I was in admin company, and we were staying at the Peter Badcoe Club where the battalions took us. I only went on one I think with the

17:30 admin company, and we had to jump over the gates because it was after the curfew and everything. So we went, just me and who was it, McClintock I think, I can't remember his name, yeah, we dallied a bit longer and got back in without getting caught. But you know, we could have been charged and all that

sort of stuff, if we'd have been caught. Yeah, we had to climb the bloody gates and

18:00 everything. But it was worth it.

Did you have to watch yourself for catching diseases from these girls?

Yes, shit yes.

What would you do?

Nothing. We weren't worried about that. We would have got out of going bush, possibly . No, I didn't catch anything, so they weren't all bad.

Were some of the girls nice?

Oh shit yeah, yeah, to a 21-year-old bloody,

18:30 you know, guy that's thinking he might be dead next week or next month, yeah, of course they were. But you know, I can't stand the snarl they've got, you know, the, "ning-nang-nung-yang," fuck that, you know? Like a lot of guys go over from here from Darwin and marry Filipinos and Thais and all that, but I could never do that. No, Vietnamese I think is the worst language, you know, it

19:00 grates on me, you know, it's just - yeah. Thai ladies are beautiful, most of them, are really beautiful.

And would any of the guys fall in love with any of the girls?

Yeah, there was one, what was his bloody name? He wanted to go, get married, and take her back, he was a dickhead. Shit, what was his name? No, can't think of it. I heard he got killed when he came back anyway, in a car accident or something.

19:30 He was strange. But he wanted to stay over there or something, I don't know.

And what did the guys think of this kind of situation?

They think he's stupid, you know? Jesus. We're there for a good time, not a bloody long time, you know?

Did any of the girls try to hook up with the men?

Oh yeah, oh yeah. "Hookdalai number one," you know? Shit yeah.

20:00 "You number one," bullshit. Yes, only the guys that were pretty naïve, yes. Shit, what was his name now? He was in admin company, I'm sure. It'll come to me, but he wasn't in our platoon. Doesn't matter. You know, that was

20:30 about the only guy that I knew of. I've heard that guys have gone back there since and living there, you know? How stupid. I mean they're losers, obviously. I mean we've still got the best country in the world.

Was it an eye-opener for yourself or for other guys being with these women?

Shit yeah, bloody hell. Anything went . Yes, certainly.

21:00 **Anything went at all, or...?**

Yes. Yes, taught us a few things, yeah.

Was it different to having sex with say a woman in Australia?

Do I have to answer that? Jesus, come on , bloody hell.

I'll just ask the questions, you don't have to answer.

All right, it was.

All right, I've reached my limit. I was actually interested, just one other question, in what the rooms were like that you'd go to,

21:30 **what were they like?**

Who cares, as long as there was a bed there . Yeah.

You weren't looking at the décor?

No, no.

And were they run by someone, like a mamasan [brothel madam]?

Mamasan, yes.

How were they run? Like what would happen?

Oh you'd just pay her, you'd have to pay her before. But you'd go up, go with one and then a couple of

hours later you'd go with another, you know, I mean Jesus - I was single,

22:00 right? Yeah.

Oh, it's no problem, I was just curious, you know? And would you say most of the blokes did this?

Jungle didn't, he was married, he was - he would not, but he did do something - no, I'm not saying anything, no, no.

Was it kind of like half-half or something like this?

Oh, a lot of the married guys wouldn't, obviously, but a lot of single guys wouldn't, you know, they just, you know,

22:30 maybe they were queer [homosexual], who knows? But yeah, I mean most of the guys had a few loads to lighten, yeah, you know?

Was this a way of bonding with some of the other blokes, the blokes which would and the blokes which wouldn't?

No, it didn't bother me. I mean I don't care what the next guy does, it's up to him, you know?

And what would the mamasan say?

Oh, as long as she got paid, Jesus, "Yes."

23:00 **Were they a character, themselves?**

Yeah, yeah, oh they knew the value of money, gees you couldn't screw them out of anything, except Bum of course .

What kind of comments would she say to you?

Oh look, that's too long ago, you know? If some of my mates were here they'd say it and I'd remember it, but you know, nope, can't. But yeah, it was different, it was - yeah. But

23:30 you know, you want this beautiful girl, we get you young girl, and all this sort of caper, and you know?

Were there any really funny stories from some of the drinking nights out in Vung Tau?

Well some of the other boys would have heaps of them, because I was more conservative than a lot of those guys, I tell you, you know? And we ran out of money once,

24:00 and like there was food markets and shit on the street, and who was with me? Jonesy I think, and we picked up some roosters feathers or some bloody thing, because one of the guys said, "Well sell these to the Yanks as kangaroo feathers," and they bought the bloody things . Because we got talking to the Yanks and you know, we could bullshit to them

24:30 and they wouldn't have a clue, "What's Australia like," you know, and all this? And "Ah, what's that you've got in your..." you know, you put them in your hat, "These are kangaroo feathers man," you know? And they bought them, we had some more money so we were happy, yeah.

What other things did you swap with the Yanks?

They sometimes tried to sell us revolvers and shit like that, but we knew that we couldn't take them back, so -

25:00 you probably could have but - you could have when all said and done, we had no checks when we came back, but you didn't want to get caught with anything. But some of the guys probably did, I don't know. On one of the leaves down in Vungers [Vung Tau] got caught up with some Yanks and they took us back to their base. It was huge, it was like - Nui Dat, it was probably six

25:30 times the size of that, and it was just equipment - and they reckon their biggest problem was, they had it all wired up, because they had patrols out, because the South Vietnamese would cut through the wire and drive trucks through and pinch their stores and shit, you know? That's how bad it was. Like there was a lot of obviously corruption in the sense of black market stuff, because we heard that, but we didn't have any - you know, it was the pogos and that had trucks and vehicles that could drive up and down through Ba Ria and

26:00 Swon Mok and those sort of places that were, you know, they'd get a bit. One of our guys got caught somewhere along the line, I can't remember - selling army booze and stuff to someone, whether it was the locals or whatever, I can't remember, but there was things happened like that obviously because wherever you go there's always graft and corruption, and there was a lot of graft and corruption over there.

How did you get on with the Yanks? What did you

26:30 **think of them?**

Stupid, yeah, stupid. I mean, they – I don't know, you see these films where they go round and they're on patrol and they're smoking and they've got earphones and shit like that, there's no way that we'd ever do anything. Whether that was the true Yanks I don't know, because they obviously had good soldiers, but you know, there were things that they were high on dope [marijuana] and all sorts of stuff like that, but I

27:00 didn't see any drugs apart from –you know, obviously maybe a couple of people smoked dope or something over there, but I never saw it in Australians, other than that guy I told you about earlier, you know, he was coming back from leave, what he said. But it was cheap, easy to get, I know that, on leave, it was down in Vung Tau, some of the guys said do you want some? No way, you know? Don't need that. But I

27:30 believe a lot of the guys that would have had it would have been ones back in base that never had to go out bush, you know, and they were bored and probably plenty of time on their hands during the day and all that sort of caper. I don't know, but certainly I'd be very surprised if too many of the Australians that were out in the field would use it, very surprised. You had to have your wits about you, you know, all the time otherwise you were dead. Or you could have been,

28:00 yeah.

We were talking a bit about rest and comfort, did you have an R&R [Rest and Recreation]?

No, another bloody thing. When they cut the National Service down from 24 months to 18 months, we'd already done 18 months, and I'd put in that I'd go on R&R at the end, because I thought well you know, instead of going early and then having to wait all that time, I'd go at the end. And apparently Bum had done the same thing, and it was three months that we had to be there, and Bum

28:30 said to Major Bizzo, (sic) our company commander, I forget names, I mentioned his name earlier, he said, "Well that's it, I'm not going out bush any more." And the major said, "Why?" He said, "Well, I got called up, I volunteered to come over here to Vietnam and fight, and I've done that, and now the army is changing the rules."

