

# Australians at War Film Archive

## George Hodgson (Ian) - Transcript of interview

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### Tape 1

01:09 **In your own time, if you could give us that brief history of your life that we were discussing?**

Yes, well, I was born in 1931 in a country town called West Wyalong. I don't remember, but shortly after that my father got a property near Gilgandra. My early school days was correspondence, my mother was my teacher,

01:30 and at lunchtime I was in the paddocks and helping my Dad. The Second World War came, he joined the army, he was going to serve overseas. I went down to Sydney and finished my last part of primary school, and did my high-schooling in Sydney. In those days, if you weren't going to become

02:00 an engineer or a doctor, you finished at the intermediate certificate. I lived with my aunt and my Mum, both very good teachers. They made sure that my part of culture training was... opera and ballet and that sort of thing. I couldn't wait until I got old enough to say no. But however,

02:31 looking back with hindsight, it didn't hurt. I did numerous jobs because I always wanted to join the army. And when the Korean War started, I thought I might, but however... I could go but I had to have my parents' consent, that's both signatures. There is no way in the wide world my father would do that, because

03:00 he reckons I was too young. So I had to wait until I was old enough to join the regular army, but I was able to get in the CMF [Citizens' Military Force]. To which I did, and pretty good, too, because I got the basic grounding, I guess. Then in 1957, I joined the army...

03:30 went to Kapooka [near Wagga Wagga]. I was allocated to the corps of artillery. In those days, your corps training was about three months. About that time, the weapon we were trained on was a three point seven [inch] heavy air defence gun, which was used in the Battle of Britain, as I understand. And other roles.

04:01 We learnt all that. The field role and the air defence role. I think, at that time, they were stationed at George's Heights? I'm not sure now, but in that area. So we all got there after training and this warrant officer came out and said, "Don't get too comfortable, because these are out of date." And we all went back to the school and got converted to field artillery. In those days, of course, it was

04:30 twenty five pounders.

#### **And your service life?**

You're a young soldier, I guess. I did all my courses for a junior NCO [Non Commissioned Officer]. Originally stationed at Holsworthy [near Sydney]. And I got posted to the School of Artillery where

05:00 you worked with a warrant officer, learning the skills of instruction. I went back out to Holsworthy, and by this time I qualified for the subjects that are required for sergeant. And I was promoted to sergeant, out there, I think around 1961 or something like that. Or '62. Then Indonesia

05:31 and Malaysia were, as they called it 'Confrontation'. We went across to the Malaysia on the old aircraft carrier, the HMAS Sydney. I think it took us ten days or something to get there. And our role was to protect

06:00 the RAAF base at Butterworth. And also we had a ground role to fulfil as well. We did a couple of trips up to the border, with 4RAR [Royal Australian Regiment]. I might just go back to Holsworthy. The COs [Commanding Officers] we had were, in the main, Korean

06:30 veterans. And the artillery's second role is infantry. There were about three strong COs, I reckon. They would pick a number of people, I was one, "Go across to 1 Battalion and I'll see you in three months, and learn what they do." So I was a bombardier then, and I

- 07:00 was with the section commander and we exercised and did all the things they did. And then I got promoted to sergeant, the same sort of thing. We worked with the platoon and see... It was reasonably to a troop sergeant or a platoon sergeant. But it was a good grounding. So when we went to Malaya, I went
- 07:30 up to the border with one of the company's. And this was for Communist Terrorists, they were called. Indonesia in those days said... They were in Borneo anyway, and a lot of our soldiers had contact
- 08:00 with them there. I don't remember... There was typical rumours running around. "Indonesian paratroopers have landed here," and all this sort of thing. And I remember once we all had to pack up and race down south. God knows what we were going to do, no idea. Nobody seemed to know what was there.
- 08:30 The airfield, of course, was still well protected. I can't even remember the name of the place we went to, but the authorities there had never seen an enemy, let alone somebody dropping out of a plane. So we spent a couple of days there and went back home.
- 09:00 So it was... yeah. We used to exercise pretty hard. To hone your skills, and not only infantry skills but also your own. Always looking at better ways of defending the airstrip. And always the main planes [aircraft] and its equipment, all that sort of thing.
- 09:31 I've never heard of aircraft leaving Indonesia to attack some target in Malaysia. I never even heard... not even a rumour. But I don't know. The higher authorities, the intelligence gatherers might have known something. Then
- 10:00 we were relieved, then another group came in to do the same sort of job as we did. I just came back home then... I was posted to what they call a div [division] locating battery. They had radars that, and the capability of, when a mortar was fired from its tube,
- 10:30 they could follow the arc to where the mortar exploded. And from that information, which would be handed to the field artillery... The object of this was to destroy the mortar base. To do that would be not only the equipment but the crew as well. I wasn't there very long, and this
- 11:00 officer contacted me and told me that he was forming another battery at Woodside in South Australia. I'd never heard of it. "Woodside! Where in the hell is that?" So you're trying to relate that Holsworthy. Holsworthy is south west of Sydney, near Liverpool.
- 11:30 He said, "I need you to do..." I was in the command post, in all its mysterious ways. I'm glad I accepted because I enjoyed it. I can remember the young driver meeting me at the railway station in Adelaide in those days. So I put all my bags in the back of the vehicle and away we went. The old [Land] Rover, it used to go up Adelaide Hills. And I had to look
- 12:00 at him and say, "Where are you going? Where are you taking me?" "Out to Woodside, sir." We're up in the hills and gone, and all I could see was farms, and here was this big army camp. That was used, as I was told, in the last war. The 4RAR had been moved across from Sydney, so they had the largest part of the plot.
- 12:30 (BREAK)
- So you had some time at Woodside, and how long before you went to Vietnam?**
- Before then I went back to Malaya, with that new battery. They let me take my family this time.
- 13:01 So, like Edna and her bunch he knew very well. We still went about our army business, but the girls kind of had... I think we were there twenty months. So it was like a twenty month break away from the mundane housewife and all this. Still responsible for your kids, but
- 13:30 we had an amah. Her name was Madam Lin Poen. Chinese. And a boy and girl who were educated in one of the Christian schools there. But she was top class, really top class. But my two boys just thought the world of her. By the same token, she used to rule them as well.
- 14:02 One time I had to... you didn't even think, but you had two lots of uniforms. You had your barracks uniform and your bush gear. So she decided to starch my bush gear. And nothing would be more deadly than going into the bush in starched greens. I had to say, "No, these are good ones. These are for bush."
- 14:30 And she did, there was no things about it. So we went there, and Edna enjoyed herself. But it was good to get back in your own country and that sort of thing. And I got posted back to Woodside as the training line officer. I think I had been there about...
- 15:00 I'm not sure about the length of time, but not long. Six months or eight months, maybe. I then got posted to Darwin, and that was a kind of a duo. I was with an Army Reserve Unit as part of a command. But Darwin being Darwin, the commander would say, "I want you to do this task or that task."
- 15:30 So apart from your own professional role within your unit, you were expected to do other professional work, outside your unit. While I was up there I was told by my director... No, I'm incorrect there, it was

before I went to Darwin, my director told me that if I qualified in all the courses

- 16:01 I would go to Vietnam with the Australian Army Training Team [AATTV - Australian Army Training Team Vietnam]. So that involved psyche tests and an interview. Canungra, I think, was seven weeks. And I guess the staff up there, apart from your knowledge, they were looking to see whether you were going to be suitable
- 16:30 to work as an adviser with the Vietnamese ground forces. Then you went to the infantry centre and did what they called a weapons course. Apart from your own weapons, there were foreign weapons that you would have to have some knowledge of. And of course by the time you went to the infantry centre, you were a very, very fit person,
- 17:02 and you were expected to keep a pretty high grade of fitness. Because you never knew when you were going to be called. I think it was three or four months after the weapons course, there was a bit of paper saying, "You report there" and so forth. So I went across to Vietnam...
- 17:32 I think four other warrant officers. The team had suffered a rush of casualties. Unfortunately. We went into Saigon, met our commanding officer, who most of us knew by sight anyway. He gave us a briefing...
- 18:01 There was other staff there, other warrant officers. We spent a night in Saigon. The next day we flew up to Da Nang. Da Nang, there was... People referred to this place as Australia House, or Hooktali House. There was
- 18:30 an old sort of villa that over the years, the advisers had turned into a rest place. As a matter of fact our COs said, "When you get your rest days, you will fly to Da Nang and stay there and eat Australian food." And it was good because you picked up with some of your peers that you hadn't seen for quite a while. I had a friend who came into the team, he went to a delta and I never saw him, because I was up north and he was down there.
- 19:01 The ROs [Routine Orders] came out, so you saw the name so you knew that he was there. I think only the one night... Then we went up to Hue. At each of these places you got a briefing. And we were briefed in Hue by, I don't know whether he was a one or two star, American general.
- 19:33 And myself, and one other, we got driven up to Quang Tri Province. Then I went out to a fire base where the Regimental CP [Regimental Command Post] was. It was a big artillery base, plus infantry of course, so it was pretty big.
- 20:01 I met the American senior adviser, who was a colonel. The next day I picked up my battle order and hopped in a chopper and went out to my unit. They were on operations at that time. I'm not sure how long they had been there before I was, but I was out there about two weeks. Then came back.
- 20:30 I'm seemed to get along all right with the Vietnamese people.

**How long were you in Vietnam altogether, Ian?**

About eight months.

**21:08 Just to hop back and go back to your early childhood. What do you remember of your early years, growing up?**

- 21:30 I had a sister, who is not quite four years younger than me. My mother I think, because when it was time for me to start learning things, I don't know how old I was but I was very young, I knew my tables, forwards and backwards and sideways.
- 22:00 And I guess doing all those... Like when Mum and Dad got up, so did I. I'm talking about a five year old boy. I had tasks to do. Get the wood for Mum's fire, and the kindling... Round up the calves and the cows, as Dad used to do, to milk them. And as I got older, of course, I got more responsibilities. Dad had
- 22:30 about, I don't know, twenty or thirty Clydesdales [draught horses]. And also he had fairly modern tractor, which in harvest time, generally speaking, this, he would work his horses during the day, and he would have a fellow doing on a job on the tractor at night, to get the harvest in before any foul weather came, and this sort of thing.

**23:00 What was your crop, Ian?**

Wheat. He had sheep and wheat. So it was always... Like after correspondence... I'd do that from seven o'clock a.m. until about midday, a bit of lunch. Then my Dad would say, "Go up to this paddock. Take your dog. I need those sheep moved into another paddock." And that was in my tasks, to do that.

- 23:33 And also let him know of any lame or sick sheep. So it was all my life was revolved around the farm. We had a big homestead. The chaplains, in those days,

- 24:00 they were ministers, they used to come from Dubbo, I think. They would come and stay with us, and then go around the various properties and talk to the kids and the parents. Right out in the middle of the bush was this big

- 24:30 red hall. And at the back of the hall were two tennis courts, it might have been three. One of the padres was a fellow called Brother John. Nice man, I guess. He was the one that taught me the Lord's Prayer. I had to learn this Lord's Prayer, with a couple of clips in the ear from my mother if I messed it up.
- 25:02 And the other one I remember was Brother Fred, who was a scallywag. And you'd kind of warm to him, and so did the men. They would set up the hall, with an altar and you would be able to get in there and do a bit of Sunday school. And then the parents would come in and there
- 25:30 would be a service with communion. And the men, with their white trousers... This was in winter-time, they would play tennis. They would have the coat and tie. But they didn't play tennis when Brother John was there. But when Brother Fred was setting up and he would do all this... He would come in and say, "Righto, you mob.
- 26:00 Get your coats on! In here!" So that was the sort of fellow.

**So how did that impact on you when you as a youngster? Did that give you any kind of sense of faith? Or was it something you did because everybody did it and you had to go along?**

I think it did. It was the beginning of learning

- 26:30 about a faith that maybe you should have. Everybody seemed to have a different view about it, but I reckon, that was my beginning. Because my Mum used to... I mastered the Lord's Prayer and she said, "Right, now you've got to pray to your God, and the Lord's Prayer." So I would say this Lord's Prayer. Probably at a young age it was a bit hard to grasp.
- 27:01 But down the years I often think that... All those years ago, and it's still there. And of course, you learn more about... One thing I learned very early in life was do not argue with your Mum, reference things in the Bible. Because she might read something and say, "That's not right, Mum." I learned very early, don't get into a debate with her because she would be wrong. And she would,
- 27:30 with great patience, she would start explaining the meanings of things. My Dad was a churchgoer. But I think after the war, he didn't go as much as he used to, and eventually he didn't go at all. I never asked him any reason for it.
- 28:00 That was his business. He would sometimes say to me, "Do you still go to your church, lad?" And I'd say, "Oh, yes." Because I was in the army then and we had our own chaplains, and church parades. Even if you didn't want to go to church, you went to church, because if you didn't go to church, you were out on a pick and a shovel. But I don't think it hurt you, and it certainly didn't hurt me.
- 28:31 **So your home life revolved around your education and... It seemed to be very family orientated, in that you were all working around this farm and you all seemed to be together a lot of the time... What was your family structure like? Was this a loving family? How did each member interact with each other? Were you close to your sister?**
- Well, like brothers and sisters, I guess, we had our moments now and again.
- 29:00 My sister is still alive, and I love her dearly. She lives in Sydney. Obviously my parents are gone, there's only two of us left. The farm, yeah, that was the hub. That's where the money was earned.
- 29:30 My parents were strict. My mother would probably give you one or two around the ears. You'd say, "What was that for?" "Just in case I missed something you might do during the day." My Dad, he very rarely touched you. I suppose he did, but I can't remember. But if you did something that was worth
- 30:00 being disciplined over, he would have the knack of taking something from you for a week. You weren't allowed to hop on your horse or you weren't allowed to do A or B. It took him a year and it was over and done with, but he'd say, "There's no pushbike for you for a week. If I see you on it, you'll get it." And you didn't go anywhere near it, because
- 30:30 he was a big man, and we used to look up to Dad. I know of some fathers who would punch their kids, but all the time he was, "Come here, lad. You've been a naughty boy." And there would be some thing handed out to you,
- 31:04 whatever it might have been. But it certainly wasn't physical. Mum was the one... It never hurt. When I say it never hurt, if she was really angry with you, then you caught it around the backside. But she would give you a loving little tap around the ear, but she would be, "I'm pretty good."
- 31:30 If you did something that wasn't to her liking, it was always around the fleshy part of bum, there. So I couldn't grizzle about my parents. Even when I became a young high school boy, they were always saying, "Be careful of this," or, "Beware of that." And I do remember,
- 32:02 and you have to go back all those years ago, the sexual education of young boys and girls was heretic, I think. Nobody wanted to talk about the reproduction and so forth. And at my high school, I took this note home and it was from the headmaster saying, "There
- 32:30 is a film that is being shown in the picture theatre, and we would like all boys from thirteen or

something like that to come with their fathers, and there will be another one for mums and daughters." I can't remember all the film, but looking back on it I thought,

33:00 "Hmmm, what was that all about? I just have no idea." Now, going back to the farm you saw the animals doing what they were doing, and you never even took any notice of them. Anyway, we were walking home and I said to my father, "Okay Dad, can you explain..." whatever it was. My father went, "You better talk to your mother about that."

33:31 And you went to Mum, "Okay, son, I'll talk to your father and I'll get him to explain it to you." But that was the society of the day. Perhaps in another year I could probably tell them. Because kids growing up, he talked, we talked, and all of a sudden your education as far as

34:00 the reproduction of the human race was all explained by your own peers. I just remember that. I know my mother was very concerned, because I am getting on in years according to her, from the ripe of old age of twenty four, "and you're not married?" I said, "Well, I haven't met anybody." And my Aunt Laura, who was

34:33 God's gift to this world. She was a magic lady. And she would say, "Ian, don't leave it too late." And I'd say, "Yeah, well, if I meet someone." And I'm a soldier, by the way. And I remember my old recruiting sergeant saying to me, when I first went in to see him,

35:00 "Oh yeah, here's the form." And he's talking to me. "Are you married?" "Ahh, no." "That's all right. The army is a good life, and you will get married. And the beauty of the army is that you're away so much you never fight with your wife." I thought, "Hmm, I see." However, I think it was the end of 1957 or the beginning of '58 I met my fair wife, Edna.

35:31 And in 1959 we got married.

**So you did find someone?**

Yes, and I can still see the beaming smile on my mother's face. I just think it was their upbringing. You see today, people are probably in their 30s before they decide to

36:04 get married. Different society. I've got good friends and they've got partners, and yet they just don't want to be married. Yet they live together and they do all the things that a married couple would do, and both enjoy each other's company, but they don't want to go that one step.

36:31 Now, that's accepted today. But in my day? Oh, dear me, tut tut, the old biddies used to do.

**So in your correspondence education you were doing with your mother's assistance, was that written correspondence, were you posting...**

Yes.

**And what kind of work was that?**

37:00 I think the envelope had a month's work. I think. You had a syllabus to work from. So each day I had a set program. In the beginning there was arithmetic and how to curve your letters.

37:30 There was a little bit of a religious thing to it. Mum would do. There would be some extract from the Bible or something of that nature. But you'd do reading... And Mum would have to write and say, "He's reading is... bad," or whatever. But she was a great reader of books. That's why you have to be very careful... When you would get into some subject,

38:00 I would say to myself, "I wonder if she has read something about this? Of course she would have." So the reading, writing, arithmetic, and as you progressed, English and grammar, and as you progressed along, you got into geography and history. Unfortunately, all the history was English history.