29:00 And the major says, "What do you mean?" He said, "I put in to go for R&R in September," or whatever it was, and it was just coming on September because both him and I just missed out, and he said he was going to Thailand, and he said, "The army's changed the rules, that's it, I'm now changing the bloody rules, I am not going out bush." And the major said, "You've got to go out bush or else you're going to spend the last three months down in

29:30 Vung Tau in the bloody jail." Bum said, "Put 'em on me, show me the way, I'm not going out bush, you bastards have changed the rules." And this argument went on and on, I wasn't there, but I've heard of it since, and all of a sudden, we knew Bum had gone. Anyway the major – he knew he – you know, I mean he was a good guy, and he said, "Well for Christ's sake, Bum, what do you want?" He said, "See that truck over there? It hasn't got a driver, I want to be that driver,

30:00 I'm not going bush and unless I get to be driving that truck," because it was going down to wherever it was, whatever it did, you know, cushy job, and sure enough, the last three months, Bum drove that bloody truck. We still laugh about that to this day, you know? How can he, a baggy-arsed private, bloody do that, you know? And get away with it. He was incredible. Incredible, yeah.

30:30 **How did he get the name Bum?**

Higginbotham, yeah. Norman Higginbotham.

And so you never had R&R?

No, neither him nor I. I was going to Taipei, I didn't know where it was but that sounded all right. I wasn't coming back to Australia, that's for sure.

Why not?

Single. Could see Australia any time, you know? Yeah. Go and see another part of the world.

31:00 Could have gone to Thailand, could have gone to Hong Kong, could have gone to Singapore.

Were you disappointed?

Shit yes, bloody oath. Free flight out, for five days, yeah. Bloody oath I was disappointed.

We talked about R&R, R&C, but what about just daily kind of time off when you got back to base? What would you do?

Well, we'd have that day off to clean up and play cards and shit like that, and

31:30 get pissed that night when the bar opened, you know, we'd have two cans of full strength beer. Well I would anyway, and so would most of the other guys too, but you know, some of them drank all night, you know, they just went on and on. Then jumped on the trucks the next morning and went to Vung Tau for two days and then came back and we usually would just have one or two days back, usually one, get resupplied with new ammo, throw all our ammo out, it'd be rusty, and get all the stuff that we needed,

and bang, out we'd go the next day. But

32:00 we'd catch a movie on the base there at Nui Dat, they had movies, night movies for us, yeah. But we didn't really have any spare time, not like a lot of them. I can't recall - we played a footy match over there once, when we came back off operations, they organised - we played against some mob, I don't know who, but yeah, most of us didn't even have - well we didn't have footy boots, we had runners or

32:30 something, and it was all right.

What was the game like?

Pretty scrappy [violent], yeah. The oval was worse, but you know, what the heck? Something different.

Was it hard to go - after going out, getting pissed, having a good time, was it hard to go back out there?

Shit yeah, yeah, you didn't want to but you had to, you know, that was it. Yeah, I mean you thought, "Well shit, is this going to be my

33:00 last exercise," you know? You just never knew.

And you mentioned they were like six-week patrols?

Four weeks up to six weeks. Six weeks was the longest one we had there.

Was that unusually long?

I don't know, that's all I know, I don't know what the others did. I was speaking to someone from 3RAR that did the first tour, and he kept talking about - like they were there three years earlier, and he was talking about these tail patrols, and I know we didn't, but some of the pogos used to do them

33:30 outside the wire where they'd go out for a - I don't know, a night or something like that, and just do it around the wire, but Nui Dat was safe, because they had been in the rubbers they'd been fighting years ago, I think the - what was that one? The Long Tan - wasn't that far I don't think from Nui Dat, that was in a rubber plantation and you know, the Cong [Vietcong] had been forced and D445 which was sort of the local north,

34:00 you know, sympathisers and all that, but the real Viet Cong, they were the good fighters, yeah, the North Vietnamese. But they'd been forced right into the jungles. But you know, obviously there'd been sympathisers in close-in towns and stuff like that where they lauded it over the town's, whatever they were, the town chief and people, but intelligence, you know, that was a lot of they had people in these towns trying to find out

34:30 who was sympathetic and all that sort of stuff. It was a bit of a - what's the word, CIA [American Central Intelligence Bureau] type thing, you know, you just didn't know who was who, that was the biggest problem over there.

Where exactly would they send you? Would it be based on intelligence?

Oh yes, yes, intelligence they expected there was going to be a build up in this area or they had reports that you know, there's a lot of people on these trails or whatever, and

35:00 so they think that they might be - well they expected the North Vietnamese regiment or company or something could come down into these hills and so we'd be sent up there to look for them.

What's the feeling like knowing that you're being sent towards the enemy?

Well, if you're quick enough you'd get them, you know? Yeah, one against one, type of thing. But they usually had the upper hand because they were stationary usually and we were

35:30 mobile. So we used to try and catch them out of course, you know, because they had to go and get supplies and stuff. But never really got much...

Was that daunting kind of task?

Yes, oh shit yeah. But we had all the back up, they didn't, so you know, but they had the surprise element basically, yeah.

So talk us through, knowing this, how exactly would you move,

36:00 **like?**

Oh, sometimes we'd go - take an hour to go 200 metres, it could have been so dangerous, you know, just looked like there'd been - what's the word, you know, there'd been people living there, or people been through there, or there'd been signs that you know, there'd been people around that area or whatever, yeah. So we took it slow. We weren't like the SAS [Special Air Service] who went out on three to five man

36:30 patrols, and they would drop in sometimes behind the enemy lines, you know, and that sort of stuff, and

they were only in there for I think three or four days or whatever, and they'd be airlifted out. They weren't in there to fight, they were in there to report on peoples' movements and I think they used a lot of their reports for the intelligence of what the Vietnamese - but of course they'd get caught up too, you know? They were pretty brave sort of people.

So

37:00 **what kind of signs are you saying that there's life, or life there recently?**

Hey?

What kind of signs would you see that would indicate that perhaps the Viet Cong had been there recently?

Oh, there could be a grave, there could be you know, cooking, that sort of stuff, or broken twigs, or you know, branches, and all that sort of stuff. Or sometimes there was - might have been a

37:30 table or something, you know, that they've used as an operating table for wounded and all that sort of - yeah, there were different things that you...

So take us through moving through, say somewhere like this, if you're forward scout, what would you do?

Well shit, you would be so slow and so methodical, you'd look where you were going to put your foot first, but you'd be up, looking, like this, it was just constant, and you'd be scanning the whole bloody

38:00 jungle in front, because you just didn't know where they were. And you'd be forever moving, you just wouldn't stop still, your head, you know, bloody fingers on the trigger ready to go off in the fire position, you know, off safety. Oh shit yeah, you're just waiting for that shot to ring out to bloody drop and

38:30 bang, fire back, you know?

What effect does that have on you, like ...?

Well I didn't think it had any effect, but now I know that it obviously has, you know, because I can't - like nine months ago - I've actually sold half my business, because I didn't think I'd last another couple of years, because I was going downhill so fast, I wouldn't want to get out of bed if I wasn't working, or go to golf, you know, that was even then I was so bugged, you know? And I just thought, "This is crazy,"

39:00 you know, I'm walking every morning for the diabetes, I'm playing golf, usually Saturdays and Thursday, late afternoon I play nine holes if I can get out, and you know, I'm eating the right foods and keeping myself - but I'm just stacking on weight and feeling terrible, and I just thought - so I ended up selling - a guy who wanted to buy into my business and I ended up selling half to him and thinking, "I'm going to get out, I'm going to retire." But then I've got

39:30 this new lease of life with the sleep - you know, so I want to stay working, you know? So yeah, I was really convinced that I was going to kick the bucket [die]. Even sometimes when I walk I'd have chest pains and that sort of stuff. I thought, "What else can go bloody wrong with me," you know? They might as well put me away.

We'll pause there, sorry mate.

No worries.

Tape 7

00:37 Long Tan, well we went up there because there was - that was outside our province, that was a US province that they were supposed to be looking up, but there was apparently build-ups of North Vietnamese getting in, the Yanks weren't doing their patrols, you know, and all this sort of shit. Whereas we did. Anyway we went up there and I believe some of our battalions had been up there earlier times

01:00 and also ran into heaps of trouble. We had the safest, I believe, I was also told that we had the safest province, because we continually patrolled, you know, and actually I've got the figures over there of how many people from other countries were over there as well, you know, you'd be interested in, and other statistics I want to show you later. But yeah, five platoon apparently, I can't remember exactly, we were -

01:30 how far we were away from them, but I know we had to - we really had to struggle, but we heard on the radio early that morning that they'd run into a bunker system. How far they were away, I can't remember, but it took us a couple of hours I think to get there, and they were running short of everything and you know, they'd had five wounded, I think, or six wounded, and you know, the platoon has a maximum of

- 02:00 30, they probably had 20 guys at that time, and I don't think anyone - no, no-one died in that. Bum's mate Mitch got shot through the neck, lucky to be alive, and Bobby Drinnon was in that one, he got shot three times, and Sharland and who else? A couple of others, you know? And that's where Nev Walker got his - and Sergeant (Des
- 02:30 Fontaine, one of the biggest guys also that was a regular and he'd been over there I think before, he was a great guy, one of the sergeants. Bloody blow me down, about three - just before we went to that reunion, the first one, '71, he bloody died, he was still in the army I believe, or he just got out, but he was training kids, and he dropped dead of a heart attack. And like he was, he would have been five or six years older than me, and I was probably 40-something
- 03:00 then, you know, but he was fit, really, and he got an award over there for bravery, and a great guy, you know, and Nev Walker also. And now I've seen Nev, Christ I can't believe how he must have been affected by it. And another one, Charlton, what's his name? Charlie. Anyway, he's from North Queensland, I think, yeah pretty sure North Queensland
- 03:30 and so was Nev Walker and the other fellow, who's the other fellow I mentioned? Des Fontains, I think he was a Queenslander as well, yes.

So how did you I guess navigate where the contact was taking place?

Oh, radio, you know, they would establish their position and we just had to get there, you know, and we just flew through that bush, you know, because our guys were in trouble.

- 04:00 And four platoon, I don't know, they came from another area, and we all caught up there and strengthened their whole position and then some of us relieved some of their guys. It was just full on, you know, it was huge. And then we'd laid all our ammunition, it was just about out, and that's when the - I don't know whether that was the first or the second resupply of ammo we'd had but yeah, poor of
- 04:30 Sergeant Griffiths, bloody Johnny Harris was the guy that was supposed to go out, and I met him here in Darwin a couple of years ago, he was in admin company, and I've got his phone number in Adelaide, but he was crook as a dog, he said he's had stomach operations and god knows what, and like he was admin, I mean, they would have done a few tail patrols around Nui Dat, you know, never would have run into any Viet Cong or anything. But I suppose it affected
- 05:00 different people in different ways. But yeah, I'll give him a ring when I get a chance and see how he's going.

And in this contact what could you see...?

What I want to mention was - like I never - for years and years and years I never believed that Agent Orange and the guys were claiming all this stuff, and I thought, you know, "Bludgers, bloody whingers," you know? And a lot of them went off the rails when they came back, or a few of them went off and just got on the

- 05:30 drugs and the booze, they were probably the first people that ended up getting these pensions, because they couldn't handle it, I don't know for whatever reason. And a lot of them just weren't the infantry guys, you know, they were the guys that didn't do anything. And where was I leading there? Shit, I've forgotten.

Agent Orange?

Yes, something about that. Anyway I'm now reading stuff about all

- 06:00 that Agent Orange and shit, and I'm really dark on the government. No, it was something else. Jesus. Oh yeah, at our reunion, the platoon reunion down there in Canberra, there was four of us, five of us sitting for breakfast and we started talking about the kids. Well my second oldest, you saw her, she's got - and she hates people knowing, polycystic ovarian syndrome, and she had some other bloody problem, when she was young
- 06:30 Joy used to take her to the hospital, because she was nowhere near as big as what she is now, you know? And she never used to eat much, but she just seemed to be putting on weight, and she used to play sport and all that, and this doctor, female doctor down the road, I should have sued her for malpractice, but she was a bloody client of mine, you know, and she just said, "You've got to lose weight," that's it, you know? And I think she was
- 07:00 11 and 12 and that sort of stuff, and she was always crook in the stomach and everything, pains, and anyway, ended up taking her to another doctor, female doctor, and she found it straight away, she said, "Oh, you've got polycystic ovarian syndrome," and this other bloody thing. Anyway, she's had an operation for the other thing and apparently it's cured, but this one's too late. She won't be able to have kids and you know, other female problems and all that sort of stuff. And
- 07:30 so - she's a smart kid, you know, but yeah, it's really sad. Jonesy, my mate from northern New South Wales, they have two daughters, I think, and I only met him at the platoon reunion, first time in bloody 32 years, it's fantastic, his shit, his daughter was born with no ovaries, she's formed very small, she had a thing called - he told me what it was, something syndrome.

- 08:00 Trevor Lock, my mate from Renmark, his son was born with part of his mouth missing and a hair lip, and who was the other guy? I forget his name. Ritchie from Brisbane, his son was born with no roof in his mouth and a hair lip, and the other guy, his kids were okay, you know? Now my other daughter's okay. And I
- 08:30 couldn't believe it, four out of five, hey, something's wrong, you know? And I'd been hearing about all this deformities and shit like this. Now I don't know whether any of those are you know, related to Agent Orange or whatever, but Jesus, I don't think anywhere else you'd go in a group of four, five people and find four of their kids have major, major problems. Ritchie's son, I'll tell you this but, he's become a drug addict and ended up
- 09:00 taking an overdose, dying, because he couldn't fit in with, you know - and Ritch was pretty cut up about all that, obviously. So you know, it's had horrific bloody consequences. Whether it's a result, who knows, but now I'm starting to think, "Hey," you know, because I'm not happy that my daughter can't have kids, you know? So I don't know. But where do you go? What do you

09:30 do?

Has anything about that ever been mentioned by advocates for...?

Well, yes it has, but you know, I didn't even tell the advocate that I saw, the guy in Adelaide, I didn't even think of it at the time, it's only just - down here in this last reunion that it all cropped up.

Have you mentioned to your daughter what you suspect?

I don't know, well, I said it

10:00 could have could have been, I don't know.

What's her reaction?

Well she's been down uni for four years, so you know, we haven't seen her much. She doesn't want to talk about it.

And when the four of you all sat - or five of you all sat down together, did you sort of talk about

10:30 **these...?**

Well, we wondered why, you know? Could it be something to do with - but what can we do? I don't know. And then you know, I started thinking, "Well gees, maybe there is more to it," you know? And I'm glad I've been pursuing things because now I'm starting to get better with proper counselling and

11:00 what's the word, whatever, yes, that sort of stuff. I'll continue to do that, you know, until - I want to be, you know, I live a pretty bloody good life and made a lot of money, and I want to bloody live to a long time and enjoy it, and enjoy my kids and grandkids.

11:30 **When did you come to the realisation or decision that counselling was something that you might think about or could be useful?**

Not so much counselling I suppose, I'm going to do it because I know this guy, Dr Parker, is a bloody good - he's counselled a lot of Vietnam vets, he knows what they've been through, and he is damned good. You know, he's telling me things that I should be doing, you know, like going and having a sleep apnoea test which proved correct, you know, pity I

12:00 didn't do it straight away. And then now this other blood thing, when I've been tired, and he's got me off of it and shit, why didn't I see him years ago, you know? I hope that I will be back getting some of the energy that I used to have, I used to be playing squash and you know, cricket, bloody you name it. Didn't play much Aussie Rules when I came up here because I was working too hard, but

12:30 golf, and sometimes I don't even want to do that, I'm too bloody worn out. But that's - I don't know - that's probably not Vietnam. The result of, maybe, I don't know.

Is there more of a psychological side of it that you'd like to talk about, or...?

No, I think I'm pretty much in control, yes.

And just another

13:00 **question actually about Long Tan which we were talking about at the beginning of the tape, I'm interested, you talked about the jungle and how thick it is and all that sort of stuff, what kind of visibility do you have of a target?**

Sometimes you couldn't see three or four metres in front of you, you just couldn't see, it was so thick. Like I carried a pair of secateurs in places to cut my way through the jungle, you know? It was so damned thick you

13:30 could have had a nog two metres in front of you and wouldn't have known. But other places it was you know, reasonably open and you know - but a lot of the jungle was really bloody thick, you know, it was

up inclines or down slopes and all that sort of stuff, it wasn't level ground or anything.

So in a contact or a fire fight how do you know what you're firing at, where your enemy is?

Well you'd see – you know, you'd see the tracer come often, you know, one if five, you know, they used to

14:00 obviously to get their line of fire to see where they were exactly firing at, and you'd see this tracer coming at you, you know, so you know there's another four bullets there, you that that's just been past you, and the fifth one you see, you know? So you know where it's coming from so you'd fire back at it.