38:30 It was important that you knew about Captain Cook and all that sort of thing. Oliver Cromwell and all this? It's pretty thrilling stuff, isn't it? But that was part of the thing. And it wasn't until you went to high school and you branched out into science... So really it was the basic requirements of education,

39:02 and it was important that I learnt, because eventually I would have to go Sydney anyway to do my high school, because... I suppose at Dubbo, I could have gone to, but they were talking about me staying with Aunt Nora, and going to a high school. And she agreed to that. But as the war came, I think I was the ripe old age of

39:31 eight... He must have discussed it with the whole family, my Dad joined up, but he had to do that. I couldn't understand, later on in years, how dare he do this, when he's a man of the land and all this, and he didn't have to do it. But he did. He really felt that he had to go. And of course, we never went back to the farm because...

40:00 Dad was not a well man, and it would have been too arduous for him to carry on and I was too young... Because the plan was when Dad decided to retire, probably retire on the property anyway, I would take over the conduct of the business.

Sorry, we have to stop there.

## Tape 2

00:55 **Were there any particular smells you remember from your childhood?**

Yeah, I guess so.

01:05 The fox. It has its own odour. We've got foxes here, and I know they've been on my front lawn, because I can smell them. And this going back to the farm. The smells of ploughed paddocks, dead animals of course.

01:32 Mum's cooking.

**What did she cook?**

She had a huge range, with log fuel [stove]. There was a big urn on there, very heavy, always bubbling away with water, because my Dad was a great tea drinker as well. It was one of my jobs if he was close,

02:00 I would get a break from correspondence, a billy of tea, a flour bag, and head [go to] for Dad. And he would have his cup of tea and a scone, or whatever it was, and I would take it all back. If you were in the cow yard, the cows have their own odour. The horses the same. Huge stable, with chaff in it.

02:31 So I can still smell those farm... because of the horses and the animals. Mum's cooking, which you could smell about thirty metres away. But she would cook... My Dad used to have a big breakfast, so that would be chops and sausages and eggs.

03:00 Mum was always a good one for veggies. No arguments, you ate the veggies. Dad would kill a sheep at least once a week, and I used to help him do this. He showed me how to skin a sheep and gut it and all that sort of thing. Hang it up there. If we went into town, like to Gilgandra, Mum would buy

03:31 beef and that sort of thing. So she was a great one for sweets. But because of Dad's life... he worked hard, damn hard, he was always a big eater. Whatever Mum cooked, we ate. So my sister and I had our likes

04:00 and dislikes of course. But if Mum went... I'd better finish it off. But when you became a teenager, and I'm talking fourteen or fifteen. And if you said to your Mum, "Mum, I don't want that." She would accept that. But not when you're a little tacker. Again, it didn't hurt us.

**I've got quite a good sense of your family**

04:30 **and the way that it worked, but things must have changed significantly when your dad went to war? Can you tell me about that period of time in your family?**

I'm just trying to phrase this properly. My Dad wasn't the flavour of the month, within the adult family. Me as a young fellow just thought...

05:04 what an adventure, really. The only film that I had been to, and we went into Gilgandra, and the theatre there was open, with all these big deck chairs, hundreds of them. And I think the film was The Charge of the Light Brigade.

05:31 And that's all that I really can remember. I knew that it was an army thing, and I was wide-eyed after seeing this film. Yeah, I missed my Dad. Mum was great. Being a child, you didn't realise what she was going through. All of us, all the boys and girls,

06:00 "My Dad's here or my Dad's there." There was a friend of mine, his father was in the navy and serving on the cruiser HMAS Australia. Another couple of fellows... We used to go the same school, with friends in the same street. Brian's father was a prisoner of war with the Japanese and worked on the Burma Railway.

06:36 Mum said to us, "Your Dad is coming home. He will be home..." whatever time it was. Then the Armistice was on. The shooting part of the [Second World] War stopped. There was no TV in those days, everything was radio or paper. And whatever happened in Japan...

07:04 Everybody was jumping up and down and saying, "Thank God" and all this sort of thing. And Brian was about a year older than me, I think. And I saw that he had been crying, and we all said, "What's the matter, mate?" And they had just received notification,

07:30 that his father had passed away, about two weeks before this damn thing had finished. As a thirteen year old boy, or whatever it was, I really felt for him. I thought, "You poor bugger." Knowing, I think, that I knew my Dad was coming home.

08:02 Dad used to write, "I'm here," doing whatever it was. And looking back in hindsight, because I went

through a very similar thing. When I was in Vietnam I used to carry a bit of a small writing pad, and I'd jot a few notes down if I got time. And at the end of an operation, I would pile all that in an envelope and away it would go.

- 08:33 I can't talk for my sister, because she was younger, but I can say that she was very excited when Dad was coming home. When he did he was in his uniform, and he looked pretty good, and my Aunt Nora said, "Your father doesn't look well, lad." He looked all right to me. But you started to pick up things...
- 09:01 But he... He didn't go back to the farm because he couldn't, but he got a job with the Department of Navy, I think it was, and stayed there for quite a long time. But we didn't have a home, we were renting. And I finished my high school in that place. Went to work, messed around. Then he retired.
- 09:36 And my mother said to me... I always used to ring up at least a couple of times a month. And I said, "How's Dad going?" And she said, "He's driving me mad. He's painted the house inside and out, the garden is perfect." And I said, "He's bored, isn't he?"
- 10:03 Eventually I got home and Mum said... Mum had a big smile on her face and I said to him, "What are you doing, Dad?" And he said, "I've got a little job." He had a... I forget the brand of the car, a Peugeot, I think.
- 10:30 And he used to go up to Gordon, on the North Shore line there, to have his car maintenance and so forth. Dad was very... everything had to be in the place. And they couldn't find his account. He knew the two owners, they were brothers. He said, "For two pounds, I'll come up here up and fix up your accounts and things." And this fellow looked at him and said, "You're on."
- 11:00 I looked at Dad and said, "Dad, you opened your big mouth." He said, "No, no, three days a week I go up there, half a day each." And then it got to three full days, then four full days, then five full days. And it was a big engineering place as well. And I got to know one of the brothers quite well. And said, "Old George goes down to that
- 11:30 workshop and there is mechanics going left, right and centre." Because they hadn't dotted the 'I' and crossed the 'T'. And that's what he demanded, he demanded all this sort of thing. And he said, "The best thing I'd ever done in my life. Flowing well, people are happy, the accounts are there."
- 12:00 Dad was, "That's black and that's white." And there was nothing in between at all. And he kept on doing that... Gradually, he went back again. From say four full days, then he was doing half a day, then his health didn't allow him. So I think he was well into his 70s, 78 or something like that when he gave it away completely.
- 12:30 But as he said, "I enjoyed it. I got out of your mother's hair." But like all families, you had your ups and downs. We all knew when there was going to be a couple of cross words between Mum and Dad. I used to look at my sister, and out we'd go.

**How had the war affected your father? What could you see that had changed?**

- 13:00 **Or how you could see he was a changed man?**
- That's a pretty hard one. You just knew that something was different. He never spoke... Very rarely did he speak about it. And I reckon... What I'm saying now is
- 13:33 way down the road, an understanding... That's what a soldier does, or [any] service person for that matter. And it does. I'm not a professional person... I think it just takes something from you. Now whether
- 14:00 it's the remains of this soldier, that you had when you were a kid... That's not there. I had an uncle by marriage, my Aunt Nora's husband. And I really didn't like him,
- 14:30 as a child. And I didn't really like him as a teenager, really. He was in the First World War and he served in Europe, and he was wounded a couple of times. The only thing he used to mention, he used to have a scar going from his shoulder and coming out the back. I said to him, "Uncle Orb, did that hurt?
- 15:00 and he'd say, "I really didn't know. It was just like somebody punched me." You've seen the movies of the First World War? Up over the trenches and away they'd go. And it wasn't until somebody said, "You've got blood on your tunic." then he said, "It started to bite." My Aunt Nora had four children, and three were premature and
- 15:30 they didn't survive. And my first cousin, who I don't remember, Anne, she was about three years older than me, she died of tetanus. And it really affected me. And down the track, the family history started to... My Mum was saying, "He was a mongrel. The way he treated Nora." But later on...
- 16:04 Like he wouldn't come to our wedding. My Aunt did, of course. And my wife and I, we decided that we would bank one of our pay, and live on the next one, so that we could buy a block of land and build a house, that was the go, then start a family. And Philip was born, and we
- 16:30 drove up to Wahroonga. Young Phil was in Edna's arms, and I was watching him and his eyes really lit

up, and he said to my wife, "Can I nurse him?" And I thought, "Gee, poor man, going through all that horror, then losing his children, and

17:00 having no-one to talk to. No-one to understand." Of course, in those days, unlike today... you can get counselling. But he had to do all that. I know he looked forward to us going up there, and the first thing he did was nurse that little boy, yeah. So,

17:30 as I got more experienced in the army, I thought, "You poor bugger. You had to be yourself, no-one to talk to, to unload all the things that must have been going around in your body or your mind." I don't so in those days that there was no-one that he couldn't have gone to, but I do know...

18:00 that the facilities then, and now, are totally different. So there is more support now for the service person, as against those First World War fellows. And think that kind of flows into the Second World War as well. And I guess even Korea. Korea started not long after the end of the war, but I...

18:30 really don't know whether the Korean soldiers, probably, had a bit of a better deal, maybe, than the First World War fellows, but them as people, I don't think they had a great deal going for them, in as far as... I guess they were looked after physically,

19:00 but I often wonder about the mind. I think they were left to their own devices. Now, after the First World War and the losing babies, he became an atheist. He wouldn't even walk into a church, let alone worship. Where my Aunt, who was probably affected more...

19:32 like losing her children, still went to church, still had the faith, but no my... And my Dad did the same. But I don't know. He just stopped going to church. So obviously... you'd have to talk to an expert, I reckon, because I don't know.

#### **In this period of time that your dad has come**

20:00 **back and whether or not you could tell how severe the damage is, or what has really traumatised him at that point, you know something is a bit different. But you were still yourself, to join up for Korea. Was there still some of that romance of the films that you had seen, for a young lad?**

Oh yeah... I don't know whether there was any romance in it... It was this thing, I had it when I was in high school...

20:30 that I wanted to be a soldier. I hadn't, at that stage, seen many movies. But in the movies there were updates before the real movie came...

#### **Like a newsreel?**

Yes.

21:03 It went for about a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes. And you would see the aircraft flying off to go and bomb Germany, or a ship sailing to go and do whatever, or troop ships. And it used to bring the people up to date on the two theatres of war. But it's very hard to...

21:33 My Dad was alive when I went to Vietnam. He used to write to me regularly, and Mum would put a little note in. When I went to Vietnam, my wife was... I was in Darwin.

22:00 And because she was a New Zealander, she stayed there, in the barracks, which was good for her. The army people up there were absolutely superb. And I'm talking now from the Northern Territory commander down to the carpenter. She wanted for nothing. She was protected, I guess. Looked after.

22:30 However, I came home and my posting was regimental instructor here at Keswick Barracks, in the old G Branch days. It doesn't happen now, because it all comes under Training Command now. And we stayed with Mum and Dad, but we were flying to New Zealand.

23:00 And my Dad said, "Feel like a stroll down to the pub?" And I said, "Yeah, that will do." He brought me a beer and I brought him a beer. Halfway through that he said, "What was it like, lad?" And I said, "I don't think it was any different to what you went through." "Hmmm." And that was the end of the conversation.

23:32 He never asked me any more and I didn't... If he wanted to talk about it, he would have, and I'm the same way. He just didn't want to talk about it. And I guess, there are some things I would never... I haven't even discussed it with my wife. And

24:00 I remember when I came home, the eldest boy was seven or eight, and here's the romance because, young Phil said, "Are you going to tell me about the war, Dad?" And I remember looking down at him and saying, "When you turn eighteen, and you want to know about the war in Vietnam, you come and ask me." And he never has.

24:41 He might say, "What was it like in the helicopter?" But he would never ask you, and he certainly hasn't, "What's it really do to you?" And I'm grateful for that...

- 25:01 It can always be in your mind, I guess, and you've got to try and discipline yourself to forget. I think the biggest help was my wife. She'll say, "You're going off the track a little bit there, old fella.," "Oh, thank you." And I might not talk to her for a couple of hours, and she understands that. And I'm fortunate I've got a good doctor.
- 25:33 And my son... I didn't know about this until after, and my daughter-in-law, went to the movies to see Saving Private Ryan. He didn't mention it to me, he said to his mother...
- 26:00 because apparently... I don't watch war movies at all, apparently it is quiet realistic and as much as you can in the movies, and they commented on the horror. There's one thing you can't do in a movie, and that's smell it. Yeah, so...
- 26:30 Phil and Craig never got personal. I think that's a better word, they never got really personal with it all. And I'm grateful for that.

**But we can see how through the different generations, how war has affected your family in different ways, in different times, and the way that father and son have dealt with those things as they've come up has changed as well.**

- 27:00 Yeah, I guess so. You've got to deal with the things as the best you can, I guess. My Dad couldn't really grasp this. Wars are hard. But he used to talk about this.
- 27:30 "Oh, dog biscuits and bully beef." When I first joined the army, they still had bully beef and dog biscuits. You'd throw the biscuit on a tarred road and it wouldn't break. So you used to melt them down with hot water and make porridge of it. But down the track, we got issued with one day ration packs, and this is well written, eventually the
- 28:00 Australian one-day ration pack was one of the best in the world, with all its nutrients and all this sort of thing. There were some things in there... I don't think so. But Dad did his thing. And one thing I remember, there was no way in the wide world would... they were a fish in a can in tomato sauce. And when the bully
- 28:30 beef used to run out they would serve this stuff. But he was quite amazed at the difference of the food style that I had and what he had. In Malaya, out in the bush, we had our ration pack. And of course when you were living at home you
- 29:00 you ate what you wanted. In Vietnam, and I'm talking now when you are out in the field... I'm only speaking of myself, I used to eat with the Vietnamese commander. What he ate, I ate. And when you finished the operation and you'd go back and I would spend the night with a bloke called
- 29:31 Snow Lawrence, who was a medical adviser, and I would stay in the MACV [Military Assistance Command Vietnam] compound, and the next day you were on a plane and down to Da Nang, for two days, three days, whatever time you were given, and there the food was... A lot of the food was from Australia, and so was the booze.
- 30:00 My Dad would say, "If you were lucky, a beer ration would come." One bottle per man per whatever time, it might have been six months. And I'd say, "No, we didn't have any worries about the booze." And he'd smile and say, "Hmm, not as tough as we were." This sort of thing.
- 30:32 I think he was quite amazed, and he didn't grizzle about it, because he thought that was one thing that had to be fixed up. From '39 to '45, they were pretty hard years, because they were not long after the Depression, which never dawn on me, the hardships that my Mum and Dad were going through, in those times. But we'd never want for anything.
- 31:01 We didn't get the things... Kids today, my grandkids, they've got enough stuff to supply Myers. Where we had small things that used to amuse you. But the things was a horse,
- 31:30 and a dog. My sister had her dolls and all that sort of thing. And as you grew up you got to... My Dad, and my Mum, were great ones for giving you books. In the inscription would be, whatever. And my Mum would say, "Just because you've left school, you shouldn't stop learning."
- 32:00 And her doing that to me a young person, when I joined the army and we started to study for courses and that, I never had a great big problem of reading. Even though I was reading pretty old stuff sometimes, but I never had a difficulty with it. The problem or difficulty I had was probably trying to retain it. So I reckon that goes back to my parents, as well.
- 32:32 **Now your dad hadn't been popular in the family for joining up and going off, which he felt he had to do. Yet when you wanted to go to Korea, he was not willing to sign those papers. Why not?**
- He said to me, "You are too young." And I think I was the ripe old age of 17.
- 33:00 Now we've all heard stories of people going away to the First World War or Second World War... I know one fellow who had his 16th birthday in Tobruk. But my Dad was well into his 30s when he went away to the war. And he just wouldn't. He said, "You're too young, you wouldn't come back." Full stop. I kind of

got around Mum a bit, but she said,

33:30 "No, if your father signs, I will. If he doesn't sign, I won't." And that's why I joined, in those days, the Citizens' Military Force.

**Can you tell me about joining up in the CMF? How that process went?**

Yeah, a few miles from us was a depot and I walked down there and I said, "What are the chances of me

34:02 joining the unit?" And, I forget who it was now, said, "There's a very good, if you're fit," and all this sort of thing. I went and had a medical, and there wasn't much else. But the senior people in this CMF were all ex-soldiers, officers and warrant officers and sergeants, who had all been to the war.

34:30 And their knowledge was superb. And again, these fellows had two and three rows of ribbons, never spoke too much about it all. They might give you an example, but mainly it was around leadership,

35:00 winning the trust of your soldiers, all this sort of thing. As a matter of fact, there was a sergeant in there, no he wasn't he was a warrant officer... He served his time in Tobruk, and later on in the islands, but he was telling us, I think he was a sergeant in Tobruk, that everybody would go and do twenty four hours, as he used to say, "on the wire."