What colour were the tracers?

Shit, good question. Good question, I don't know. You just see them, that's all, it's probably silver or something, I just – no, couldn't remember, it was

14:30 just – you'd know because you'd duck your bloody head when you'd see it coming thinking shit, they're close.

And this might be a silly question, but how do the guns, how well do they shoot through trees?

Mincer, you know, bloody – the gunners, the machine gunners or any riflemen or – yeah, I mean Jesus, those weapons are so powerful, they'd go through, you know, sometimes through bloody trees,

15:00 you know, things like that, no worries, straight through them. They were powerful.

And how about the Armalites?

The Armalites weren't quite – they were only 5.56 millimetres from memory, they weren't – didn't have as much power but they were easier to manoeuvre because they were probably two thirds the size of the SLRs.

And so what was your best shooting position be?

Flat on your guts, yeah, behind your

15:30 pack, or a stump or something.

And where would you position your gun?

So you could shoot it. I mean ...

Would you raise it off the ground or would it be against your shoulder, or ...?

Oh, it'd be against your shoulder but you know, you'd support it, but you might have a branch or something that you – bit of rock or something that you'd support it on, depends what was there.

And during this contact,

16:00 **you said it went on pretty much all day?**

All day, yes.

Were there any sort of lulls or...?

The occasional lull, yeah, and that's when you could hear the, "Hookdalai," and all that sort of stuff, yeah. Oh shit yeah. "Hookdalai number 10," you know? That means bad, you know? Where the mamasans would say, "Hookdalai number one," you know? Yeah.

And was there any other sort of I guess that psychological propaganda stuff? Were there any leaflets

16:30 **distributed or any...?**

I can remember something but I can't, you know, I know there was other things, leaflets and that, but I think we used to – the Americans or the Aussies used to leave them too, you know, from what I believe, I've heard that they used to fly over villages and drop leaflets and stuff to tell them, you know, the Viet Cong, if they've got any Viet Cong or whatever, you know, all that sort of caper. It was all psychological, yeah, it was a bit of psychological warfare, I think more so from our –

17:00 on our behalf than the Vietnamese, but...

Was there any sort of propaganda radio from the North Vietnamese forces at all?

I can't remember any, but you know, I wasn't on a radio so, yeah. We used to listen to Good Morning Vietnam. No, we had an Australian, I think, we had an Australian bloody radio station, I'm sure we did. I can't – look, I

17:30 know it was good music, you know, that was the best music of the era, anyway, late '60s, early '70, Christ, Creedence Clearwater [Revival] and the [Rolling] Stones and yeah.

Are there any particular songs that really stand out, when you hear them you go, ah, that's a

Vietnam...?

Ah, I was only 19. Shit, yeah.

What kind of reaction do you have when you hear that?

18:00 **Because he got it a bit wrong, you know, too.**

Cold shivers, yeah.

In what way?

I mean there were very few 19-year-olds, there were a few regulars, but most of us were 21, but I think 19 rhymed with something, so...Because most of us grunts were National Servicemen and privates and you know, we were the cannon fodder, because the regs all had good jobs in bloody – a lot of the regs had good jobs in civvies or other corps that were pretty pogo-ish, yeah.

18:30 But we had some bloody good – my Corporal Buckland, he got wounded, bloody great man, he's retired now. Old Buck, yeah. He had a couple of good sayings, oh shit I can't remember, but he's in Goulburn, he's looking after his Dad. I met him at both reunions, he was there, because Goulburn's right next door to Canberra

19:00 and he's looking after his disabled Dad or aged Dad, he doesn't travel, because I wanted him to come up here and yeah, he was a reg and stayed in for, I don't know, 25, 30 years or whatever, and he's just on his superannuation pension, he won't go to – he told me he won't go to Vietnam Veterans or anything to put in for any claim, but you know, he's one of the true blues [true Australian]. Bloody what was it? "She'll be right," he'll say, he used to say...

19:30 And then old Corporal Ward was a good guy, bloody Sarge [Sergeant] 'Mouth to Mouth', he was a good guy, yeah. I never had any problems with the sergeant or whatever. He's still in the army, he's an officer now, I think he's turning 65, so he's been in for – he was in before, yeah, he rides a big motorbike around.

20:00 Our – all good guys, yes. Ralphie and – yeah.

And what's the feeling like I guess when you see them at reunions?

Oh, fantastic, can't believe it, you know? I mean even a couple you don't – didn't have much time for, you don't bother about it, I mean we're all mates because we've got something in common and yeah.

And how does the experience of Vietnam sort of connect you? What is it that ...?

Well we were there. A shit

20:30 load of other people weren't, didn't know what happened and we did. So as far as I'm concerned we're entitled to talk about it now, yes. I don't care, you know, I mean if I want to talk to someone about it and they're not interested, I'll keep talking about it, stuff them, they'll listen, or they'll hear, yeah. Because we haven't done any talking for a long time.

What was the decision, or when did you come to the decision that you were going to start going

21:00 **to reunions and contact people?**

As soon as I went to the one in – the battalion reunion in '71. Shit, I thought, "How good's this?" Catching up with guys and reminiscing and remembering things that you'd forgot and you'd put in the back of your mind and didn't know it, and seeing old faces and yeah, I just wish I'd have gone to the first one, you know, I could have always afforded it, but I was always too bloody busy.

And how about Anzac Day?

21:30 I'll march every Anzac Day from now, yeah, probably the last eight, seven, since my daughters wanted me to go I've always marched, I'll always get up and go and march now.

And what does Anzac Day mean to you?

Probably that, yeah, I did something a lot of other people wouldn't know about, never know about, and a lot of them – I shouldn't

22:00 say it, but too gutless to give it a go, yeah.

And do you feel part of the Anzac tradition?

Not really, no, because nope, I'm still not a member of the RSL, I'm not even a member of Vietnam Veterans, but I'm going to join them, I don't want to get involved that way with guys that I don't know, I'm not – only the guys that I was with, you know? That interests me. The other guys, I

22:30 mean guys if they were in the infantry, sure, as I said I know quite a few – there's a lot of guys up here in Darwin that I continually run into, a lot of them have been in engineers and infantry and that. I'm

more interested in the infantry guys, just I guess engineers are more interested in mixing with the engineers, you know, and pogos would probably be more interested in mixing with the pogos, but who cares, you know?

23:00 I'm only interested in what I want to do anyway, I'm not interested in someone else.

And you're not a member of the RSL?

Nope. Don't think I ever will be until, like Jungle told me, his father was a returned serviceman, when he came back, took him into the local RSL club and said, you know, "My son's just come back from Vietnam." "Oh, Vietnam, that wasn't a war." Jungle's Dad has never been back

23:30 to the RSL since, and neither has Jungle. And a lot of Vietnam veterans are like that. And I remember going into the RSL up here, and I wasn't given a - you know, I was going to sign up, but I wasn't given a friendly welcome so stuff it. So when they die out we'll take over. No, we'll do that before then, but yeah. I'm a member of

24:00 too many other bloody things, I'm involved in sports and cricket and you know, treasurer of the club, life member, life member of the footy club, bloody all that sort of caper, and sponsors of the golf club, I've got too much else on when I've got any time off to be worried about...But I will, I'll join Vietnam Veterans probably in the next year, and maybe get a bit involved. But never see anyone from our - there's a few guys up here

24:30 that were in our battalion over there, but gradually now I'm finding out a few more that are up here and you never hear about them. Did I answer it? I don't know.

No, you did, yes.

Oh shit, good.

We were talking in that break about the film that your daughter gave you for Christmas.

25:00 Oh yeah, yeah, what was it? The Odd Angry Shot. Yeah, I reckon that's probably the few of them that I've seen it's probably come anywhere near closest, it was pretty ordinary, but that would have been the one that came the closest that I reckon to what we actually did. But you know, compared to these Yanks, bloody stupid movies and you know, some of the others I've seen, you know, like that bloody, what was that

25:30 thing, where they played the music and all that, and blared over the jungle and - oh...

Apocalypse Now?

Apocalypse... What a load of crap, you know, probably made a lot of money but what a load of crap. And that We Were Soldiers. Great film, but Jesus, get real, you know? It would have been - I don't even think it was shot in Vietnam, I waited for the things to come through and I'm

26:00 sure that didn't I'm sure that didn't look like Vietnam, it just didn't, none of the - and yeah, it was just - it wasn't that easy, you know? I just don't - nope. It would have been in some places yes, but not on that scale I don't believe. Yes, it was just a bit farfetched, some of those things. It was pretty

26:30 graphic, which is fair enough, you know, but it was just...