35:30 So that would be a machine gun emplacement and whatever else. All you had was a water bottle, that was to wash, cook, drink, all that. So obviously a water discipline came into it. And you'd be pretty damn scruffy when you came back into the rear. He was like a sergeant. I don't know

36:00 whether they showed their rank in those days. I suppose they did, I don't know. But he was pulled up by this officer, and he was dressed down because he was a scruff. No shave, no this, no nothing. And here were us this kids. And the officer said that he was going to lay charges against him. So he said, "I went to see my CSM [Company Sergeant Major]."

36:33 He said, "Well, let him make a fool of himself." So this sergeant was marched in before the company commander, and the charge was read, whatever it was, and Lawrie said the major looked up at my CSM and said, "March him out." So they went out. And the CSM stayed out

37:01 and the door was closed, but they could still hear the voice of this major giving this young lieutenant an absolute dressing down. And said, "Now, you go out and spend twenty four hours on the wire. And you will report to me when you come back here in twenty four hours' time. I want to see how much of a scruff you are." And he was talking about leadership

37:30 and caring for people. I can imagine it would not be a nice place to be. But those sort of things they'd speak of, so you'd learnt. And I stayed, I think it was eight years. And four of those was what they called full-time. And this fellow who was my adjutant in those days, said, "Look, it's obvious you like the army,

38:00 why don't you become a regular soldier?" I looked at him and said, "Yes you will. Go and join the damn army." And I did. And I don't have any regrets of it. There are moments that you would like to take out of your life, but... this is my view, you either like the army or you don't.

38:30 And if you like it, and I did... I learnt a lot of skills on all sorts of subjects. And the rapport that you got with your peers, and the loyalty that came out of that. I will just stop there because when I retired from the army, I got a job in civvy street [civilian life], and I met some very nice people.

39:04 And I'm still looking for this loyalty... I can't get around it. The loyalty that we used to show to each other. And it doesn't seem to be out there in that big wide world, at all. People cared.

**Was there a love for the other men**

39:30 **that you were working with? Would you describe it as a kind of a love?**

I don't know about love. I think affection.

**Putting their needs right up there as important to you, and being willing to do a lot for them?**

Oh, God yeah. I suppose it started

40:00 in Greek days. But like, you and I are going on operations, and the other blokes have just come in and they're cleaning up and that. You say, "See you later." "Now you fellows take care now." And it was always said. And when you came back it was, "Good to see you. How are you?" But you could feel it. There was no, "See yah."

40:30 There was none of that. It wasn't what we do here. If somebody comes, "Yeah, see you later." It wasn't there. It was, "You take care." And I know, and they do... I think this is probably the essence of it, I was out on operation, and we twenty five sets,

41:00 and I had a Vietnamese corporal who used to carry my radio, some identification panels... And I used to look to after him. However, I couldn't, and nor could the Vietnamese, talk to anyone. Nobody would talk.

Now I didn't think we were out of range of the radio, and I used to always carry a bit of signal cable. And fortunately,

41:32 we weren't desperate for any assistance, but I kept on and on... and it sounded like he was on the moon. And he was another adviser, I can't remember now where he was, but he just sounded so far away, and he heard me, and his first words were, "Are you okay?"

## Tape 3

00:45 **Just staying on your dad's service a little bit longer, when did he leave to go to the war, and how long was he in the war and where did he serve?**

It had to be

01:03 when Japan entered the war. And hindsight is very valuable, I guess, and he said, "I'm an going to do my bit, because there's getting too close." He joined the army and he was part of the H Division, that went to Singapore. And as you might note in history

01:30 they were all overrun. But my Dad, as I understand it, he became quiet ill. And the Japanese were... in Thailand or on the border, I don't know. So all the sick were evacuated

02:00 and as I understand, they were all off-loaded in Darwin, where he was nursed and brought back to a reasonable health. And he stayed in Darwin, he was there when the first air-raid happened and all this sort of thing. I don't really know what unit he belonged to

02:30 up there. And if you read the history of Darwin in those days, it was such a mess. But I think he went to the Tablelands in question, and there joined a unit, I don't know. But he then served up through some of the islands. Bougainville comes to mind. And he was away for about

03:02 say, three years, roughly. So '42, end of '42, I'd reckon he joined the army. Because I can remember on the farm and the Germans had entered... Britain and Germany. And I remember my Dad, drawing with a fork,

03:32 and I think it was another farmer, and they were talking about Belgium. And my Dad said, "If Belgium folds, then the Germans will go through the rest of Europe." And they did. At that time there was no mention of him joining the army, and it wasn't until the Japanese entered the war. And the disaster of

04:00 of Pearl Harbour, as you know, they just over-ran everything they went near.

**He had a lucky break getting out of Singapore before the rest of the Eight Division was captured...**

He still kept in touch with some of his close friends... for a while. And my Mum

04:30 had passed away, and my Dad... My sister had a place at French's Forest. And out the back of this place was like a little flat. And my Dad used to stay there with them. Because I said, "You can't be by yourself. So you either live with your daughter, or your son." And it was a good move because he

05:00 had his own quiet time, and my sister used to look after his meals. A nurse used to come and see him a couple of times a week. We couldn't get him out of the house. And after a fair bit, my sister says... and there's a beautiful Returned service thing... I think it was named after Lady...

05:30 Lady something... in the Northern Beaches. Beautiful. And the Department of Veteran's Affairs, through them, the vehicle would come and pick him up, but he didn't want to go. However, I think his arm was twisted by all those people around him, and he went down

06:00 and my sister went with him, and this lady got ahold of Dad, and... this is the story. He walked in... and my Dad was a great card player. He taught me how to play crib and rummy, all those sort of things. And he also taught me how to play poker and...

06:32 pontoon and all that sort of thing. And one of the big lessons, he said, "There is no need to cheat in cards." And he said, "In my day, in the army, if you got caught cheating in cards, you were really given one in the ear. Really quickly." However, my Dad walked in with his sister and this other lady, and he's

07:00 looking around and he thought, "Oh, a card game going on over there." And this old fellow looked around and... I hope my language is going to be all right, but it is a term of endearment anyway... , "Balley, you old bastard!" And he is one of the ex- POWs [prisoners of war] that still recognised Dad. My sister said, "Well, I had to get out." And the other two fellows he knew, who were able to get out...

07:31 survive the POW system... He'd go down there three days a week, gets down there for morning tea, then lunch, afternoon tea, and the vehicle would bring him home. And my sister was saying, "And the four of them would be playing cards all the time. And talking." It did him a world of good. He had lost

his wife.

08:01 They were married fifty five or fifty six years or something, and all of a sudden he's got three old blokes, that he hadn't seen...

**When did your dad pass away?**

About ten years ago. He was eighty nine. Mum was six months older than Dad, and sort of a year after that, he died in the old Vet's home at Turramurra.

08:33 He'd had a fall, and had broken his shoulder. My sister rang and I said, "Okay, do you think I should come across?" She said, "Oh, no, they reckon he's all right. It might be better when he comes home." Anyway, he went to sleep one night and didn't wake up. Which was a blessing for him, I think. He didn't have...

09:00 The quality of the surroundings was there, but I think losing his wife after all those years, and also his own health. My sister was saying he was becoming cantankerous with the nurse, who would come in and say, "Have you had a shower this morning?" "No, I'm not going to have one." Now this man, even on the farm, would bathe every day.

09:30 We didn't have showers in those days, it was a bath. And in the city... depending what he did, it would not be uncommon for him to have a shower in the morning, a shower in the night...

**Getting back to your service career, you started off in the CMF and you joined the regular army, what sort of soldier were you when you came in and decided to become a regular army?**

Oh, I suppose an average sort of digger, I guess.

10:03 I had a bit of knowledge. People say, "A little bit of knowledge is dangerous." But you know, I could 'shun' and 'un-shun' ['attention,' "stand at ease'], I knew how to salute and I knew how to fire a .303 rifle. I could do a bit of communications. So when I went to Kapooka, somebody said,

10:31 "We can take you out of your platoon and put you in a platoon that is just about to march out, because of your experience in the CMF." In those days, I think it was fourteen weeks or whatever it was, and you went from cover to cover of the drill book, and you learnt field craft and you were lectured on all the corps in the army. I can't remember now whether it was my platoon sergeant or my platoon commander

11:00 but they said, "We can put you up there." And I said, "I would like to stay with the fellows I'm with." I met a few good blokes. As a matter of fact, one lives in Canberra, he was my best man. Another fellow lives up near Noosa, he was groomsman. So I'm glad I did that, because with great respect to the CMF,

11:32 but it was like the icing on the cake, as a recruit.

**What year was that that you became regular army?**

'57, 1957. As a matter of fact, I did all the paperwork and everything a couple of weeks before Christmas, in 1956, and this old fellow said, "Come and see us after the New Year, and we can get this all squared away." Which they did.

12:03 And it kind of gave you a good grounding, and a lot of our instructions, when I was going through Kapooka, were ex-Korean veterans. I think they just about all were.

12:31 I remember, Bill Laws? He was one of our field corporals, and of course those blokes used to teach weapons and all those things.

**What did they tell of the Korean War?**

Not a great deal. Things I remember them saying was it was quite hard terrain, bitterly cold in the winter.

13:00 And dirty and hot in the summer. I probably learnt more about Korea from my good friend Tom Waters, because he was a section commander over there. He belongs to the... I know he's

13:30 a member of the 3RAR Association, but he gets the magazines, then he hands them over to me. One was this photograph, this longish photograph, and Tom said, "On the top of the ridge here, then down through the valleys." And I thought, "God, look at it." And he said, "Yeah, there were better places to be." And I think that's about the end of it, I reckon.

14:04 **When you were in the army, at that stage, in the late '50s, who did you think that you may be going to fight?**

Yeah, a lot of our forces, and I'm only talking army now... I know the air force were there, and the navy and so forth, and our troops used to get on a cruise sort of liner, with their families,

14:30 and go to Malaya. And this was when the Emergency, where the Chinese Terrorists, as they used to call them... And apparently the forces were most concerned because they didn't want Malaya, as I

- understand, to become Communist. And you'd hear people speaking of a domino effect,
- 15:00 and all this sort of thing. And I remember being on... I think I was at North Head. But anyway, our boss said, "We will all go down to this point and bid them farewell." And this ship went out with mums and kids and the shoulders. So that's where we thought that we would go,
- 15:30 when our term came up. It wasn't until long after that before we left. Although we trained for it. I was a member of the... what the hell did they call that.
- 16:00 Anyway, it was a ready force to be deployed wherever there was going to be a need. And you had two kits. You had your normal mundane day, but in barracks, all you had to do was pick up your pack, and your ammunition and weapon, or whatever you were going to do, and hop on a plane.
- 16:31 Because people used to come round, and I would have to go around, "One toothbrush," and if you didn't have a damn toothbrush in there... All the things that you were going to require. From the top of your head to the soles of your feet, the only things that you didn't have were like your weapons, because they had to be secured and so forth, but
- 17:00 everything else was there. And every week we would have to around and check the soldiers, and sergeants would check sergeants, and officers would check officers, so it was everybody, in that force, everybody had to be the same. If the officer didn't have one, I don't know what the CO would have done anyway,
- 17:30 but I know all the diggers, general NCOs, and I know damn well the sergeants, there was never a problem.

**What was your rank?**

I was a two-striper then, a bombardier, and I had my own crew of blokes, that I was responsible to my sergeant for.

- 18:01 And then later on, of course, in that unit, I got promoted to sergeant. As a matter of fact, I took his place. Yeah, he was promoted to warrant officer. So I did... the bombardiers would go down and check all these little groups and report back to me and say, "Oh, Charlie Brown didn't have his spare pair of boots," or whatever it was he had to have,
- 18:32 "You better bring him to me, and I'll talk to him."

**What state of readiness were you in? On how much notice or stand-by to go, at that stage?**

I'm not sure now. It was like... a few days. Because

- 19:01 apart from us, other things had to happen as well. Ammunition and all that sort of thing. It was all there. I can't be accurate with that. I've got a memory like three days or four days, something like that.
- 19:35 Later on, the decision was made to send our unit to Malaya. Now in seven days, we were on the HMAS Sydney, sailing up the coast of Australia. And a lot of that was down to because we were ready.
- 20:00 It was a medical of medical, dental, all these inoculations. Generally, you were up, but we had to go and have... but you know the normal, tetanus, smallpox,
- 20:30 you were always at a high level. You were going to this country, so you A and B. So you would go to the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] and they would jab you in both arms and send you off.

**Were you also working with CMF, or National Servicemen, at that time?**

No, not at that time. I'm incorrect there...

- 21:01 A CMF unit camped in our lines at Holsworthy, and I know I was a bombardier and I did a lot of lecturing on communications, radio and all that sort of stuff. That was then about the only time that I had
- 21:30 any dealings with the CMF after I had left. They weren't the only unit, there was a twenty five pounder artillery unit went out there. The people that I'm talking about were coastal gunners. I think that's where they came from.

**What did you know of the situation in Vietnam**

- 22:01 **in the mid-50s to late "50s?**

A lot of this is by reading...

**I'm thinking more of at the time. What did you know of Dien Bien Phu?**

We had a CO that, and I'm talking

- 22:30 among the NCO group, he used to say... I can't remember now. There used to be these magazines, and one of them was about the French. And the battles they were having in Vietnam, and it finished up with Dien Bien Phu. Plus a lot about the prisoners being repatriated back to France and that.
- 23:03 The only other thing I knew about Vietnam was that the Japanese had overrun it. Like they had done all through that area. But that was about my limit. And I remember... say '60 or '61, there was concern about
- 23:30 the whole of Vietnam becoming Communist. And from that, into Cambodia, into Thailand... So there is this circle coming again. In that time, it was an event that was happening, but it didn't seem to be an important thing. And then all of a sudden, my sergeant major,
- 24:01 he said, "Well, I'm off, fellows. I'm going to do this and this, and I'm going to Vietnam." And I thought, "I see." So I spoke to him and he said, "We are going across as... , " And this would be where the Australian Army Training Team [AATTV] started, in 1962. And they were led by
- 24:33 an officer... There was say, 40 or 50 of them, and they went to teach.

**That was your first inkling that you had of Australia's involvement in Vietnam?**

- Yeah. It was sergeant major. And then of course, that pricked your interest up. And then you found your
- 25:00 friends were on their way. And the unit, even in those days, was in high regard. And these very schooled Australian soldiers were doing their best to teach the art of jungle warfare
- 25:30 to lots of Vietnamese people, and also other matters, of course. So that really got your attention, and you were saying, "I wouldn't mind going to that unit, as against going over with that unit." Then you started reading more, then you started asking more questions, about the country and I was
- 26:00 able to get a book out of the army library. It was on Vietnam, and their cultures and their customs, their way of life and how... As we all know... they say, "Well, the Asian fellow, he loses face." Well, none of us like to lose face, but it was horrific for them, more than you and I.
- 26:30 My directorate said, "Have you passed all your courses, and if they accept you, you will go across to Vietnam."

**In the early '60s, you were headed over to Malaya, though?**

Yeah.

**But at that time, what other world events do you recall, that shook you, or shook things for you, at that time?**

- 27:00 One of my... And we were on exercise, in Australia. And somebody said, "Oh, somebody's shot President Kennedy." And I thought, "What!" So that was a pretty big event.

**What do you recall of hearing that news and what you were doing?**

Oh, we were out in the bush,

- 27:30 of course. I think then I would have been what they called a technical assistant... don't know if I can remember. Where you worked in the command post, and did all the sums. You did logarithms. Today, of course, it's all computerise
- 28:00 and you can just go and press the button and you've got the answer. In this days you had to work on an Arty [Artillery] Board and do this and do this, so that the correct information could go on the sight of the gun, under the supervision of a command post officer. And that's what I would have been doing in the year of President Kennedy being assassinated, plus all the other stuff. They rushed him to hospital and the doctors couldn't save him.
- 28:30 Then there were photographs in the papers of his distraught wife and all that sort of thing. Yeah, I suppose the other event was the first war between Israel and its neighbours. They absolutely blitzed... Well, it was suppose to last whatever number of days, and it was finished in hours, virtually.
- 29:00 I think it was all over in seven days...

**What about the Cuban Missile Crisis? What did you make of the possibility of becoming involved in a nuclear war, at that time?**

Well, our authorities seemed to realise they could, because we were doing some training. Mainly protective sorts of things. We learned about the atomic blast, and

- 29:30 what do you call them, the... I forget now. Running the Geiger counter over, if you were affected by radiation, it would make this sort of sound. And also some... what do you call it? There was an injection.
- 30:00 But you could inject yourself anyway. I can't remember the name of it. I just hope I haven't got that crossed with something else, I don't think so. But that was kind of small. The news that we were getting

about Russia and America, they were really eye-balling each other off.

30:30 I met a pilot who happened to be over in that area, on exchange, with the American air force [USAF] in that part of the land, and he was saying that they were all hyped up, they were ready. But he said, "The thing that sticks in my mind as you looked out to sea and there was nothing, when you went to bed. And when you got up and the daylight was there,"

31:00 he said, "it was just ship after ship after ship. Of all types. aircraft carriers, cruisers, the whole thing." And he said, "It was amazing to see this Task Force." And you close your eyes and you try to envisage this. You go to bed and there's nothing, get up in the morning and here it is. Fortunately I think for us,

31:32 common-sense was achieved, I guess. If that had turned into a nuclear thing, we wouldn't be doing what we're doing now. Thank God.

**Can you tell us about leading up to your departure to Malaya, and heading up there...**

For the first time? It was quick. Nobody knew that we were going.

32:00 Not even our boss. He was summoned, and then of course a rumour started. "Maybe, we'll get a break." He was away for a couple of hours, and straightaway we had a unit parade. There he was on the dais and he told us we were off to Malaya, and we had seven days to be on board the HMAS Sydney, and away we were going.

32:31 So it was full on. Even though everything was packed and everything, it had to be checked and checked. Everybody had to go to the RAP and make sure you were up to date with all this stuff. It was all this sort of business. And it was go, go, go, go.

33:00 We never had a date, except this seven days. And some fellows were going. "We'll probably go on the fifth day, or it will probably be ten days." And all this sort of thing, and moneys were exchanging hands. It was so secret, that everybody knew about it.

33:30 It was a closed camp. Say you went in this morning, and you didn't leave. You said goodbye to your wife and family...

**Did you have any kids at that stage?**

Yeah, Philip, my eldest boy. He was only a baby. So I kissed them both and said, "Ta ta." I stayed there that night, then there was a briefing by the boss

34:00 for NCOs, then we went back and briefed our soldiers and so forth, that we would depart... I think it was like one o'clock or something the next day, p.m. And we drove from Holsworthy right down to Woolloomooloo, and there's people everywhere going clap, clap. Then we had to load, with the navy's help, all of our trucks and guns and stores.

34:31 Plus our soldiers. And I'm not sure of the time, but it would be around midnight, and you felt movement in the carrier. We were up on the flight deck, and there was this tug giving the old girl a bit of a shove out of the way. And we sailed out of the heads and went up to

35:01 Manus Island, I think. The mail was delivered, or whatever. Sailed around the bottom of the Philippines. You could see the coastline, in the distance, off Mandora [Island]? Yeah. Then across to Borneo where we off-loaded some engineers. We went down into Singapore...

35:33 And the captain, and I'm talking about the four ring fellow, on the intercom said, "There will be no shore leave until everything is unloaded. And of course we were carrying a huge amount. The barges used to come along... Anyway, we got to know the sailors,

36:01 and they were bringing up these, I think they were mortars. I said to this fellow, "If I went and got my fellows, would we be in the road if we gave you a hand?" He said, "I'd love you." So we all hooked in and did what we could. And by... say, tea-time, maybe, it had all been off-loaded and had gone

36:30 away to wherever, and over the thingo [public address system] said, I don't know the navy expression, we're all able to go ashore. And for me and a lot of us, it was our first time into an Asian country, and here's this different world. So we went to

37:00 you've read books about Bugis Street? And the markets and whatever else is there, and there was four of us, and we were all married except for this fellow over here, who has since died, and here was this amazing place. Anything you wanted to eat you could, I reckon. So we ate there, and then the next stop

37:30 was Raffles [Raffles Hotel Singapore]. You had to go and see Raffles. Because the Second World War fellows who were in Singapore, the books that you read about the English gentry and their ladies and all this sort of thing, and it was, it was superb. This was 1964.

38:01 And we were in our uniforms, which we had to be. Very expensive drink, but through some of our native friends we found the Union Jack. And that was another pub, very nice, very good. The only trouble at that place was you could only get a pint of beer, at a time.

- 38:31 And I'm looking for our schooner, but no, damn pints. And we had a great time. We had to be back on board by midnight, I think it was. So the half-full soldiers and the half-full native blokes staggered back on board. We checked back in on board. And then the next day, some of us left the Sydney and travelled by train,
- 39:00 from Singapore to... Ipo , I thought, but I'm not sure. Then the Sydney sailed up to Penang, where all our stores were off-loaded and taken to Butterworth. The train trip was interesting. We had our own carriage,
- 39:30 but me being a bit inquisitive, walked through one and into another one, and of course, the locals were in there. And some of them had their little fires going, cooking. "Oh God, the train's going to burn down." And there were live animals, like WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and ducks. So it was an education. Then working with Malays,
- 40:00 and also the English...You used to meet the occasional English fellow, an officer he might have been, but here's a whole group of them. I think, looking back, they used to be... Our sense of humour, I know is a bit different to other nations.
- 40:31 But that was the way we were brought up, and I say this without any disrespect to any other service, particularly in the army. My wife still says to me, even today, "What are you doing?" Because I've said something or done something. And even after all these years, she's, "Damn queer Australians." Because she's a damn Kiwi. But, I've worked
- 41:00 with Kiwis, they were good people. Some were Maoris. Good friends, particularly if you got in a scrap, because the Maoris, they were big boys, but they were good blokes.

**We'll just change the tape.**

## Tape 4

- 00:41 **You mentioned the Maoris helping you out in a scrap in Penang? You want to tell us that story?**
- I even remember the date of this, it was the 8th of December. Three or four of my
- 01:00 close friends, "Come on, mate, we'll go in and have a meal and a few drinks."
- Where did you go into?**
- I can't remember where we ate, it would have been nice anyway. But there were a couple of bars that were quite popular and the Boston Bar was one of them. This was in Penang itself, I think it was in George Street. So there was about six of us. And one of
- 01:30 my friends, a fellow called Philip Prosser [later Phil Prosser, President of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Veterans' Association]. He was part-Aboriginal, and I use that word, and he was a very well-educated man, and a damn good friend. As a matter of fact, he used to relate some
- 02:00 of the things, that when he was a small boy, his grandmother took him away. And she told his parents that she was going to look after, and she was going to educate him. Which she did. So Phil was obviously one of us. And there is a little bit of bad feeling between us and an English unit,
- 02:30 and I don't want to mention their name. Anyway, the word got out that this bar and this bar belonged to them and nobody else was welcome. And I honestly forgot all about it. And then somebody reminded me, and every time you heard people coming up the stairs... Anyhow, we were having a great old time, juke boxes going, having a few beers, telling a few yard, then klunk, klunk, klunk.
- 03:01 You could look across the rail as their heads came up the stairs, there was about six Maoris and a couple of white Kiwis. And we had done some exercises, and also played each other in rugby union and all this sort of thing. They looked across and this Maori said, "Hey cob, how you going?" And they joined us. Then somebody said, "Oh, it's Ian's birthday."
- 03:31 Oh God. A line of drinks. And then some fool said, "Ian's wife is a New Zealander." However, I don't know how long after that, so there's about six or seven of us, there's
- 04:00 about the same number of them, with about four Maoris, and they were big boys. They're jovial people, you know. However, unfortunately, about eight or nine people from this English unit, and their leader was sergeant. Now I was sergeant, too, but I
- 04:30 wouldn't come to this place to do what he was going to do. And this fellow in his English voice said, "This our bar, get out." And somebody told him, "Run away, son." And I said, "I think it's going to be on here." And this big Maori... I got up, he said, "You're there." I said, "What for?" He said

05:00 "It's your birthday, you're not allowed to fight on birthdays." I thought, "All right." So I armed myself with a chair. And every now and then... and by this time it was very serious.

**What do you mean it was very serious?**

Oh, there were punches going left and right, and some people were getting hurt, it was as simple as that. Except for yours truly. Anyway, Phil had knocked this bloke down,

05:33 and he kicked him in the bum, then Phil is jumping around on one leg holding his ankle. And later on we found out he had cracked a little bone, you see. Serves you right for kicking a bloke. But the Maoris and some of my friends, got the better of them. And as

06:00 that happened, the Red Caps [British Military Police] came. But fortunately for us, our own MPs [Military Police] came as well. And the proprietor of the place, surprisingly, because there was some damage, like broken glass, a bit of furniture I suppose, but from his conversation to our military police, and the

06:30 Red Caps, of course, arrested them all, and we were told to go back to our barracks. And I went and saw my BSM [Battalion Sergeant Major], and told him about it. He said, "Okay, I will let the old man know."

**Can you describe this brawl for us? Is it like what you see in the movies? Can you paint a little picture of what a brawl between Australian and New Zealand soldiers and English soldiers looks like?**

07:00 I don't think it's like anything in the movies. Push becomes shove. And then there's a punch up. Bit more serious than a punch up at the school, because these are grown men, and fit men. Including the Englishmen in this as well. It was just the attitude, of this particular group, because we were

07:30 Englishmen on the other side of the harbour. Englishmen and Scots and Welshman and all this sort of thing. Got on marvellously well with them. It wasn't only the Australians, but the English unit didn't like them as well. They were a strange mob, I tell you. So I guess, the sound you hear on TV of somebody being hit, was different what

08:00 you heard in that pub. They make it entertaining, I guess. And the only entertainment we got was laughing at Phil, because he was jumping around on one leg. But you could hear a fist driving into a body.

08:31 You see the bloke on TV or movies, and he hits this bloke in the jaw. Never wrings his hand, or very rarely. And also, if you use your fist on the hard part, it's like hitting a brick wall. You are liable to break your knuckles anyway, or fist or whatever. Many years ago,

09:00 when I was in high school, I belonged to the Police Boys' Club, and you learnt all sorts of things. And as part of that, this old sergeant used to teach you to box. And nobody got in the ring, unless he was in the ring. It was more the technique of boxing. But he would lecture, "If you get in a fight and you hit him in the jaw, you are liable to break your hand.

09:30 Or if you hit him in the head. So you work to this part of the body." And later on in the army, anyway, you were taught... or where we were, various places on the body where you could disable a person without damaging yourself. Some were

10:00 just holds, some were pressure points. But in the movies, you see this bloke hit somebody three or four times and never even wring his hand. In reality, he has probably broken every bone in his hand. But there was a fair bit of anger in it. And it took, I don't know about the others, but it took us a

10:30 while to settle down over it. You got this suspicion... However, our CO didn't stop anybody from going to Penang. He did say, "I expect when you go there that you will uphold a conduct of the Australian Army. But that is not to say

11:01 that you can't defend yourself." So I just thought, "That was pretty good." What went wrong after that, that unit was... And I'm not sure about this, that unit was sent back to Germany, I think. They weren't sent home,

11:30 I think Germany. And then the unit that took their place, we got on marvellously with. So there you go, there's my birthday thing.

**What action did you see in encountering the Communists? What major activities were you involved with?**

Again, I'm only talking about us. We didn't see a great deal at all.

12:02 Our responsibility in general was the airfield. And apart from my guns, we always had our machine guns, rifles, that sort of stuff. So we could... If a force had attacked

12:30 us, we could have... with the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force], we could have made a good account of

ourselves, in my view. A lot of us got the opportunity to go up onto the Thai border with the... I think I said before, I went up a couple of times with 4RAR. We set up all sorts of ambushes, lay there all night

13:00 and not see a soul.

**Can you describe setting up one of those ambushes?**

Well, you need to have a piece of ground that intelligence says they use. Like tracks, track jumps, whatever.

13:32 You need to have good fields of fire. You need to have... you've got what you call your killing group, you've got your flank groups, your cut-off groups. And of course, concealment, quietness is a must of course.

14:02 So you would go into the ambush site, which had probably been reccied [reconnoitred] days before. So you knew the piece of ground and you knew where to go. But in ambushes I did up there with 4RAR, except for one time, we didn't see anybody at all

**14:31 Can you describe the time you did?**

Yeah, poor buggers. These two blokes... Sorry, I wasn't in that. The story went they'd just got in and these two blokes came wandering down the track. As I was told by the guy, who was killed

15:00 in Borneo, they didn't seem to be armed anyway. So whatever number went out and grabbed them. I think they had a pack each that was loaded with Thai silk. They were interrogated by, I think, the Malay police, apart from the Australian Army. They were smugglers. They ran right into an Australian ambush.

15:31 And I don't know what happened to them, I've got no idea. That's what we were told. But I do know other times where... Information used to filter through as to where they had had a bit of success. As a matter of fact, I've got a book there called The Mad Galahs And it's written by

16:00 George Mansford, who retired as a brigadier. And George is a team member...

**Was he there when you were there?**

No.

**What action did you see there, in those with 4RAR?**

Nothing really. It's very hard. You go through rubber plantations,

16:31 tin mines, by the living hell there was some hard work there. And the powers say, "Okay, we've got information about X. You are to proceed to whatever reference." And the team commander is given his orders. And sometimes this might only be a section of you. Sometimes it might be the whole platoon. So there was

17:00 so many different ways... But I've got to be honest, I... I know, that ones that I did was just lay there all night and get nothing. It's like the book said, you are patrolling...

17:31 And George when he wrote the book, he gets into the mind of a soldier. And when he starts... early pages was this Australian patrol. And he's in the mind of the forward scout...

**18:01 What role did you play in the patrols?**

I was with the platoon sergeant. If the whole platoon went out, there are various formations and it's depending on the formation where you are.

**Were there any times when you did have to engage with the enemy at all?**

In Malaya? Not me personally.

**Did you discharge your**

**18:30 weapon there?**

On the firing range. Not in anger, put it that way. We came close to it, I think, because at one stage the locals were getting restless. Some of us, responsible people, were armed, purely for protection. But I never fired an

19:01 angry shot in Malaya. No.

**What was the difference between the two tours of duty you did there? Can you compare those?**

The one I'm talking about now, that was the Confrontation. And I know there is a lot of propaganda, and at least half or two-thirds of the stuff you used to hear, you used to say, "That's rubbish." But there

19:30 always was an element, that Indonesia might have attacked Malaya, as they did in Borneo. So I suppose there was always that thing in the back of your mind where, who knows? It could come, and you had to

be ready. It was no good saying, "Don't come anywhere near us, we need seven days.

20:00 to do this." You had to be trained. You had to be alert. It wasn't only the Indonesians, there were a lot of other people that would... Securing your base, which was mainly... apart from us, the RAAF were...

20:32 They had really brought their security up to a high level. But it's a big place. And you can't put a soldier in every yard. So you had to be alert within the system.

**What was your understanding of your role there? The role of the Australian Army at the time?**

Our role was to defend the RAAF base.

**And during the Confrontation?**

That's exactly right. And the second

21:00 tour, we were stationed... I think that was an agreement between the two governments. That we have a military force up there. Because you must remember, down at a Malacca, was where the battalions were and

21:30 all sorts of support people. So we had us right up north and then down... Malacca would be... I'm trying to relate it back to Singapore, and I'm not sure now. It was a bit more than halfway down.

**What were you told by the Australian Army why the Australian Army was in Malaya at that time?**

22:00 Are you talking about the first trip?

**The first and second trip.**

From memory, the only thing... I'm going back to my CO, when he first briefed us and said, "We're off to Malaya, to help the family." The RAAF were big there.

**What were you told of the strategic reasons?**

22:33 The base at Butterworth was all sorts of aircraft, apart from the fighters, but reconnaissance. Some of the RAAF would go to Ubon, in Thailand. Most of those I think were engineers.

23:05 The one that I knew went there was an engineer. But broadly speaking, we were told that our role was to keep this airfield safe.

**I'm thinking more of the reason why Australian troops were deployed in Malaysia as a whole? Was there much understanding**

23:30 **of what was happening with the Communist insurgency, and the conflict with Indonesia?**

The Communist Terrorists that lived in Malaysia... And you have to go back into a bit of history here... See the British have always been there...

**At the time, though, did you understand these things?**

I think so.

24:02 It was there and you knew about it, but you didn't dwell on it.

**What sense did you have that you were maintaining the Empire?**

I think the only sense of feeling that I had was that I was doing my job. I was doing my job for my country, more than the British Empire. We had our own flag, and the British were there, fine.

24:30 But we were doing our job for our country, and in a way, I suppose, to help Malaya, the Malaysians. More than the Empire, I will put it that way.

**Although it was a British colony?**

Yeah. And had been for a long time. And we all know that the Japanese overran Malaya, and the Malaysian people

25:00 really suffered under their regime. So I suppose it was a little bit that way and of course, and our Australian soldiers suffered in that country as well. \*

**How did you feel going out on the ship and being deployed, did you feel the ANZAC [Australia and New Zealand Army Corps] tradition in a sense, through the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]?**

I suppose so, but you didn't kind of

25:30 say, "We're the Third AIF." I think my concern, and I'm only talking on myself here, I knew I had been

well trained, but I had a small doubt... I just hope

26:00 I do good. I know that's not very good grammar, but... And talking with some of my close peers, we all seemed to say, "God, I hope I can do the job." And I suppose in that thought your mind obviously would go to the ANZACs. And I suppose it was for their memory, I guess, that you didn't want to fail.

26:31 The hard work that they went through and the traditions that they laid down, for us to follow. But we didn't dwell on it.

**Was there a sense of frustration that you didn't find more action there?**

I suppose, a little bit. But looking back on hindsight, thank goodness. Yeah, thank goodness.

27:00 We had a few deaths, which were mainly by accidents. And I know that the battalion suffered some casualties in Malaya, Borneo. And so did the English. I guess there was a disappointment in as much as...

27:35 I had nothing to talk about when I went home. That might seem strange, but you did, because you spoke about your life, you spoke about going to the border, you spoke about the very primitive people you met, in the country. So I don't think there was any...

28:04 I suppose your pride, too, I guess. But there was no shame in not firing an angry shot. Because you went there to do a job, and we did it, and we did it very well. And so did the infantry battalions and the field regiments, the engineers, the signals, all those people, did the job. And

28:30 probably the only shame out of is that... these are not my words by the way, that we went and nobody knew. And we came back, and nobody knew.

**How did you feel?**

I didn't have any problem with that.

29:00 It just took a long time before these service people, who went to Malaysia and Borneo and did the job, before it was written about.