What do you think of the general representation of Vietnam veterans, I guess in the media and films and...?

I don't know what you mean by that.

I guess I mean from

27:00 **seeing films, like a lot of American-based ones and that sort of thing, do you think it's...?**

Films are made for making money, not bloody telling the truth, you know, so really before they make a film they're going to think, "Can we make money out of this thing?" So you know, they try and change events and do all that sort of stuff so that it'll look attractive for people to watch. So yeah. And in the media, well

27:30 I think we're getting more recognition now, it's really great, you know, and a lot of our guys, like Trevor Lockheed, that was the first time he marched last year, you know, that's 32 years, 33 years or something since we came back, and there's other guys I know up here up here, a part Aboriginal guy, he went two tours, he was in engineers, and I got him to see an advocate, and I think he's getting a pension now, part pension or whatever, and he has never marched,

28:00 and he doesn't want to, he said, "To hell with it," you know? And he's got a lot of things wrong with him, health-wise, and what have you. And he's worked ever since he - he's always worked. You know, a lot of the guys don't realise how much it's affected them, and it's only by meeting others and

28:30 talking and finally getting some help - I saw a show on the TV [television], and saw a show on telly about Les Hiddons last year, you know, the Bush Tucker Man? And they had some thing on about this

retreat up in North Queensland, and I hadn't seen Les on telly for a couple of years. Now he did two tours, he was a forward scout and then when he went back he was an officer. I think he was a Nasho originally and he signed on or

- 29:00 whatever. And he said, in that thing, he didn't say he was a TPI pensioner, but I took it that he was, because he said that, oh, they sort of said, "What are you doing now?" He said, "Oh well, I haven't done much lately because last year I ran into a brick wall." And I took that as though he had a breakdown, because that's what a lot of our guys are doing, I've got a mate up here that's had a breakdown a couple of years ago. All of a sudden out of the blue he realised he was having problems at work, he's in the same
- 29:30 business as me, and I didn't see him around for a long time, and so I asked, and they said, "Oh no, he doesn't work any more." So I rang him at home, and he said, "Oh no, I can't work any more." And anyway, I said to him, "Do you mind if I come around?" You know, I never socialised with him other than at official functions or whatever, and he was in seven battalion, and I said, "What's wrong Joe?" And he said, "I just had a breakdown."
- 30:00 And it was a couple of years ago, New Year's Eve, him and his wife and friends had booked a couple of rooms up in the hotel on the Esplanade to see all the fireworks and stuff like that, having a few beers before on the balcony, and all of a sudden at 12 they were talking and the fireworks went off and he lost the plot. And he told me that before, six months before, like he's a financial planner, and he couldn't remember
- 30:30 peoples' names, and I'm getting a bit like that, and you know, he couldn't remember what he had to talk to them about and you know, he couldn't study, and that's another thing the bloody stupid government's trying to force on us, is to do all this study. I'm nearly 55 and they want me - I mean I've been in the business 19 years, and I never - I look after my clients, and I probably charge the lowest fees of anyone in Darwin, and I've got a great reputation, and here's the stupid f-ing
- 31:00 government and the bloody ASIC [Australian Securities and Investments Commission] trying to - because we've got bad apples in the bloody - they don't look at you individually and see what you've done, and ask people, you know, "Is he good?" or whatever, or, "Does he help you, has he made money for you?" They want to tar them with the same brush and you've all got to do this diploma. Now there's no way, I've been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, and they said I've had it for years, and I denied that I had it because I didn't want to -
- 31:30 I thought, not knowing about this, this was a couple of years ago when I went for this pension bit, and I said, "No, I haven't got it," because I thought I had to give up work, and I don't want to give up work, I want to work as long as I can. But you can still get this army pension or whatever and have post-traumatic and you can still work. But once you go to the bigger pension and you're TPI'd, you're not supposed to work, you can work eight hours a week or something. So I
- 32:00 denied that I had it. But I've got it all right, I know, I've known that for years.

How have you known?

The way I deal with people, I get angrier as I get older, and you know, my sleeping habits and all that sort of stuff, you know, the irritable bowel and all that, it's just a combination of things, the itch that won't go away, you know, it's just...it's a whole range of bloody things. I don't get close to anybody these

- 32:30 days, I'm my own man now, I'll do what I bloody want, when I want to. I'm not going to conform any more, stuff it. I look after my clients and I do a bloody good job and that's why I have people coming to me wanting my advice, and this stupid bloody government, all of them, do
- 33:00 not - it's not - you're not an individual any more, it's not based on what you do, it's based on the whole bloody range of you know, financial planners and you know, of course every occupation there's criminals that want to take people down, doesn't matter whether you're a bloody teacher or a doctor, although doctors you probably could leave out of it, but I know a few that have done the wrong things. Accountants, solicitors, lawyers, whatever, they are there to feather their own
- 33:30 bloody nests [make money only for themselves], and there's a small percentage I might say. Most of them, like any other occupation, are fantastic people, probably 99 per cent. But the 1 per cent, and the stupid bloody government is legislating so that all 100 per cent did this - because it's automatically going to make you a better bloody...bullshit. You know? How dumb is that? Anyway, they should go on - go and interview your clients, get the ASIC to do something, you know,
- 34:00 properly interview you, 150 of your clients, see how they think, what they think of you, and then act accordingly, whether your advice is professional and your charges aren't too high. I know guys that've got all these qualifications, and they rip people off blind. And what happens to them? Because they got their diploma of financial planning, I'm halfway through it, and that's all I'll get, but...Yeah and poor old Joe couldn't bloody study you know, so getting back on us, I'm pretty good here. And
- 34:30 he said yes, "I haven't been back in the city for two years," he says, "All I do is go for a walk in the morning and stay in the house." He said, "I've just had a nervous breakdown," and I knew he was getting bad, he'd gone into Vietnam Veterans to get some counselling and all that sort of stuff. Six months prior to that he knew he couldn't handle his work and all that, and he said, "Don't let that

happen to you.” And I know of so many other guys, and I

- 35:00 think that’s what’s happened to what’s his name Les Hiddons, he’s had a nervous breakdown and now he said, “All I’m – my life, is going to be devoted to my...” because on his second time he was an officer, “The guys that I commanded, I’m going to try and look after them, because they need looking after. They don’t realise, you know, they’ve come back and they’re all having huge problems, but later in life, you know? The genuine ones, where it’s all been pushed to the back and nothing
- 35:30 ever discussed.” And yeah, I mean I get so angry these days. But I contain it mostly, except when I had a fight with a guy from our cricket club that went to another club a couple of years ago, he was built like a brick shithouse, and I’d coached since under 12s and under 14s and he’s probably 32 or something, and here I was 53, and sick, not bloody – and he’d gone to this other club and he thinks he’s
- 36:00 god’s gift to women and you know, he’s one of these guys that’s got all the potential but never, ever, he never got on the committee, pinched money off people, you know, took things and never – always bagged [criticized] the committee, and I was on the committee for 25 years or something, and he said, he said to someone, “Yeah, now I’m out of that club I’m really doing well,” and he said, “You know, the best thing I ever did was leave that cricket club.” And I said, “What did you say?” and he wouldn’t repeat it. I
- 36:30 grabbed him and had a swipe at him, I said, “Don’t you fuckin’ rubbish our cricket club,” and he swiped back and bloody we were right into it and the guys pulled us apart you know, and he hasn’t succeeded, the club that he’s with now, it’s his second year, they banned him basically, they don’t want him to play for them. He’s a user. But I would have put up with that for years and years and years but now I won’t, and anything like that I’ll have a dip [throw a punch], yeah, I’ll let them know. And just one thing, in the
- 37:00 cricket club, this second year, this was the first year that he left, the second year, they had a – he was always breaking down and they had a – what’s it called, a bloody gamble thing on...

Pokies?

No, no, on Willows, two to one that he’d break down from a crook leg or a bloody pulled muscle or he’d be KOd [knocked out] by Bill Passmore, I think it was 50-1, I think. This is an opposing cricket club, you know, they were

- 37:30 behind me, they weren’t bloody – and that was his first year, he had huge talent but never – there’s nothing up here, you now? Anyway, I hear he’s prematurely retired this year, because they don’t want him, so I’ll win out in the long run.