**To what extent did the**

29:30 **reasons, the rationale, for going to Malaysia and the experience of Malaysia, influence, just from your opinion, influence Australia's going to Vietnam? Or Australia's increasing, escalating involvement in Vietnam?**

I'm having a guess here...

30:00 The vast majority of people, in Australia, didn't know that we had troops in Vietnam in 1962 and 1963. Then the role of the team changed, and all of a sudden, in Vietnam was an infantry battalion, with its own artillery

30:32 battery with it, plus all the communicators and that sort of thing. Then the people suddenly realised, we were at war, again. That's my understanding.

**While you were in Malaya, what did you hear of the people going to Vietnam?**

Yeah, a fair bit. And

31:00 the main reason was that a lot of them, and some I knew, were coming home from Vietnam after being injured. They would stay overnight in the RAAF hospital, which was a reasonable size. And I think a wing commander was the [chief surgeon]. And we'd get a message, and I just remember one fellow that I knew, he had

31:30 his eardrums blown out, or blown in. And talking to him, you suddenly realised that there were better places to be. And you looked around at some of the wounded, or the injured, because of whatever. And they're on their way home. And the mind said, "Hmm, this is not playing..."

32:00 This is purely my opinion, I don't think the Australian people, unless they had loved ones that were over there, knew until that first part of the Task Force, well, they went to Bien Hoa first, then Nui Dat was established. Then of course, we all knew, the National Service...

32:30 **About that time, was there any restrictions placed on you talking to the general public about Australia's involvement in Vietnam? What you knew of it?**

No, there were no restrictions placed on me at all. Talking to the public, and I'm not getting up on stage and lecturing or anything like that, but you were... It was required in the army anyway, you signed a document, that

33:00 you didn't talk about those things that were secret or confidential...

**Was it indicated that this was secret or confidential?**

Not to me, no. I never heard anybody say it was confidential or secret. We in the army knew, and I used to tell my wife, "Ken Holme,

- 33:30 he's off to Vietnam. He's gone an adviser with..." I'm not even sure that the team had a name then. It wasn't until after I think. It may have done, I would have to read the history. And she said, "Oh yeah? Where's that?" It's like when the Korean War started. They said, "Korea? Where's Korea?" Then you looked at a map and there it was. Vietnam and all that area, I think, was called
- 34:00 Siam. And it wasn't until the French and the Vietnamese were having their battles, so then it was, "Hello. There's Vietnam." So way back, I suppose in the middle of the late '40s, perhaps the late '40s, early '50s, and certainly into the '50s, where you knew about Vietnam.
- 34:30 **When you were over in Malaya, how were you coping with the separation from your family?**  
All right, I think. Malaysia was pretty good, the mail system was okay.
- 35:04 Night-time probably. I only had one boy, and he was only a baby, too. During the day you were pretty full on with your job, and we used to work shifts, too. So, I'd do four hours... Say, you mined
- 35:30 or you were physically or mentally working hard. One or the other. But it was when you had your spare time, of course your mind would go back to your wife, and you'd wonder "How's my boy going?" Just to give you an example, my troop commander was a fellow called Jeff Carter, Duntroon graduate. Top officer.
- 36:02 He was my captain. And by the way, when he retired from the army, he retired as major general. And we all said to him, when he was a young officer, "You will make general." However, there was a communication from the army in Sydney about my boy. That my wife had to take him to hospital, that he had convulsions and this sort of thing.
- 36:31 So my concern then was, not only for him, but for Edna as well. But he was in Manly hospital, and she was going backwards and forwards. My CO and Jeff Carter were fabulous. My boss was saying, "We need an answer now." And this is in the signal, probably going to Victoria Barracks in Sydney, "You get someone over there and check this woman and his boy out."
- 37:02 And within hours, as it turned out, the medical people, he was getting his teeth... and some children or baby, because of this, would have a convulsion. And of course this is the first time for Edna, and here's this little child... So once she was told, and was given
- 37:30 stuff to... I think it was through teeth cutting and all that stuff. And it took a load of my mind, too. That was all right, and so was Philip. So the assistance was there, and it was a bit of a relief, I guess. There's an old saying that 'the army looks after its own'. And they did, and they do.
- 38:02 And I'm always grateful to the officers... Not only me, but anybody else in a situation, they did the same for, and they did it well, and nothing was left unanswered. And if it wasn't answered in a detail that day, they'd insist upon it. They
- 38:30 didn't let it go. You couldn't escape, until they got the answer. So not only me, because that's a personal friend, but I know other people had mainly little family problems that needed to have a bit of attention paid to, because the husband would normally do those things. So they just needed some authority to help the woman over the hurdle. And
- 39:00 that's what they did.
- When did you come back from your second tour, back to Australia?**  
Yeah, I did I think nineteen months, on the second tour. And I come home a bit earlier, because I was due to do my long gunnery course. The system say you will
- 39:30 come home and attend whatever course it was. So I came home and I was stationed up at Woodside.
- What year was that?**  
'67, so I went across in '64, and I spent just on seven month in, that time, came home, they formed this new unit up at Woodside
- 40:00 and I joined that. And the majority of this unit was National Service, with the regular army sprinkled amongst them, and we went back. We flew across in a [Boeing] 707...
- That was in...**  
We flew across in the middle of 1966. This was the second tour, with National Servicemen, and they were pretty good bloke, too. I came home because I had to do my long gunnery. I was qualified for warrant officer, but I needed
- 40:30 this long gunnery course, and I came all the way home, and the course was cancelled. And I thought,

"Damn." The system said, "All right, now we'll put you on the first available one." Well, in between that I got promoted to warrant officer, provisionally.

41:00 I had been on a couple of courses that the army had taken me off, because I was required to go and do... whatever. There was good system, because you wouldn't be penalised, in as far as seniority and money, and all that sort of thing. So I was a provisional warrant officer, then I got posted to Darwin. And while I was up in Darwin,

41:30 in came this thing, "You are to report to the long gunnery course." Which I think was about fifteen weeks.

**We'll have to stop now.**

## Tape 5

00:50 **Can you tell us about... Why do you think it was you were sent back to Malaya a second time, instead of being sent straight to Vietnam?**

01:10 My view. The unit that I went to Malaya with, on the second tour was ninety per cent, first time National Servicemen.

01:30 Newly formed, and we trained here in this country, for about twelve months, in South Australia and also up in the tropics of Darwin. My role and my peers role was to train these young men, so

02:00 that they could do the job that was going to be required of them in Malaya. And because I was in that unit, and didn't request to get out of it, I knew that when my corps said, "Young fellow, go." So it was no big deal. I was a regular soldier so I went. The army said,

02:32 "I want you to go here and do that job." And that was what you did. And the only way you'd say no is if you had a valid reason of... I'm trying to think of one. Say a very, very sick child. And they would excuse you from going overseas for that time. As soon as the child was well enough, of course, away you went. I was in the unit, I had

03:00 responsibilities to those National Servicemen, like all the other regular army soldiers, from the boss down. And it never really worried me, because I knew, eventually, I'd go.

**How did you find the National Servicemen, as someone who was helping to train them? Were they as good as the other soldiers, did you feel?**

Yeah, holding in your mind when they came to us, they had

03:30 completed their basic training. I was involved in the first four intakes, of these young people. And I found them to be very astute characters. And I'm talking about the private sort of soldier. The regular private and they seemed to fit in very well.

04:00 You must remember... I don't know what the system is today, when I joined I was further down the line. The army was pretty fussy who they took in, into the regular army. And of course, some National Service people, weren't called up anyway, and they were kind of sorted out, too.

04:30 Somebody would say, "He's not going to do well in the army." Fitness wise... It was no good trying to put this square peg into a round hole, it just doesn't work. Of all the ones I had in, I just thought, "Well, a damn good choice." That was my view. And I'll go a bit further. I had

05:00 the privilege, I suppose, at one time... I had been invited down to Nui Dat. It was the regiment's birthday. The RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] said, "If you can get down," he was an ex-team fellow anyway, "we would be happy to have you." So I thought, "I'm off." I arrived there in the morning...

05:31 I think it took me three days to get there or something. And I knew a fellow there. So we were walking around, and these were National Servicemen. And one of my questions to him was, "How are you getting on?" One young fellow says, "We're having a ball." And his mate said, "Hmm, sometimes."

06:05 I don't say they enjoyed some of it, but I think what they were getting to was, here was this camaraderie that we were talking about. This affection for your mate. And you just had to look at these people, a dozen or so of them. It was all there. There was none of this saying, "Well, I'm all right, Jack." You could feel...

06:31 I know if something happens to me you will come and get me and vice-versa. And it's not spoken about. I don't know whether that makes any sense to you, but that was the feeling I got. So I just think this country, and I guess it still is, can be justly proud of their national servicemen, because they were damn good people. And now of course, they were well into their 50s, so yeah, pretty good.

07:03 **Before you went to Vietnam, can you tell me about your training? Before you left for Vietnam?**

Okay. I don't know whether this was training, but firstly you had to go and do all these psyche tests. And I don't know to this day whether they reckoned you were mad or not. They were trying

07:30 to find out if you could work with another human race. Asians are, generally speaking, very nice people. But their culture and their beliefs are very different to ours, in Australia. So you go through all these psyche tests and it takes about half a day, then the psyche officer...

08:04 In my day, anyway, I went to the intelligence corps centre, which was a corps in the army. I never saw... And you had a briefing by the CO of that centre, and he said what was the stage in Vietnam at that time. And also you learnt about their cultures,

08:31 the dos and don'ts. If you do this, the CO will probably send you home. And if you did something that upset them, you might as well pack your bags and go somewhere else...

**This is the Vietnamese people?**

Yes. So I spent a fair bit of time...

**Sorry for interrupting, but can you tell me about some of those dos and don'ts that you were told about?**

Yes, some of these were not only Vietnamese, but

09:00 our CO, he said, "Eventually, you will be changed from where I am going to send you now, because five or six months will be long enough for anybody. And you might get a situation where you are going to work with village people. One of the don'ts is, don't have an affair with a woman in that village, because

09:34 it would be impossible to keep it secret." So not only would disgrace fall upon her, I suppose, but they wouldn't want to have anything to do with you anyway. As I understand that. I guess politeness was a positive.

10:04 I was going to say 'manners'. They are well-mannered people to a degree because that's how they've been raised for thousands of years. If you did see them, you would say thank you. So we did this language course, which went

10:30 for a month, so except for a lecture here on Vietnam, the rest of it, learning how to count. And, "Chow um," and, "Chow am," and, "Chow co," and that sort of business. And military terms. It wasn't bad, we used to get little tests, and our

11:02 instructors had been to Point Cook [RAAF Base in Victoria], and they really studied the language. It would be no good sending me there because I don't have the gift. These people have been taught three or four languages there. So this fellow was telling us, "You have to be very careful how you put emphasis on a word, or a small phrase."

11:30 And one of these, to which I can't remember now, one of these was, if you were invited into like your Vietnamese commanders home, it was polite for you to take a gift to the lady of the house. They used to get a bit of perfume or scented soap or something. He was very partial to Australian beer, so my friend Snow would go up.

12:00 Just a six pack. And it was also good manners to look about, so we were told, and to say, "You have a lovely home." If you didn't pronounce it the proper way, you were saying to a very nice Vietnamese lady, who are very modest by the way, "You have a very lovely whorehouse." This fellow looked at me and said, "Can you imagine

12:30 if you were saying that?" He said, "I'm speaking with great authority because I did it." And I thought, "Dear me." I suppose all of us when we got there, and started spruiking the little bit of the Vietnamese that we had, and these Vietnamese people were saying, "Mad Hooktalies." Hooktalies is Vietnamese for Australian. And they would turning this, like this.

13:02 "What are you talking about?" So it was a language that changed. Down south was like a colloquial thing, the further you went north it became the proper thing. I was lucky. My Vietnamese commander, his English was good. His wife was a teacher of language. So any time we stopped for a meal,

13:30 we just spoke in Vietnamese. And he was teaching me how to. So after a while, you were speaking it. I wouldn't say that we were really proficient in it, but you had enough to carry out a not too difficult sort of conversation between each other, or his wife or kids or whatever. But you've got to be very careful, I can tell you.

**Those inflections will catch you out?**

Well, yeah. I would speak in Vietnamese when I found it was a better way to go, and just to let them know that I am trying to learn the language. Instead of being, I'm here, I speak

14:30 Australian, you speak Vietnamese, that's fine, but it's like anybody else, it's like us here, isn't it? Somebody been here for twenty years and can't speak a word of English, and you'd say, "Hmph, I see." You reverse it, and I think that was one of the reasons that I thought it was important to learn as much

as I could, and pronounce it as best I could. So they could at least understand me and realise that I was trying.

15:01 And if they said, "No, he's not trying." So be it. But that was my idea.

**When you were leaving to go Vietnam, who did you think you were going with and what duties did you expect to be performing?**

At that time, I didn't have a clue. I knew I was going to the team.

15:30 I got a... like a communiqué from the commanding officer, who I knew, just explaining to me, "Inform your next of kin. Tell her don't believe anything she sees on the TV, radio or papers. In Darwin, anyway, there was no TV anyway.

16:00 And Edna said that was a blessing, until she has heard from me. And we discussed it a little while ago. The media will get all things wrong, and why would you put... "Oh, four soldiers killed in Vietnam." Automatically your lady says, "Oh, where is he? What is he doing?" I said to Edna, "It doesn't matter. Unless you hear from Alex,

16:30 it ain't true. And that was the policy we had. And he used to do it, good man. He's passed on now, too. Good CO, good soldiers. And no-one, but no-one, touched his warrant officers. He spent half his time out in the bush with us. He'd get

17:00 out of a chopper [helicopter] and there he was, packing rifle. "Just thought I'd come and say G'day, and see how you were going, mate.," "Not a good place out here, sir." "You're telling me..." He'd been through Korea and here he is commanding, albeit in those days a hundred people, stretched from one end of South Vietnam to the other. I don't know of anybody that he didn't

17:30 go and see, at least once or twice in their tour. And for that he was highly respected, and still was. He used to live here... and not last year, the year before, was it? Anyway, he succumbed to cancer and passed on. So we had a guard of honour for him, we had a bugler and a piper.

18:00 Because that was the respect that... I suppose people in the army knew him.

**What did you know about the team... What had you heard? Was the team getting a bit of a reputation? Did you know much about them?**

Only as much as, when they went across they taught. And then a little while after that, as I understand,

18:30 the warrant officers went to their CO and said, something like, "We teach them what to do. But we're not their to see how they're doing it, and we need to be able to do that, to do the job properly." Albeit you'd do a little bit of teaching, and then later on, down the track they formed... There was Vietnamese Jungle Warfare School. But the

19:00 Australians formed their own as well. So a lot of the advisers that went into there, had field experience, and went in there just to finish their tour. So I knew about them, and I knew about the team fellows who went to the CO and said, "We need to go out." And that's when their role changed. Because they used to go out...

19:30 Every time your unit went out, you went out with them, on operations. Whether the operation went for a fortnight or a month. So you were with them, in the unit, and you did what they did. But that's all I knew. The only other thing... I knew before I went, there was a friend of mine who went a month or two before me, he wrote to me and said, "It's damn hard work."

20:00 And I said, "Yes, you just bring..." I can't remember now, small pack, I think. Which I had. It was a British army small pack. But he just said, "It's damn hard work." So I knew what he was talking about. But that's all I knew about them. I knew that from day one, and probably

20:30 until the last day, the standard was set, and the standard in the team was extremely high. And this goes back to the ANZACs. The standard and the example was set at Gallipoli. And I'm sure, every Australian soldier has that name, and

21:00 also, how dare I, let these brave men of 1915 down? So, that's my view. And I suppose there are different expressions that you can put to it.

**Can you tell me about preparing to leave and arrival in Vietnam?**

21:30 Pretty ordinary, pack this. Make sure that I was up to date with all my inoculations and health and that sort of thing. Didn't speak a great deal... My boys were youngish. I think Phil was six and a half, or seven, but he knew that I was going away...

22:00 And my son Robbie, he was too young anyway. I think the hardest job I had was to say to my wife, "Don't worry," because I knew she would. And, "Remember, Alex will let you know." And you try to prepare her. And I think it's harder for your wife. You know where you are, you know what you're doing,

22:30 but she doesn't. The next thing she knows is, "G'day, it's me," in a letter saying... I never discussed the

war. I might have said, "I went down and saw Max Steiger on the way. I saw John Lear," who she knows, "and we're all well." But as far as preparation was concerned, all of the preparation had been done six months before this. The courses, your learning, your

- 23:00 briefings. I tried to keep up my fitness. I used to run and do some 5BX exercises [Canadian Military Exercise Program developed by the Canadian Military]. I played a lot of squash. Playing squash in the tropics was pretty good. By Jeez. And I was kind of a learner, I guess. One of the fellows I used to play against was the West Australian champion. God, I didn't... "Where's the ball?"
- 23:31 He was very, very good indeed. But that's about it, I guess. In as far as preparing to go overseas. Because the army says, "You will hop on this plane," and you hop on that plane. My arrival in Saigon, in those days, Tan Son Nhut is the airport. Air America, I think it was. A 707 anyway. Where we were met by a team member,
- 24:00 a warrant officer, and as I said before, I think there were four of us, and the very first thing he did, he took us to the armoury, where he we got issued with our weapons and our ammunition and so forth. And then you went to the American Q store, and I've never been given so much equipment in my wife. One rule, the CO said, "When you come, you will bring Australian greens, you will be your slouch hat
- 24:33 and your GP [general purpose] boots. Because when you travel from A to B, you will travel as an Australian soldier." And I thought that was a damn good idea. So here's all this gear, four pair of trousers, ten shirts or whatever. Strike a light. It was this high, you couldn't jump over it. We were billeted,
- 25:01 and the name of the place I can't remember now, but it was like a pub without a dining room, sort of thing, I think there was a bar area. And we just dropped all the stuff off, checked our weapons, then we went to the Free World headquarters, where we met Alex. He said, "Righto fellows. There's a big map of Vietnam there, look for your name on a pin."
- 25:30 Now we're all in Saigon, so we're all staring around Saigon. Then somebody said, "Here I am, down in the [Mekong River] Delta." And I thought, "I'm not down there. Where the hell am I?" So I walked up the map. And there was a pin with Hodgson's name on it. "Thank you sir," bloody hell. Then he briefed us about the situation at that time. He briefed us about the
- 26:00 units we were going to, and the conditions in the Delta, and I call it a bit different, because there is a lot of water down in the Delta. But not only that, I would be working in this area, doing whatever, and say fifty k's [kilometres] away the adviser and his people would be doing probably the same job, but in a different way. So you
- 26:30 hear people say, "This is the way we did it." Well, yes, they did, too, but it could be different. So what you did in your area and what he did in his area could be two different things, but achieving the same goal. It's just the different way you do it.

#### **So you adapt it a little bit to your environment?**

Oh, I think you must. The place I went to was a place called Dong Ha [USAF air base, Vietnam]

- 27:00 It was a huge base of Americans and Vietnamese. This big base. And it had an airstrip and everything, tanks, choppers, you name it, belonging to the American army and the Marines and that sort of stuff.
- 27:32 It was a dusty place, very dusty. Jeez, it was dusty, then the rains came and you were up to your knees in mud. Red mud. But you adapted because, you adapted in Australia anyway, to certain conditions. And just because it was a very hot day, or a freezing day, it didn't stop you training. "Sir, it's too
- 28:00 hot." No. You got on with the job, you did it. So I guess the adaptation comes right back to your training, beginning.

#### **Did you have a warrant officer at your base when you arrived, to show you the ropes?**

Yeah. When I got to Quang Tri, a fellow called Snow Lawrence, who was a Medical 01, apart from his own duties,

- 28:30 but he used to be responsible for our administration. So I met Snow. Snow was an old Korean veteran as well, and we just seemed to click. And I liked him. He was a scallywag. An absolute scallywag. And I reckon I'd gleam more out of him in a night, than I did from all the
- 29:00 other briefings down the track. Because Snow had been there about four months before me. He was a very experienced man, I guess. However, he took me up to Dong Ha, I forget who I met there, then I went out to this big fire base. It was all calibres of artillery on it, to meet
- 29:30 the American senior adviser, who was what they called a Bird Colonel [Lieutenant Colonel]. And he agreed to this, and he was my boss as far as operations were concerned. But that's all. Discipline and administration and so forth was my CO, Colonel Clarke. So I met him and he said, "Right, your unit's out in the field. We'll fly you out tomorrow."
- 30:00 So I got all my gear ready, and a chopper landed just near where I was sleeping. And I hopped on and

away I went. When I got out on the operations, the fellow I replaced, he stayed with me for two days, I guess. Just nagging, and, "this was the way I found that this is a good way to do things." And we all knew that if you wanted something to happen,

30:30 you would knock on the front door. If that door was closed, you would go to the back door. Or you would try the windows or side doors or whatever. And try and plant an idea into your counterparts mind. So that he would say... Covarne, is Vietnamese for adviser. "I have got this good idea." And he'd tell you, "What a great idea."

31:01 Now it may not be exactly what you were thinking of, but a door opened, so you can get him to do things that might be better for you. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't. You really couldn't go in and start demanding, because if you did, you may as well pack your bag. It was nothing to do with rank, it was...

31:32 You couldn't afford to have a commander lose faith. And by Jeez, they do it very quickly. You had to be very careful what you did and said. And this goes back to your peers. I'll just give you an example,

32:02 of Snow Lawrence, and the bloke I relieved out of operation. And there's nothing derogatory about this, it's just... the people before me, and I followed suit, I never lied to any of the pilots. I never lied to anybody, but the pilots, like the chopper pilots, the gun ship pilots. In particular when the chopper has

32:30 got to land... And it got to the stage, and... We had a bit of a scrape, a few casualties. And one of your jobs was to evacuate them. I used to have a FAC [Forward Air Controller - airborne target designation] flying over me.

33:00 Anyway, the choppers were coming, and I had this radio... And I was working with an American, and he has answered the radio, then I heard this Yankee pilot saying, "Have you a Zulu on your sight?" "Yeah, I do." Zulu was our call sign. And I heard the young lieutenant say, "It's all quiet here now. There's

33:30 been no gunfire or anything like that for a while..." But he didn't believe him, because there had been occasions, so I was told, where they brought choppers in when they shouldn't have. And this was mainly American casualties. So it was told to me that, "Don't lie to them. If you've got a doubt, tell them to stay up." And that is exactly what I used to do. And I used to get on the thing and say, "Look, we haven't

34:00 experienced any gunfire for two hours. Our patrols have been out, so we be alert." And we were, too. We'd get him as quick as we could, put on whatever you wanted and get him out, gone. But don't lie. So my peers before me, they laid down that foundation and we were expected to do the same, and we did. It would be wrong, to bring in a pilot and his crew knowing

34:30 full well that is was dangerous. Because a chopper is very vulnerable when it's on the ground, or just getting off the ground. This sort of thing. Until it gets some height and speed. But apparently, so it was said, some of the ground forces used to do it. And paid the penalty.

#### **Why would a ground force do that?**

I don't know. I can't see the sense. If the situation warranted

35:03 of you getting casualties. You probably realise that all wounds have a category. For example, a head wound would take precedence over a broken leg. The next priority would be the chest wound and so forth... haemorrhaging of course, but... I don't know. Isn't it better to say, "Wait up there,

35:30 I'll determine if it is safe. We have one critically wounded soldier." So as soon as... and it doesn't take long, but as soon as you can say, "Okay, this is the situation. We'd like to get this fellow out, but it is risky." Then the pilot makes a decision,

36:00 not you. I knew one dust-off pilot [helicopter pick-up crew], I don't know his Christian name or his surname. He had a nickname of Dirty Man. He was an American warrant officer, and he was one of the most skilful I had the pleasure of meeting. It didn't matter what you put him in, you could put him in a Mercedes and he looked a grub.

36:32 So you'd say to him... he'd say, "Okay, I'm coming in." And he was in and gone. We were all ready for him. We had plenty of people way out, and this sort of thing. It was his decision, and it was wrong of me to make a decision for him, when he didn't know all the facts. And of course, he had his own crew to be concerned about, as well,

37:00 and a critically injured person. It doesn't take long to put a wounded soldier on the chopper. But it does take a little while to put half a dozen on the chopper. So it's a decision for the pilot. I don't think I can add anything more to that.

#### **The commander that you had gone to advise, how many men did he have?**

He had a battalion.

37:30 Our battalions, in those days, were four and a half, five hundred. Depending on their status. There were four battalions in the regiment I belonged to. Each one was at a different total because of leave,

casualties, whatever.

38:03 I really can't remember now the scale that they determined is the total amount that each battalion would have, because it would vary. But we would have, I think it was four fifty, of all ranks. They were infantry people. We had

38:30 our mortars. I think that was about it.

**And how many of those people were Vietnamese?**

I know of no other race in that battalion that weren't Vietnamese. That is not to say that they didn't have, somewhere in their background, a Chinese grandfather,

39:00 a couple of hundred years ago, it didn't matter. See, my commander there was North Vietnamese. And he fought against the French, but he didn't like the Communists either. So he went south. And the South said, "Thank you very much," for having him. Obviously because of his knowledge and experience and so forth. No, I think they were all... up there they were, anyway.

39:31 **You were talking before about the National Service personnel, and the fact that you think they performed well, and done their job well. How do you feel that battalion was? How do you think they measured up to their Australian Army equivalents?**

40:02 I really don't think I'm equipped to answer that correctly. Because this Australian battalion, and that Vietnamese battalion, are similar. But different cultures. Being biased, I guess, I would

40:30 have to lean towards the Australian Battalion. But the regiment that I was in and the division that that regiment belonged to had an extremely good Vietnamese general.

**Sorry, we just have to change tapes.**

## Tape 6

00:39 **Can I take you back to just before your departure to Vietnam, and can you tell us a little bit about your experience and feelings of the national mood in Australia towards the war, and how exposed to it you were?**

That's pretty easy, I think.

01:05 Reading the newspapers and the people who were reporting the mood of Australia, and it's quite obvious because there were a lot of demonstrations. 'Send our young men home' and all this sort of thing. In particular, the National Service side. Now it's history, when old Gough Whitlam got in [to be Prime Minister of Australia], everybody was out. So I

01:30 accepted the society saying, talking about our National Service, because they were only there two years, whereas I was a regular soldier. So my attitude to that was, well I'm a soldier, and that's where I will do my work, if I have to. So it didn't go past that. I just thought, "Well, if you want to demonstrate,

02:00 that's fine. That's your business. So long as you do it peacefully." I don't think I had any big opinion one way or the other. It's very difficult to explain... You trained, from the day you joined the army, to do a job. Now it doesn't matter what job it is,

02:30 you were trained and brought up to that level of fitness, and mental fitness as well. Which was obviously quite important. This doesn't make you a killer, but this is part of the training to keep you alive. Now the people of our society said, "We don't like our boys being over there." I know there was, generally,

03:00 the National Service lads, and I suppose some might have had a bit of regular army in there, I don't know. But that was then, the society. Now if you look at things now, the Prime Minister says, "We are going to send troops to East Timor." There is no big upheaval, it was the way he went about it.

03:31 Why would we be helping these East Timorese, but they didn't go far enough down the track and look and say, "Well, they do need some help." And that is the reason, or one of the reasons in my view, why the training team was sent over there, because of the South Vietnamese government, there was no secret about this, asked them for help. Not only of the Americans... and we're still

04:00 doing it. Ever since the last war, we've been pretty close to America, I guess. And I know we don't always agree with them. But it's the way that today's governments go about informing the Australian people.

**But back then?**

04:30 It just didn't concern me as an individual, with the outlook of being a soldier.

**At that stage, to put it bluntly, there had been quite a few Australians killed, and brought**

**home in body bags. How were you feeling about this and your colleagues? Going into harm's way and...**

I don't know whether you did think about it.

05:08 It certainly, it was a sad moment when you heard that people were killed, or badly maimed. Your heart would go out to their family, and the soldier who suffered. For me, it didn't linger.

05:37 I think it would be absolutely stupid if that thought stayed in your mind. I don't think you would survive long. Now, you'll probably ask the question shortly...

06:01 **Did you know any colleagues before you left that had been killed and wounded?**

Yeah, I did, I knew a few. Most of those, there were some team fellows that I happened to know that were over there. And a few of my friends in the Task Force

06:30 were, "You might remember so and so. He died of wounds." So you'd say, "Damn, that's stiff." And your mind would go to their families. And I know it's devastating to lose somebody in your family. It's too difficult for me to put into words.

07:01 I don't think anybody can, because it's the individual that is hurt. But you can't get rid of it for the rest of your life. I don't know any other way of putting it.

**At that time before you left, were you aware... had that happened to you in the**

07:30 **service life with colleagues or closer friends?**

You mean dying?

**Particularly in active service?**

Well, in most cases, and I'm only speaking of myself, when I was told

08:00 so and so had been killed, it was usually three or four weeks after the event. You'd say, "When did it happen?" "So and so," "Oh, that's hard-line, isn't it?" It wasn't like a knock on the door, "Ian Hodgson has been shot." Because it was down the track. I think subconsciously, you carried it for the day

08:30 and you thought, "I'm going to miss him." You and him might have played football together and become pretty good mates. Then all of a sudden he is doing his job and he has been taken from you. So yeah, I suppose it's a bit emotional. But over in Vietnam, you didn't get a great deal of time to have your mind set on that thing, because it's too dangerous. You really had to be focused on the

09:00 job you were about to do.

**But it did happen to you?**

In as much as somebody... Not in front of me, but in the vicinity, put it that way.

**Did you apply for the training team, or were you requested to join, or did someone order you to go?**

09:30 No, it wasn't an order. It was just that my director, who came up to Darwin. He certainly didn't especially come up to see me, because there were other of my corps there as well, including the commander of the Northern Territory. But when my turn came to go and have a yarn to him... I might just stop there.

10:04 **Do you mind if I ask why you want to stop there? You don't have to discuss these things, but is there something particularly sensitive there?**

No, I think I'm just leading up to... He just said to me, "Normally, we would send you to England for two years, because you did so well in the gunnery course. However, we want you to go to Vietnam. And further

10:30 if you can pass all the tests, we would like you to go and serve in the team." To me, when he said those words, I felt very proud that he thought I'd be good enough. Anyway, they thought at the end of the seven weeks that I could go across there and do a job.

11:00 **You mentioned psyche tests? What in particular were the psyche tests?**

Oh, stupid things. It was a tick and flick sort of thing. In some cases, there was a fair bit of writing. What did you think about whatever it was.

**Were they moral, ethical dilemmas?**

I think one... In your record, you served in Malaysia, what did you think of the local people?

11:30 How did you get on with them? What about the children? But generally speaking, I suppose they've got

to sort out the nuts, I guess. But what is to hand? Boot, shoot, love? Oh, love. What is to foot? Boot, shoot, love? Boot or shoe? All this sort... If you're standing on a hundred foot cliff, do you feel like jumping off it? Well, you'd

12:00 have to have rocks in your heads, wouldn't you?

**Did you ask any ethical questions, like are you ethically opposed to putting civilians in harm's way, things like that?**

I don't remember anything in the papers. I think that was raised in the interview with the psyche officer. I don't even know his name. Something brushed on that, you know. How would you feel if you brought in artillery and you

12:30 killed twenty people? My answer to him was, "Well, I haven't experienced that and I hope I never do." Spur of the moment, that was the only thing I could think of, and I am still of that mind. But anyway, the rules of engagement and that sort of thing, for us anyway, we weren't allowed to land a round...

13:00 and I can't remember now... a hundred metres from any part of a perimeter of a village. So as far as dropping one in them, God forbid. But we had these rules that we as a civilised country, had to follow. So I never thought much about it in the end... Well, I did. I hope it never happens to me, put it that way.

13:34 **You've got a young family, but you've been requested to go to a dangerous part of the world. How is your wife feeling about this situation?**

Edna was, when us soldiers used to talk about our wives, as a good soldier's wife, or a good army wife.

14:00 When I first met Edna I was newly promoted to two stripes. And down the track we got together, and spoke about becoming engaged. So I said, "I've always wanted to be a soldier, and I enjoy being a soldier, and God willing,

14:30 I will remain one. And I will be away... nothing to do with war. You're forever on exercises and training and this sort of thing." And I said, "I will be away for a fair time of the year." And she says, "Well, if you're happy, so am I." None of us, at that time, thought I would go to Vietnam or anything, where an element of

15:00 danger was. But she accepted it as thousands of other women had accepted their husbands or sons... Like my mother, she saw her husband go to war, then she sees me go to war, but she accepted that, because that was my life. Not going to war is, but I was a soldier. And

15:30 I was expected to go, under the Constitution, and do my job. So I never had... Edna, even after Vietnam, I'd say, "I'm being posted here." She'd say, "Okay, when do we move?" And she didn't mind it. The only reason I got out of the army, really, was that it had started to interfere with the education of my sons. And I wasn't about to allow that to happen, no way.

**Can you take us through that moment when**

16:00 **you had to say goodbye to her, when you set off for Vietnam?**

Yeah, it was about... The stupid army, with credible respect, my wife is up in Darwin and that's where my wife is going to stay. The army says to me, "You will proceed to the ECPD [Eastern Command Personnel Depot] on South Head.

16:30 And you will be notified when your plane is going to Vietnam." Now the damn thing flew all the way back up and landed at Darwin airport, and stayed there for about two hours. My commander signalled Canberra and said, "The man is doing this and this and this." And they came back and said, "He will proceed to the ECP Depot." Now after I'd gone, they did change it.

17:00 A friend of mine came over, who was stationed at Darwin, his wife... and he stayed there and hopped on the plane. So I had not a real goodbye. But it was about 2am in the morning, very early hours of the morning, my wife is there with my two boys, and I was able to sit with them for the whole time the plane

17:30 was there. Young Rob was asleep, Phil was half asleep. "How you going son?" "Not bad, Dad." But we didn't dwell on it. We just spoke... Because this lady now was going to become every manager that you can think of. From banking

18:00 down to shopping, and everything in between. It's a pretty hard row for a lady. Without dwelling... and you shouldn't dwell on things at that time.

**What personal possessions did you take with you? Photographs, or anything in particular she gave you?**

Yeah, I had a photograph of her and the two boys.

18:33 I had a photograph of her by herself, and each individual son. And I shoved those in my wallet. That was about it. I didn't have any jewellery.

**Lucky charms?**

No. Up here.

**Do you believe in luck?**

Oh, definitely. Oh yes. I suppose it's luck. I guess it's your training.