Is there anything particular, I guess people like that guy, or any sights or sounds or anything that can kind of get you a bit on edge?

Only the helicopters I think, you know,

- 38:00 when they go across, you know? Or shots, sometimes fire, you know, you hear that, we’re in Darwin, so you know, you’d think, “Christ.” I had the neighbour from hell, I had a neighbour from hell over here, a guy from New Zealand, but no, that’s another story, I’m not going to tell you that, it’s got nothing to do with Vietnam, except that I used to come home from work, he was as crazy as hell, didn’t work, they had a deformed child, and they thought everyone owed them a
- 38:30 living, and everyone in the neighbourhood just wanted him out. And he threatened people and the policewoman at the back, threatened her, and she got the CIB [Criminal Investigation Bureau], she worked for the CIB, got him, they raided him a few times, took him to jail, get abusive, drunk, whatever, he bragged to me he knew the deal, you know, he knew how to handle people and actually, and you know, he’d been in jail, he knew the score and he could kill me and all this sort of
- 39:00 stuff. My daughters, wife, he had a crazy women he was with, I believe they met in a mental asylum in New Zealand. Eh? What? Yeah, anyway, I used to come home, late at night, and all his lights would be out, off, that’s why we’ve got that black sheet up – but he’s not there now, he’s gone, he’s back in New Zealand thank Christ, and the police had a file on him that thick, and he could never hold down a job and they’d got this compensation, they’d paid
- 39:30 cash for the house next door and a new Falcon, and everything, they got it and they came out to Australia for a new life, and they picked bloody Darwin of all places. How dopey is that? And – look, I could go on for ages about this, but I used to come home and I’d hear this voice, “Oh, been in the office getting a head job have you?” You know? This is – it was all sexual connotations and anyway I’d just say, “Fuck off Selwyn, you idiot,” you know, “Go and root a sheep or something,” that’s what I’d say to him. And anyway, I’d come
- 40:00 up here, ask them how they are, then go down the back stairs, turn the lights off, down the back behind the shed, look over the – and this was Anzac Day one year we’d been out and come home that night, hadn’t been at work, and so here I go, it was raining, and I’m peering over the bloody – through these bushes and I’m thinking, “Fuck, I’m back in Vietnam,” you know? This is stupid, you know? Here I am, it’s Anzac Day and I’m looking over the back
- 40:30 fence to find out what this idiot’s bloody doing, because often he used to be in the pool at the back, he’d have mates around and they’d be smoking drugs or something. “Come on, let’s annoy the neighbours,”

you know, and they'd jump into the pool, and then they'd throw rocks on the roof and shit like that. Anyway, the police – we got him out of here, we got him out of here and he went to the caravan park and he was supposed to go to court and he didn't turn up, he'd gone. Went over to Cairns I believe, but now I've found out from the police that he's back in New Zealand.

- 41:00 Never to come back, there's a warrant out for his arrest, if he ever comes back to the Territory. The neighbour from hell. If you ever have one, Jesus, just go out and shoot the bastards, I tell you, it would have saved me two years of grief. No, you wouldn't believe it, you would not believe it.

We'll just change tapes on that note.

Tape 8

- 00:37 **Okay, just some questions on patrols, when you're going out on patrol. What kind of things would you carry in your packs?**

Oh, well water, for example water bottles, probably six, I guess, eight, I don't know, I can't remember exactly, probably a few litres I think from memory. Ammunition, probably had about four pouches, I guess, sometimes a bandolier, depending on

- 01:00 what you were carrying, if you were the gunner or the number two on the gunner, you had rounds which I could show you in the books, bloody, you know, 100 rounds I think they were, maybe two or three of them, bloody – and they were heavy. And the machine gun of course, that wasn't bloody – you had to have a big fella to carry one of them, they were 30 kilos I think, no it wouldn't have been that much. They were a fair bit,
- 01:30 anyway. And when they fired they had a huge recoil too, and they a stand which you could put down and it was a lot easier to fire. They used to cover a wide arc, they were powerful, the old machine gun.

Who had to carry that?

The machine gunner.

Yes, who had to carry...oh, the machine gunner?

Jungle was our machine gunner, yes. And some of the other guys were huge, Stretch was a six foot seven guy, he carried one, and

- 02:00 Babbage with four platoon, he was – there were three gunners in each platoon, but he was a big guy from Western Australia. Shit, who else? Nope, can't remember but there was yeah, there was – I think one of the Aboriginal guys, a big fella from Queensland, pretty sure he was a gunner, he was a painter up in Rocky or something. George, I can't remember his name, a character.
- 02:30 Nope, don't know. Anyway, and there was Claymore mines, the wireless operator had a wireless, rations of course, yeah, you had grenades on your body, on your pouches, trenching tool, like a dig, you know, if you had to
- 03:00 dig in anywhere, that was it, I think.

Was it hard to cart this gear?

It's about 50ks all up, but gunners would have had probably 60 or 70ks, yes. It was pretty big, yes.

Hard to move with this?

Oh, you got used to it, Jesus Christ, we were that fit, yes.

What about moving

- 03:30 **in such an environment that you could be shot at, that you had to be careful about where mines were? Was it difficult to try and maintain camouflage and all these kind of things?**

Yes, well I mean you had to have your wits about you, that's for sure, you know? You didn't just step anywhere. You're out in the jungle, well they're not going to lay mines out there, more in the populated areas that you know, on the way out you'd find that's where the mines would be. But not out in the jungle, we didn't

- 04:00 come across any. Well we did come across a few of those jumping jacks, but none of our guys stepped on them, but we saw the remains of some and you know, we saw some old ones that had been there for a long time, and they were useless, yeah. A lot of – I think a lot of the – they were better set up when our battalions went over early and we had to set up this Nui Dat, for our support base, and then
- 04:30 we gradually – they were sort of taking over the whole province and we had the – the battalions had to drive them out, and so a lot of the battalions earlier than us had a lot rougher time than we did, that's for sure. From what I gather from other people, you know, they had driven them out and then they were

trying to come back in and get back in the bunker systems, or build new ones, and we just had to keep patrol of them to make sure that they wouldn't establish themselves back in the province.

05:00 So – and we did that. But you know, with the help of all the battalions and the people that came before us, because I think they got a lot rougher, a lot tougher than we did. And you know, the Vietnamese obviously set up all these bloody booby traps and stuff, and the early guys copped them, because we didn't have any casualties from booby traps, but we saw, you know, where they'd been and whether it was just like or whatever, but I think they were booby traps, like once we forced them out they didn't get a chance to get

05:30 back in with that sort of stuff, they just got into the bunkers and waited for us to come.

Did you come across any booby traps of sorts?

Yeah, old ones, yeah. There was a pit there once with spikes in it, and stuff like that, but it wasn't – it was open so you know, it would have been discovered obviously, and you know, they'd just have a covering over it and you're supposed to – the Australians were supposed to fall into them and be spiked, you know, wooden spikes.

With all

06:00 **this gear, like if you had to move quickly what would you do? Would you run with it, or would you dump it? What would you do?**

Oh, you didn't have to run quickly, shit no, except if you got into contact we'd all bunch up you know, and form our whatever it was, you know, like a harbour. But yeah, we'd just, with all the sides protected and the back so that we could fire out either way if they tried to double around behind us, and all that sort of stuff.

06:30 **What would you do if you were fired on? What exactly would you do? Which direction would...?**

"Hit the deck! hit the deck!" Yeah. Shit yeah. No, if you thought you had a chance of getting one and you could see him or something, yes, you'd just fire, you'd stand up and you know, you'd remain standing. But shit, if you couldn't see anyone you'd hit the deck and try and work out where it's coming from, you know?

And once you know where it's coming from, what's the plan?

What's the plan? To fire shit into it, you know?

07:00 Try and get some grenades or some bloody RPG, you know, the rocket – a couple of guys had those other launchers, what do they call them? Not grenade launchers, some of them had – either had a grenade or two as well on their – SLR I think. But I didn't have one of them, I had an under and over which you just poked it up and put

07:30 a canister in and bang, let it go. But you had to be very careful with that, because all the trees and shit, if it hits one 10 feet in front of you, it'll bounce back at you, you know? Or go off, you know? And yeah, there was a lot of stuff that we had to carry, but I can't think of everything, you know? You're out there for six weeks so you need things to you know, can openers and shit like that to open those

08:00 cans, and cigarettes and lighters, you know, you had a lighter or matches or something, they'd be in the rations as well, and a pack of cards of course was obligatory, if you had a bit of a rest and a couple of guys'd be there, you'd be playing cards.