19:01 And I was brought up and I still believe, I think, that the Good Lord does have his finger in the pie. And sometimes I look back and say, "How damn close was that?" And there just seemed to be some other intervention. And I've spoke to

19:30 Edna about it, and we reckon that he smiled upon us.

**Is there any one incident you are thinking of?**

Yeah. One of the things that you learn from your peers is, when you're talking... On operations,

20:00 you're with the armed forces... and I think the best way that I can explain it... What happens happens out on the battlefield, it's going to happen. Then you're taken out of there, like I was, and some of my peers...

**What do you mean taken out?**

Our commander relieved us, because as he said, five or six months in these areas is enough for anyone. "And I'll take you out,

20:30 give you a break, mentally and physically" Because you become very tired, you really are... If you weren't mentally and physically fit, you wouldn't survive, in my view. In that situation, like the fellows where I was, the advisers in Play Cu, the fellows down in the Delta, and several other places, too,

21:00 you just couldn't mess around. So anyway, I went to advise this village.

**Which village was that?**

I'm trying to think... Phuoc Tuy. You never set a pattern, you always did...

21:30 From the time you opened your eyes, you did it differently. Because as soon as you set a pattern, they would notice it and sweat on you.

**Who's they?**

The NVA [North Vietnamese Army], the Viet Cong. The Viet Cong in these instances... And I knew an American major, and he was warned, and warned. "You drive down this damn road

22:00 at this time, every day, and you are not going to be able to do it much longer." And they sweated on him, and they got him, because he had set a pattern. And you couldn't. Like I would leave my compound... I would get up and have a quick look up towards the village. And if all the ladies were gathered around the entrance or the exits of the village, I would know, "Damn, they've mined this damn

22:30 road again." Because they were all there with their wares, and they'd go down to another village to do their bartering and this sort of thing. We had Vietnamese engineers with us, so we'd go and clear the road of mines. And they seemed to know, and you'd be a fool not to take stock of it. If I looked up, and this was just on daybreak, and all these people were trotting down the road, good day today.

23:07 **You said about luck in the village, you couldn't remember the name?**

Yeah, this was just outside the village. It was a road that used to go through the paddies, just wide enough for perhaps two Jeeps. But not for two trucks to go pass. There was two bridges. One, which I'll talk about now, was close to the village, a wooden sort of thing.

23:31 But again, you see... I would never go over those bridges at the same time, ever. I would plan it... Sometimes I wouldn't go over them, I would go another way. Anyway, this day I came across at a different time, and I had just driven into my compound and the whole damn bridge went up. Now that was a matter of ten seconds, roughly. The bridge blew, black smoke.

24:02 And I kind of said, "Thanks, Lord." Because there was some... I always had a suspicion that they would knock them out, then they would have to travel through the paddies.

**Was that targeted at you, do you think?**

I don't know. I suspect, but I can't say, exactly. I suspect that.

24:38 It was time they knocked off an adviser I suppose, I don't know. It could have been anything, I guess. It had to be command detonated, because of the... It wasn't a time detonation; I reckon it was somebody had a clacker somewhere...

25:00 and... I was driving pretty fast by the way, and I think he just didn't have the judgement to click when I

was on the bridge. That's only a personal view. I could be very wrong. I don't know. However, I don't care. I said, "Thank you."

**Did you trust your closest ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] colleagues...**

Generally, I did. I trusted the people

- 25:30 when I was up north, because I trusted the commander, and I knew that he wouldn't tolerate anybody who wasn't of the faith, I guess. So I didn't have a big problem up there, at all. I don't know. You hear stories from other advisers, "We had to weed this fellow out. He was Viet Cong." Or something. But I never experienced that. But I did, when I went south.
- 26:04 And this was when you really had to be alert, I guess. Anyway, this fellow... He did something or said something, or whatever, and you know, the alarm bells sort of deal. So I kept it to myself, and then later on,
- 26:30 I mentioned to an Australian adviser, who was an officer. And he said, "Okay." He was a senior Australian adviser in that area, and he said, "Leave it with me." The Vietnamese had people, who you would never see in your life, I tell you. So these people came in and they grabbed him, after watching him for a day or so. And he was
- 27:00 a Viet Cong. And he had infiltrated through the system. Now, they took him away, I don't know what happened to him, or what his role was. He just did something that wasn't normal. It probably cost him his life. But however, down there... and also I don't think...
- 27:35 I don't think their heart was in it, as much as they were up north. And the other thing you've got to remember is, I go over there, I spend twelve months and I come home. And they're still there, years after... And it is a tiring experience. I can tell you. Half of them are five foot.
- 28:00 Five foot four or five. And they're carrying these huge packs, and they're fighting and all this sort of thing. And you say to yourself, "You poor buggers. I say goodbye. And you get up tomorrow morning and go on operations again." You've got to remember that, I think, that huge draw...

**Can you take us back to your departure from Australia, and the flight over? Initially when the AATVs went over, they had to go in civilian clothes...**

- 28:30 Yeah. We left South Head... and there was four of us, I think, but there were other Australian soldiers on the flight, going back there after R & R or whatever. We hopped on the flight in our polyesters, spit polish shoes. But in our little bag we had, we had to have a civvy shirt.
- 29:00 And mine happened to be a lemon wash and wear one, because when we got to Singapore, the thing we were told was that Singaporean soldiers didn't like Australian soldiers standing out. We never left the airport. We went for breakfast. We waited
- 29:30 until we were called back on, and we flew into Saigon. And here's however many the plane carried, all in polyester pants or black shoes, short back and sides, and you stood out like a beacon. I just thought, "Well, I'm proud of my uniform." But anyway, the authorities... and you're talking the politicians now.
- 30:01 So there we were, all having breakfast in different coloured shirts, but we've all got the same pants on.

**When you left Australia, was there any protest at the airport?**

Not with me, no. I never saw... I never got involved in anything. But certainly there was none at Sydney Airport, when I left. No. And certainly none at Darwin. And nothing in Singapore.

**First impressions of landing at Tan Son Nhut?**

- 30:32 What the hell am I doing here? There was still some damage from some attack. Everything was sandbagged. The bunkers for the planes were sandbagged. There were soldiers everywhere, all armed to the teeth and ready to go. And of course, you're in the aircraft with nothing, just the clothes. Yeah, it
- 31:00 was quite impressive when you are flying in to land, because you had an overall view, of parts of Saigon and parts of the airport, looking out his porthole. But when you got on the ground you could feel it. You can feel tension. And these fellows were really... It was only the night before, or two nights before, that they had an attack there. So they
- 31:30 just tried to blow up a plane or some damn thing, but that was not on. No damn way. So yeah, it was quite an impressive [sight].

**What was the date of your arrival?**

May, I think.

**It was fairly hot, not raining?**

Oh, it was hot. It wasn't until much later that I felt any rain. But I remember what it was like, out on operations...

32:10 **You mentioned your first encounter with the monsoon rain?**

Yeah, that was up north. And it's like our tropic rain. Lots of it. But just before it started to pour,

32:31 I thought, "I'm not hearing this." I could hear this song, 'Raindrops Are [Keep] Falling On My Head. And it was one of the army soldiers, had a little trannie [transistor radio]. And it was turned up just too loud. I wasn't the only one to hear it, the commander heard it, too. And he dealt with him, very severely. And I didn't hear that little trannie at all after that. But that's why I remember the song. It started to rain, then it started to bucket down and so on.

33:03 And it was really no different to Darwin. In Darwin, when it opened its skies... It was probably just as quick. Rain for an hour, then it was gone. This sort of tropical weather. Bloody hell, wet.

**You landed in Tan Son Nhut and you headed off**

33:30 **up north. Can you tell us about the first action you were involved, with the Vietnamese army Troops. This would be the first time you were under fire.**

I think it was my second operation, and I wasn't... The second, I think.

34:03 A fellow I was talking to in Da Nang, on the way up there, and he only had a month or so to go, and he said to me, "I hope for you that you have your first contact quickly." Because, you don't know. You don't know how you are going to conduct yourself. Am I going to be able to do what I have got to do?

34:31 This wasn't a long extended contact. The commander and I went forward...

**Can you take us through this step by step, for the Archive? What contact is, how you know about it, and where you are in the moment?**

I don't say this for all Vietnamese units. This was a unit that I (UNCLEAR)

35:00 and the commanders idea. In the Australian Army, we have a lead section of the platoon. We used to have two, then we'd have other sections. So if something happened at the point, these blokes were there very quickly. This is what happened. The lead sections, two sections left and right, made contact with the NVA.

**Where were you?**

35:30 About the middle. There would have been a company in front of me.

**What were you doing and why you were on this operation?**

It was just a search and destroy. We used to go out and search, and if we found them we'd destroy them. Some roles were cordon and search... Most of ours was the ARVN, which was their regular army against the NVA, which was their regular army, the North [Vietnamese Army].

36:03 The North was trying to control the province, and we didn't want to let them do that. And we used to go out, and it was a well-known fact that if you vigorously patrol, okay, you might have contact, but you won't have a big war. You're really disrupting them, and that is one of the Australian teachings.

36:30 Long Tan, where a company of Australian infantrymen, met a whole damn D445. I think they were outnumbered ten to one. And the reason they dumped them was because they were vigorously patrolling and therefore having security. We all know about that battle. Australians lost lives, but so did D445.

37:04 That just gives you the spirit of the Australian soldier, really.

**You were an adviser, with how many other Australians were you with?**

Oh, up in Quang Tri, I think there was about eight of us, spread throughout the province, doing different jobs. We had an Australian major up there, he had a role...

37:34 I think there was eight warrant officers. Six to eight, in any case. At various times of their tour. If you saw each other once every three months, you were lucky I guess. Because my battalion would be out, and yours would be in. I'd come in and you'd go out. So you may not see each other.

38:00 **In this particular instance you were walking along, and you were essentially the only Australian adviser with the...**

With that particular battalion, yeah. I knew there were other Australian warrant officers out in the field, but with other units.

**So can you take us through...**

I don't know whether there is much to talk about. There was a sharp, short firefight. I have no memory

of anything

- 38:30 coming close to me. The forward elements dealt with it. And the NVA would pull out anyway, if they thought they were in danger of being encircled, or they were against a stronger group or whatever. You must remember, of course, one of my roles was, if the commander so desired,
- 39:00 was to bring in gun ships [airborne fire support] or artillery. It was as close as the radio. And they were well aware of that. And they were good soldiers, you couldn't take anything away from them. Not the troops that I met. They seemed to be well led. But of course, they had logistic problems...
- 39:32 **Why were you given that role, and not that role given to the ARVN? Why were you the only one able to call in an air strike?**
- That was probably our biggest role, I guess. Because we had the communications with the free world firepower. And most
- 40:00 of it was American. Awesome, absolutely awesome. And if I called for fire support, it was considered essential. Now I would never call fire support, unless the Vietnamese major said, "Can we get some artillery or gun ships?" or whatever. But [it] was my voice,
- 40:30 on my co-ordinates, of whatever firepower we needed. Now sometimes the Cobra [AH-1G Huey Cobra gun ships] gun ships would be required, and they would be escorted, sometimes by fighter jets, American. Generally they used to fly out themselves. But I had been in position where the fighters came.

**We're running out of tape.**

## Tape 7

- 00:43 **You were very good at describing the smells. Can you take us back through that smell that you talked about in the jungle?**
- The jungle has got its own personal aromas throughout it, anyway. But,
- 01:02 it is a tropical area. Obviously there is no showering every day when you are on operations, and you don't wear body deodorant, because smell travels. The aroma would be picked up when you didn't want it to be picked up.
- 01:30 All the weapons that were used, the cordite gets into your clothes and into your skin. So you've got that kind of smell. There is no real sanity, not sanity, not sanitary,
- 02:03 so you've got all the human odours as well. That's a part of nature, isn't it? And wounded people, because of the loss of blood, or blood, has its own aroma as well. So you kind of join all these smells... I suppose, you are
- 02:30 accustomed to them, and you don't want to be. That's why I say, you can watch a war on TV or at a movie house, but you can't smell it. That still sticks to me. Something will happen and my mind will race back to all those years ago, and there will be a smell of body odour or a
- 03:00 wounded man, or whatever. It's war. So you're training comes into force. A bit of self-discipline. And you say to yourself, "Well, I'm not the only one smelling this either."
- 03:31 There are all these young Vietnamese soldiers around, so they've got to be smelling. So they've got to be smelling the war, and apart from that it was damn noisy as well. It's just my impressions. I know my friend and I were talking about it, and there was little difference. He got the smell of war. I have no idea
- 04:00 what Flanders would smell like, or Gallipoli, but I can think about it, that it would probably smell the same. Probably worse than Vietnam, because of the mud and the huge amount of explosions and buried people...
- Are your sense more heightened, because you are more alert, when you are operations?**
- 04:32 I guess so, because you are damned alert, to just about anything. And I think this is instilled into you, in your training before you go away, because if you are not alert,
- 05:00 you are running a huge risk of becoming a casualty. Not that that would stop you, but at least it would take some of the element away from it. Some of the team players lost their lives...
- 05:38 it was nothing to do with their alertness, it was just what they were doing. And I'm a believer, I do, providing you follow those rules. When the Good Lord taps you on the shoulder and says that it is time for you to go, whether

06:00 you're crossing a road in Adelaide or whether you are over there. But the danger there, is multiplied, by whatever times you want to multiply it by, but as some people say, "It's more dangerous driving a car in Australia than it was over there." But I know where I'd rather be, driving a car in Australia, for sure.

**How hard was it with the isolation? Because you were essentially on your own...**

- 06:33 Yeah, generally... My immediate, who was a major, then there was me as the warrant officer, and I was his deputy, even though he might have had a lieutenant or a captain, but we had an experienced gunnery sergeant as well.
- 07:00 There were times when I operated alone. And I don't think I've ever been more alone in my life. Nothing against the Vietnamese people... And even if I was with an American, I was still alone. Americans have got their culture, the same as we do.
- 07:37 Obviously we could understand each other, because of the language, but it was still lonely. And I think that was one of the biggest problems we had. Being lonely, not so much alone, being lonely.
- 08:03 Yep, it was very real. It was very real indeed. I guess the other concern that you had, but it didn't stay with you for long, there were all sorts of reports saying,
- 08:31 and I know it happened to some of my peers, during the ten years that the team worked in Vietnam. But some got left behind. So that was in the back of your mind. You'd think, "God, I hope they don't run away and leave me here by myself." And after a while I thought, "I'm all right. They won't do that to me."
- 09:02 But it happened to a friend of mine, which is another story. He was in this compound, fire base, and it was at night. And
- 09:31 this was pretty early on, about nine o'clock or something. All of a sudden, there was... under attack. So I got into a position where I could see, and I could see all this green tracer coming into where poor old Ray was, and I thought to myself...
- 10:01 But then this rather urgent voice said, "I think there's only me and a dozen or so soldiers left here, and the rest have run away." My Vietnamese commander was a jump ahead of me, because I went and I said, "My friend is in trouble." And he looked at me and he said, "We are now going." And he mobilised a force of
- 10:30 about thirty or forty blokes, and we took off. And they knew we were coming, so they just withdrew. Ray was all right, but there was a hell of a row afterwards. Peoples heads rolled. And the unit was divided up into other units... But I could imagine it would be damn lonely. Having all this stuff coming around your ears and there's
- 11:00 nobody with you. It would be the Vietnamese fellows I went there with. He also had... They were pretty crafty people, these were the Viet Cong. And they were well trained. Some of them were almost regular. But
- 11:30 they knew that we were coming, and it didn't want to get involved with us. They thought they had a pretty soft sort of job there, but it didn't turn out to be. And then, what we used to call the action forces, because of Ray, really. I just wouldn't... I went by myself.
- 12:00 But from that, we worked out an escape for him, if it ever happened again. Which it didn't. Because the Vietnamese authorities... I think the company commander was Jar, I think. Anyway, that was a long time ago.

**How did you regard the soldiers you were fighting with? The South Vietnamese soldier?**

- 12:41 Up in Quang Tri province I thought they were very good. They were well led from their general down. And you must remember they were very experienced people. A lot of the older
- 13:03 ones had probably been wounded two or three times, but the government said, "No, you have to go again." Down south, I used to have a bit of concern, because they were not that good. And it wasn't because of them. A lot of them were not fit enough to be in the ARVN, because of previous wounds or whatever.
- 13:30 I must say one of the company's I was with was quite good. The other one was... different. And obviously I lived with the good one. It was very difficult. Generally speaking,
- 14:00 my experience. Not yours or anybody else's, and I call the fellows I was with, was tough nuts. They were really pretty good.

**Were they superstitious?**

That's a good question. I really don't know.

**Any particular rituals**

14:30 **they might have gone through before going on...**

I don't know. I would never be a part of that. What they did in their own hoods, or your home, or whatever, I was never a part of anyway.

**How did they deal with casualties?**

Well, up in Quang Tri province, they would come into

15:00 MASH [US Mobile Army Surgical Hospital] hospital. Which was pretty big. That could take a hundred odd wounded at one time. And obviously they were categorised and so forth. And I didn't have a great deal to do, but I went with Snow Lawrence to a rehabilitation hospital, for after-wounds, and so on. And I was a bit shocked...

15:39 what's the word? It was pretty sparse. And I remember one soldier... I think it was his mother nursing him, because there was nobody else around, because they were probably involved with the sick or whatever. But I just felt it was a pretty sparse place. But that was as close as

16:00 I got to any of that sort of thing.