If you were playing cards, would someone be on watch? What was the process?

Yeah, well one of you would be looking out, yeah. There wouldn't be too much hassle.

08:30 **What about when you're eating, like what about watch?**

Oh yeah, they'd always be someone, one this side, one the other end sort of, yeah. We'd be playing cards and there's still an eye watching, yeah.

What if you wanted to go do a shit?

You'd do it, you'd do it. You'd dig a little hole and we'd bury everything, yeah.

Would someone have to watch for you?

No, you'd just do it.

Would you have your gun ready, or what?

You'd take your gun with you

09:00 just a bit off the track, you know?

Did you ever worry, like in these situations ?

Oh shit yeah, yeah you never knew. Jesus, what a terrible death, eh?

Well it's a vulnerable spot, isn't it?

Yeah it is, bloody oath.

But basically you'd go by yourself?

Oh yeah, just a couple of feet away, you know? Nothing too far, Jesus.

Were there any occasions when you'd say, "Hey can you look out for me?"

09:30 Oh yes, if you were really thinking that the Cong were around. Often you'd just hold it till the night, you know? But if you really had to go, yeah. A lot of time we had a lot of diarrhoea, shit did we ever? Yeah. Thinking of that I've never - yeah, we did, a lot of diarrhoea over there.

And you carried toilet paper with you?

Yeah, little

10:00 bits, yeah. I think we had three pieces, 'one to wipe it, one to polish it and one to make sure' .

And you talked a bit about resupply, but take us through the process of how you'd get resupplied.

Oh well, you know, when we were getting low, they'd come around and say, you know, do you need - and if someone had a boot that's stuffed, they'd want a size 7 right boot or something, you know, or

10:30 even a even a pair of greens because they'd been ripped, like if we were going through the bamboo sometimes you'd rip your gear, and through the swamps they'd all be half missing and so you'd try and get another - if they could, they could only really - if you were short of ammo or anything, that was the main thing, and food, food was the big thing, and water. You know, and ammo obviously.

11:00 But as long as you had food and water you could survive, and ammo of course. But the other stuff you could do without, new gear. So we tried to get through without...

And how would you communicate this to HQ [headquarters]?

Oh you'd just - I think from memory, because I can't remember ever doing it, but you'd just say, "I need this," or, "I need that," call the section commander and he'd give it to the platoon commander who'd

11:30 give it to the wireless operator and they'd ring out back to Nui Dat and so they'd load everything up, the food and the ammo [ammunition] and the water first, and then anything else...Oh, we used to get mail I think come out too on that helicopter sometimes, not very often, but - because usually when we got back here there was a heap of mail waiting for us, if they didn't have a big load sometimes they'd bring out mail, I'm sure. Look, it's all hazy, it's just - yeah.

12:00 **And how would they get it to you exactly?**

Chopper, yeah, always chopper. We'd just harbour up a safe area, and they'd come in, drop it off, and go, and then they'd have to disburse it.

12:30 **So what would you wear on patrol?**

Jungle greens, yeah. The boots were steel capped, I forget what they were called, the socks, grey socks, jungle greens or grey long trousers, you know, whatever they call them, shirt,

13:00 tags [identity discs] obviously, we always had them around our necks, dog tags, and a hat. And often we had scarves, green, to just keep the sweat out of your eyes, a scarf around our neck or something to wipe our face with, because we were continually sweating.

Did you have any lucky charms or anything?

No, shit no, I don't believe in any of that crap, no, that's fairy stuff, fairy

13:30 tales. Some people did, but you know, I mean when your time's up, your time's up, that's it, whether you're in Darwin or Melbourne or bloody Brisbane or wherever you are, down the Daley River, if a croc wants to get you he's got you, you know? And so be it. So you do the right thing while on this earth and that's all you can do in life.

And we talked earlier about being a volunteer, volunteering for being a forward scout.

14:00 Yes? Well no-one else wanted to do it .

Why did you do it?

Why not? You're in control, I like to be in control, yeah.

It's a dangerous spot though.

Oh yeah, you either survive it or you don't. Simple.

So did you come across mines at all?

No, not really, no, we

14:30 had an APC that one of the guys was in got blown up once, but that was roads, you know, they used to mine the roads you know, we weren't on the roads. Except when we went out, when they took us back out, you know, we'd go on roads and then through towns and then into the jungle, at the edge of the jungle they'd drop us off. But not out in the jungle, we didn't.

How would you describe what happens to your senses? Your sense of smell, hearing, sight?

Very good, very good.

Just

15:00 **describe it for us.**

Oh, shit yeah, very sharp, yeah. Oh Jesus. Well you were fit then, you were young, you were bloody - you know, you were eager to get them, there's no two ways about that, we wanted to, we had a commander that was switched on and our NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] were bloody good, a few of them had been over there before so yeah, we thought we were better than they were, yeah.

15:30 And we could have done it, but it didn't happen.

How would you describe your sense of sight when you were on patrol?

Good, yes, shit yeah, you're just alert all the time, you know, you just never relaxed, that was the thing. If you relaxed you could be dead, you know, you might have missed something.

Did you catch things in the corner of your eye?

Yes, oh yes. You always - you know, you just never stopped

16:00 moving, you know? You had to be alert.

What about your hearing?

Hearing was great, not so great now, neither is my eyesight.

And sense of smell?

Used to be good, but no too good any more, you know? That's with old age.

Do you believe in any kind of sixth sense of you know, kind of knowing that there might be someone around the corner?

I thought plenty of

16:30 times there was someone there, but fortunately enough it wasn't, you know? Yeah. Yeah, I was pretty lucky.

Did you ever work much with the armoured section?

A little bit, yeah, I know the guys did before I came out there, they had a big - sort of the army land clearing team and stuff like that. But I remember one period we were with the armoured, the big guns, and it was pretty scary just walking alongside of them

17:00 you know, in the jungle with trees - they're all coming through and trees were falling over and shit like that, and yeah, it was pretty scary, because you're thinking shit, how can they see you, you know? But you know, they had to go out top, but we had to walk alongside. Yeah, it was a bit scary thinking back to it.

How did you interact with these guys?

No worries, yeah. Always a bit of, you know, like Bum would give them shit and you know, they'd give it back to him.

17:30 yeah, there was always a few jokers in the group. I was just one of those that kept quiet, kept to myself.

What would you call the tanker man?

I couldn't remember. Could not.

What about your interaction with the helicopter guys?

That was great, because they were always taking us home. Or taking us out there. Yeah, that was great.

Now you mentioned there were a couple of big blokes.

18:00 **How did these look up against the locals?**

They were double their size, shit yes. Double their size. Christ, some big guys, yeah.

Was it a funny sight?

Yeah. Bay. Bay was the Viet Cong guy that was with us, he disappeared. I think I didn't mention his name before, yeah. Bay, that's right. Always bumming a smoke off us.

You mentioned these Aboriginal guys...

18:30 There was a few in the platoon, yes.

Did they get any, I don't know, comments said to them or different treatment?

No, shit no. When you're in the army it's what you do, not what you bloody are. That's how you're measured.

Were they given any nicknames or anything because of that?

Charlie, that was a great guy, yeah. He was a real

19:00 womaniser, old Charlie . A character. See one of his sons is - I think someone was saying he was going for the Australian swimming team. I don't know, I haven't - you know, I saw him that once, he was in a different platoon, but at the battalion reunion and yeah, they were telling me then, but yeah, whether he ever made it or not. Because I can't even remember his surname. A lot of them we just knew them as nicknames you know, we didn't,

19:30 didn't know their surnames. Sludge, Frenchy, yeah.

What about nicknames for the enemy? What did you call the enemy?

Nogs, bloody Charlie, Slopes, yes, that's all. Nothing derogatory .

Does this help with having to fight them?

What do you mean?

Kind of calling them a name, you know,

20:00 **rather than, I don't know, referring to them as Vietnamese?**

Nope, it's just easier to say. Yeah, I mean we'd like to have seen a bit more of them, they were ever elusive, but yeah, they used to dictate the terms usually.

I guess I'll ask you about coming to the end of it. How did you

20:30 **feel at the end of your tour?**

Fantastic, shit yeah, we got through, yeah. But we were really disappointed we couldn't, in that last one, go through and go out with a big bang. Then we were called back and bloody stopped. We would have cleaned them up, no worries, and even if there was more there, we would have cleaned a lot more up, we might have got cleaned up ourselves if there was, you know, a hundred or something, but if we'd have got those first bunker systems then we would have got them, shit they were 10 metres

21:00 away from us, and all we had to do was bang, go, straight through them, they were in their hootchies [shelters], it was raining, over their bunkers, and they would have been away from their bunkers because they wouldn't have wanted the rain to be - well maybe that was over the entrance to their bunker, I don't know, but yeah, they probably wouldn't have wanted the rain to go down into the bunkers, but we would have had them, bang, gone, and then we would have been

21:30 into those bunkers and anyone else comes, we could have held them off, until we got reinforcements, and we would have needed reinforcements if there were 30 or 40 there, because we were only 12 or 13 or something. But yeah, I'm still shitty about that, it was them or us, you know, and yeah. And I think most of the guys are,

22:00 they wanted to go through, they'd been through a pretty tough nine months.

How was it communicated to you at that time that you weren't to shoot?

Oh, it came by radio, there was one guy that was back, he was on the radio, way back, and he came down, and he was sort of waiting, and we were just waiting for the guy to come back, because he had to keep the radio out of contact, and he came back with the answer no, we're not to go ahead.

22:30 **How did he indicate that?**

Who knows? I can't remember, I can't, no. All I knew we were disappointed, very disappointed that we couldn't go through. And we were even more disappointed when they sent the bloody American bombers through the next morning, and we'd marked it, we were really disappointed, the nearest bomb hit 500 metres. We wanted to see bodies, we wanted to see heaps of them, yeah. For sure. And to the

day I die I'll

23:00 regret not having done that. It would have – I don't care, I mean maybe I might be wrong, but it would have given us so much sense of finalise – you know, that we finally got 'em. It was only, in those days I mean yeah, we would have been – we may have regretted it but I don't think so, because all we wanted to do was get 'em.

23:30 And it was legitimate, they were Viet Cong, they weren't bloody South Vietnamese, they were the proper ridgy didge [true] good fighters, and we had 'em on toast, you know? And it was all political. Bloody terrible. But who knows, it could have been the right decision, I don't know. We'll never know, yeah.

So tell us about coming home. How'd you get home?

On the boat again, yeah, we got choppered out to HMAS Sydney and two

24:00 cans of beer a day ration, big cans . And bloody good food, Jesus Christ, couldn't believe it. And the guys who stopped at Perth, the Western Australian guys got off, and then we stopped in Adelaide and everyone got off, and then we marched, were bussed into Adelaide, marched through the city and we were just so

24:30 bloody pleased to be back, you know, that we got back in one piece, and you know, it was great people were cheering and – most people, those big bloody mongrel protestors, we should have taken them then and there, but you know, you couldn't do that, not back in Australia. But it wouldn't worry me now, they could lock me up, who cares? I've had a good life, you know?

What were they doing?

Throwing thing

25:00 at you, tomatoes, eggs, bloody calling you murderers. How could they have the bloody temerity to do things to us who'd bloody gone over there at the behest of our government, bloody our country, and we did a fucking good job, you know? It just irks me, I really get angry about it now. And like even at the reunion when we went into Queanbeyan last April, we

25:30 had been told the night before that it was almost certainly going to be protestors. You know what we did? We said, "Great, the whole lot of us are going have them." We were – man, there were 23 of us, we were all going to have them and it would have been on. Because we all feel the same way now, and we would have – but none of them turned up, thank goodness, so that would have saved a tricky situation.

26:00 And that's the way we feel.

How did you settle back into city life?

Easy. Shit easy. Yeah. Except that you felt unwanted, that was the big thing, you felt unwanted or un-something, I don't know. You would have liked someone to say, "Well done," you know? That's it. But no-one did. So that's why I was so pleased when in

26:30 Brisbane last year or whenever, the year before, this Vietnamese bird said, "On behalf of my Mum and me, we thank you very much for going over there and helping out the South Vietnamese." I just couldn't believe it, I walked away and said, "Oh, okay, thanks," you know? And then I was in a taxi and I was thinking, "Fuck, that's the first time someone's ever thanked me," you know? And it is, 33 years later. So yeah, I

27:00 felt better after that.

And immediately when you returned, like you met your wife, how long after?

Oh no, no, you know, I had a few liaisons , yeah. Yeah, met her at my mate Tony Clayton's 21st birthday, at his cousin's place, and yeah, things took off from there.

**This section of transcript is embargoed
until 1 January 2034.**

27:50 **From your service time and through your life, what do you think you've learnt from that time?**

Learnt from that? Oh shit, learnt a

28:00 heap. Not to trust anybody, bloody you know, as I said before, Australia's the greatest place, and I've travelled the world now, the greatest country, we've got some of the laziest people out here unfortunately that all they want to do is bloody whinge and complain, I think a lot of them are called

dole bludgers, there's genuine ones of course, but a lot of them, I'm with Johnny Howard, fuckin' oath,

28:30 we've got to get - there's too many that have been on disability while Labour was in power, and should never have been on disability, and you know, I've read a book, how, when the Labour government was in, they kowtowed to all those - to win votes, to win votes. It's a great book, whatever it was, I've got it in there, and they - all the ethnic associations, they gave them huge amounts of money to vote for them, and it

29:00 eventually backfired anyway on them, but you know, the world's greatest treasurer, he's only a poofter [homosexual]. You know he lives with a guy? Mr Keating? You know that? Yeah, he's a poofter. Always has been and always will be, ever since he said, "The best way to see Darwin is from 30,000-odd feet above the ground, on your way to France." He's not an Australian, he's a fuckwit.

29:30 He's an absolute fuckwit, yeah. With his bloody Italian suits and...

What did you learn personally yourself? What do you feel regarding...

I learnt that this place is the greatest place, and I like to help everyone out, I'd never do anything wrong by another person, unless they do something wrong by me, then they're in trouble, and yeah, I don't believe as I said earlier,

30:00 in religion as such, Christianity probably, but it's all been taken out of context, too many people in powerful positions that, you know, stupid Mr Hollingworth should have resigned as soon as it happened, you know? It's just crazy, trying to cover up. Why a lot of those guys that go into the priesthood, they can't do any bloody thing else, you know? They are weak people, and they - there's the genuine ones there, don't get me

30:30 wrong, but I have learnt that you live by the laws of the land, as they are today, not fuckin' 2000 years ago, Christianity has got to update itself, everything else has updated itself, you know, except Christianity, or religion, it won't, you know? It keeps - I believe in the Ten Commandments, most definitely, and I live by them, but that's you know...

What do you think from your service time was the

31:00 **best of memories?**

Mateship, without a doubt, yeah, and I haven't had that for bloody 25, 30 years, because I've been up here and put it all away, and you know, you get on with your life unfortunately, but I would have loved to have been back, going to those earlier reunions you know, and catching up with those guys earlier and you know, I probably wouldn't have been as sick as what I am now, and - but I'm rectifying all that now, thank Christ. It's just a part of recognising things

31:30 when they go wrong, you know? And why does it happen, you know? And I was just thinking that it was just old age. What was the question again?

What were the best memories?

The best memories? Coming back marching through Adelaide, yeah, apart from the protestors, and the big party we had after and all the women and - that was good, yeah. And yeah, I

32:00 reckon I'm a better person because of it. And I hate bloody people that rip people off and take all the short cuts and are lazy, you know?

What are the worst memories of the time?

I guess seeing those things happen, like this guy when Jungle needed, you know - to chicken out. A few other things, yeah, how people are false, a lot of people are false, they're full of shit,

32:30 big mouth, and when you get down to the bare bone, they're liars and they're bloody cheats, you know? These people that brag all the time, you know, "I've got this. I've got that." Oh fuck off, you know? It's all a front. You know, the genuine people are the ones that don't mouth off, and are there to help you or whatever when things get tough or - yeah, they're the genuine people.

All right that's

33:00 **it.**

Yeah? Good

Yes, all right, well done.

Jesus.

So thanks very much.

No worries.

INTERVIEW ENDS