**Just on some of the practicalities. How does one go about calling in an air strike? What are the code words you're using and who are you talking to?**

I think this is the easy way to explain, I've got a call sign...

**What was your call sign?**

Zulu... but I can't remember the figures now.

16:32 I know Zulu. That would put me into the regimental command post where all the so-called experts were. And I would request an air strike and that was about it. I would then give the co-ordinates. This fellow called Dick Gravy, he was an American army pilot captain.

17:03 Because I couldn't talk to the pilots. On occasion, I was required to go forward and lay out an identification panel. Dick was in a light aircraft that had smoke pockets. He identified my boundary,

17:31 because the last thing you needed, in my day they were [F4] Phantoms, and the old jet jockeys, whoa, they were jet jockeys all right. That was about it. There were other air strikes that took planning, and not by me, but the authorities. Such as the B52s. I can't remember the code for that.

18:01 It was like arc light or something. But that was planned by intelligence, and if you were in the area, you were warned about this code name, 'arc light' - you knew it was B52s. I never heard them, and I never saw, except I saw where they were dropping

18:30 their bombs. And our safety distance, I think, was about four thousand metres. The zone between them and us. But that was planned by the authorities, and that used to take about twenty four hours, to start from A to B. And they were able to sight... But I was never involved in planning one of those.

19:01 Just a quick, "I need a bit of help," sort of thing.

**What's it like when the Phantoms are coming in?**

Damn noisy. Because of Dick and his guidance... He'd know where I was, and he had a good idea of where the NVA was as well. And these fellows are speeding at whatever speed they are. So they come in with their bombs and their napalm.

19:35 And Dick is saying to me, "How's it look to you?" "You're way off," or, "You're damn close!" Or whatever. Then he would tell the pilots. And once they finished their weapons they would fly back home. Sometimes we had to get more, or sometimes I would say, "Yeah, pretty good."

20:00 But I need a bit of artillery to clean up a little bit." But old Dick was always there. When you were in contact, he was there. And you needed him. He was a good bloke. He used to cost me a fortune. He used to drink beer like it was going out of fashion. But he was a top man. And it's only just... It's only the last five or ten years we lost contact.

**Where is he?**

20:30 I have no idea. He was a Texan, and I just assume he went back to Texas. He would be out of the service anyway.

**After the air-strike, what would you do?**

Depending on the time of day... If it was early morning, we'd keep on with our operation orders. If it was late in the afternoon... You see, we used to go

21:00 into a place where we would have our evening meal. And evening meal would finish, then we would move into our night position, all nice and quietly. No noise, no lights, no nothing, which would be perhaps a mile away from where we had dinner. And we would spend the night there. Depending on the

situation,

21:30 you dug a fire pit or not. Our commander used to help his fellow to dig a fire pit, I would help my fellow dig a fire pit. But you just went about your business, as simple as that. Like the banker, goes down and banks his money and goes about his banking business.

**After you an air-strike, you've got to go and see what happened?**

Oh yes.

22:00 I used to go and have a look because the Yanks would say, "Get a body count," this sort of thing. So these are pretty big explosions, so you are lucky to... Some would say, "Oh, we've got twenty killed."

22:32 So all the weapons would be brought in. "Where's the rest of the weapons?" "We couldn't find any more." And we were warned about this. That they liked to build up their body count. So unless you could show me twenty weapons, you've only got twelve, because I can see twelve weapons.

**Was it the role of the Australian Army**

**23:00 Training Team to do body counts?**

Only verification. I didn't interfere too much, unless it was outrageous. It didn't concern me if a commander wanted to say, "We killed twenty but we've only got six rifles." But if he said, "We killed five hundred, but we've only got a hundred rifles," I would say, "No, that's not quite right."

23:31 And the NVA anyway, very rarely left anybody behind, dead or wounded. There were occasions, but not often. And of course, they were pretty clever people. They weren't going to hang around for all these vicious air-strikes to come on them, and that sort of thing. Unless, of course, they wanted...

24:00 Like over near the Malaysian border there was a fire base called... Tun Tavern, I think. That's where my two friends there, Tommy Borders and Ocker Burney, they were pretty badly wounded by mortar shrapnel. And the NVA were pretty fair dinkum about taking the base because they were a pain to the NVA. As a matter of fact, the base was abandoned because of the

24:30 numbers. Tommy and Ocker were evacuated with some Americans. Then the authorities sent in the B52s and then just took it out. I never went there, that was just the military reading of it. Then later on, the ARVN came to see if there was any other interest. As far as I know

25:00 they had a look at the area... I think I'd moved just after that anyway, and I don't know if they re-deployed or not.

**What was the fire base you spent most time at, up north?**

We rotated, by units. The fire bases were for you to work from...

**Can you remember the names?**

I remember one or two. Fuller was one.

25:31 Which was not a friendly place. And up near the actual DMZ [Demilitarised Zone], there was Camp Alpha and Bravo. Another one was called 'Sarge'. Sarge, yeah.

**Can you tell us about how a fire base was organised? What life was like on a fire base?**

It was pretty sparse.

26:01 I'm just going to talk about Fuller, because Fuller was on top of this hill, mountain. Everything was dug in. The command post was dug in, even the mortar ammunition. And you had barbed wire defences around the perimeter and the whole unit had its fire trenches and so forth.

26:30 But you worked out of there, the battalion would go there. Depending on the Vietnamese commander, he might send a company out to do this vigorous patrolling. Because you didn't need them on your back. And unless you did that, they were after your patrols. And it wasn't always the war. Sometimes it became damn boring, because you were walking, walking, walking.

27:00 Hop in a chopper, go somewhere else, walk, walk, walk. Not hear a shot. Other times, of course, you would hear more shots than you really wanted to.

**What armament is at a fire base?**

Most of it is small arms, such as rifles and machine guns, grenade launchers. Depending.

27:32 Some of the fire bases were equipped with equipped with one oh five artillery pieces. But generally speaking, it was the riflemen. In the infantry, on the fire base. With small arms, generally, with eighty-one [millimetre] mortars and grenade launchers. All the stuff that you used to patrol with, anyway.

28:02 **And did you do any searches with helicopter, or...**

I had my share.

**Can you take us through how that worked?**

Just quickly. I used to fly with the commander. This particular fellow would have one or two squads fly in to hold a ground. Generally one, but anyway,

28:32 then we would go in there and he would direct traffic.

**Can you take us through it? How does it work?**

It's very simple. Depending on how many people go into this area. The chopper that would go in and dispatch a squad, and that was to put fire on the ground.

29:00 By the same token, you've got Cobra gun ships flying around and brassing [many brass shell/bullet cases] up the area, from where you're going to land, for perhaps a kilometre or two. Giving whatever was in the bush or not, a pretty hard time. Then he comes in, his men come off, he dispatches them where he wants them. Then, once all that is done, unless we're in contact, they go away and the Cobras go away, and we go about our business.

29:33 Nothing dramatic about it. It was just part of a job, and that's what you did.

**How many helicopters would normally bring you in?**

It was depending. You might have forty or fifty, if you were moving a lot of troops into an area. If it was only a company, you would have a dozen, or ten, or whatever.

30:00 **Were you ever on operations where there were forty or fifty helicopters?**

Not really. I've seen them in the air. And I've thought, "Hello, there's a mob going wherever." I don't think so. No I think about a dozen or fifteen would be about my biggest number.

**What are you taking in with you when you are doing this?**

You're armed, of course.

30:31 You're carrying your ammunition, change of socks.

**What are you wearing?**

I used to wear jungle greens, and I wore a brassard that had the rising sun, the team badge, and my rank. I was unlike the Vietnamese, because some of them used to wear helmets and some didn't.

31:02 But generally, you knew the area where you were going. And if it was a nasty one, well, you might be required to wear a helmet or something. Particularly on Fuller, there were helmets and flack jackets for advisers, that were there. They were left there. But generally speaking, that was all they used to wear. Water, water was very precious.

31:31 And just little things to make your miserable life, more...

**What weapons did you carry?**

I carried an M-16 [machine gun], I carried an American 45 [revolver/hand gun]. I had a survival knife, and a little piece of equipment... apart from a radio and smoke grenades and that sort of thing.

32:00 There was a little piece of equipment called a strobe light, that if you needed to bring in choppers at night, you dug a little hole and put it down. This very bright, small light, and the chopper pilot would be able to see it. I think my

32:30 first operation I had two grenades. And the old Vietnamese commander said, "Why do you carry all this?" I said, "I might need it." "If you and I need to throw grenades, there will be plenty on the ground." Okay, those stay at home. I don't have to carry weight I don't have to carry.

**How many rounds of ammunition did you carry?**

33:04 I think I had about twenty rounds, and about fifty rounds for my rifle. Again, going back to this fellow... If I needed more, we would be in deep trouble, because there would be enough rounds on the ground. I used to lock it off to cut down the weight.

**What instructions did you have in case of your capture?**

33:32 I personally was given none, so there you go. My CO over there, we never spoke. He never spoke to us about, "This is your conduct." There was a conduct taught within the Australian army. When you were a young fellow and all that sort of thing.

34:00 But that was the closest I got to it. There was no, "All you've got to say is your number, rank and name and your religion," and that was about it. No.

- 34:34 **You were talking before, Ian, quite a while ago, about a point at which a man had made you a bit suspicious and you thought he may be VC. And you'd spoken to people and they observed him and he turned out to be VC. And you said that some Vietnamese guys like you had never seen, came and took him? Can you tell me**
- 35:00 **what you mean by that?**
- Yeah. They were Field Security Police. There are sorts of stories about them, but at first... I didn't believe them anyway. There was no messing around with them. In fact, the common nickname for them was 'White Mice'. I don't know where it came from, or why it was, there was no mice about them. But that was their role...
- 35:34 **So they were like military police, is that right?**
- I suppose you would call them that. The Asian countries would have their field security police. Malaya had Singas. They were pretty tough people. There were no 'beg pardons' with them. They would thump a woman, or a child or a bloke. Where you or I wouldn't hit a child.
- 36:01 If they got in their way... you got out of their way very quickly. But that was their role. But it was just that they came, with other Vietnamese, and there was a lot of gibbering, and they disappeared. And it wasn't until after when I spoke to an Australian major, at the time said, after being questioned, he belonged to whatever Viet Cong group.
- 36:30 He might have been a runner or whatever. He didn't cause any danger, he just did something that was suspicious. They said to be alert for all those sorts of things. It was one of those things, it was just something.
- 37:02 It was out of place. It might have been innocently done, but I thought, "No, I'll find out about you sport." So that was it.
- So these guys had a pretty fearsome reputation, these field police. Can you tell me what they looked like? How they were dressed?**
- They were dressed in like military uniforms, and obviously armed.
- 37:36 I'm trying to think of... They probably looked Vietnamese people, obviously they were and I think it was their reputation more than their looks,
- 38:01 that was spoken about. Not that they would do anything to me, because I wouldn't give them anything different to do with me. You head stories about them... A lot of the stories I used to dismiss. But I do know they had a reputation of being...
- 38:48 perhaps fierce might be the word. I never had anything to do with them, except I used to see them, and this one time.
- 39:01 It wasn't my role to be involved with them. It was purely this fellow did something, and I thought, "No, I'll just talk about it and see what comes out of it." Anyway, that was what I was told. I don't know what happened to the man, where he went to. Did he survive? I've got no idea.
- Were you there when they took him?**
- Yeah, I was there. Not in the inner group. But I was a bit further out with some of my Vietnamese soldiers,
- 39:30 and we were watching. And there was a lot of this and gibbering, too fast for me to pick up. Then they got into a vehicle and drove away.
- Was he resisting at all?**
- Not to my knowledge, no. Oh, it would have been stupid. There were half a dozen of these fellows. If he had resisted, well he would be shot. That was without any doubt, he would be shot.
- 40:00 **Did anything like that happen that you saw?**
- I never personally saw it, but I did know from other conversations where prisoners were taken and decided to scamper, and didn't get very far. Just clock, and gone.
- We'll just stop there...**

## Tape 8

- 00:54 **So Ian, how long in total were you in the north?**
- About five months, roughly.

01:03 **And then you were told you were leaving?**

Not only me, by the way. The system started what we called a MAC [MACV] Team. That's a mobile Australian training team. And myself and one , two three, four,

01:32 not all from my area of course, we were told to report to Saigon with all our gear. We got in there and old Clarkey gave us a briefing, that we were going to become Mac commanders. And our team hadn't come into country yet, they were still over here being trained. They were either corporals or sergeants.

02:00 One of them was a medic, had to be. One was an engineer. It didn't matter, the other two were riflemen or whatever. I had all corporals. One fellow Cage Jarret was an airborne platoon fellow. And so they were trained anyway here, so while we were waiting, we went to out where we were going to work, and we were kind of

02:30 by ourselves, and waiting for our team to come, and getting established. Getting our units, what we called our regional force soldiers, or what they called them. They were soldiers... A lot of them had been in the ARVN but were not fit enough to keep on serving in the ARVN. And also they were required to stay within

03:00 their province. And their commander was like the province chief. But they were spread throughout the province. So I lived with one of the companies.

**Was this a promotion, do you think?**

No, it was just a job.

**You were getting all these great guys who were going to come and work for you, and work with you?**

Yeah, they were, too. They were pretty good boys.

03:30 Some of them still call me father, because I was... The reason they liked us we were classed as experienced. And so your responsibility was to make sure they did they proper things anyway. As I used to tell them, when they first came to me, I said, "One of you do anything stupid,

04:00 and get me shot, I'll come back and shoot you." There's an NVA tried and I'm not going to have some idiot down here... I only at that time had about five months to go and I said, "I wanted to go home and see my wife and kids." By that time, I had a little boy. My wife was pregnant when I left. His name was Craig David. He works in China now.

04:30 But they were good. And it wasn't an easy role for any of us, particularly them. They were young brats, as I used to refer to mine. And the other team and Mac commanders had a similar group of people. As a matter of fact, the engineer fellow I had, I hadn't seen since Vietnam until we did our

05:02 40th anniversary in Perth last year, or the year before. Jeez, I know this face. He's an older face. And he said... they used to call me 'Skipper'. He said, "G'day, Skip. How you going?" "I know you." And he lives up at Maroochydore I think. Up past Brisbane. Had his wife there.

05:30 He was a good man. And I was able to... this is one thing, I kind of wrote my own rules. We used to call them standing orders, and I wrote my own. "The following things will happen." And this was based around our own security. We just relied

06:00 on each other. And we were all armed and we had our own machine guns and this sort of thing. We lived in this place. I know they didn't like me when I said, "We either protect ourselves... " So we sandbagged all this. We had our own little CB [command bunker]. At one time, there had to be one awake and ready to go. So I

06:30 made out a roster. And I had another warrant officer, who was my deputy. And he came in from Australia, so I used to take one shift, and he took the other one. So if you got a night off, this was when you were in the compound... That seemed to work all right. There were some other rules, too. I acquired a little fridge and a little generator and we had some cans of soft drink...

07:01 There was a little bit of beer there, but if you were on duty that night, you didn't drink. Even if you weren't on duty, you didn't drink a lot. A can of beer, fine, full stop. Two dangerous. Too dangerous. So we just had those little rules. And wherever you went you carried your weapon. And whatever you did, you made sure you didn't

07:30 do the same thing each day. The Vietnamese has got no toilets. I'm talking way out in the sticks. They'd just go to one place. So we built our own little thing. And I said, "Now, before you sit down on that thing, you have a good look, because it might be booby-trapped, some week."

08:02 So, fortunately, that never happened. But for example, we'd got these damn Australian flags, that between the governments we had to fly the Australian flag in the compound. It's my flag, fine. And I gave it to the corporal

08:30 who used to raise the Vietnamese flag. And our flag was to be below that, and smaller. But anyway, this

fellow, he used to go and raise his flag, and he'd grab hold this time and it blew his hand off. He set a pattern. And somebody sweated on him.

09:00 He wears a glove. You're kind of building up a trust, I guess. I didn't like people going anywhere away from the compound by themselves. Always someone with them, so there was a back-up if you needed it.

**What did the company compound consist of?**

This particular one I'm talking about is a company full of soldiers with their families. All living

09:30 in sand-bagged bunkers, which are about the size of my laundry, I guess...

**So no buildings?**

Yeah, right in the centre we had a building where the commander lived. And some of his officers, and we had a part of that, where I lived with my fellow officers. You wouldn't get much... Anyway, it kept the rain off.

**That would be a dangerous place**

10:00 **to be, the beacon in the centre, wouldn't it?**

Oh, I don't know if it was too much of a beacon. It was there when we got there. It seemed to work all right. There were similar companies around the place, with similar sort of old beat-up, shot-up old buildings, which had been reinforced with sandbags and that sort of thing. But within the

10:30 compound, they had their fighting areas, the same as we did. So we made sure we looked after ourselves, and the safety of each one of them. The village had three hamlets

11:04 I think about a thousand people, round about.

**Sorry, what was the village name?**

Phuc Loi, Hum Li was the next one, where this fellow got left behind. One of our roles was to help the village in this activity, which was a very difficult thing to do.

11:35 Because you are dealing with people... As I said three hamlets. One hamlet, depending on who was in the hamlet to what flag was flying. And you didn't blame... One was, the Americans were in the village, so up goes the American flag or whatever. And one hamlet was very pro-government, indeed. So two hamlets

12:00 were pretty good, but one was... I didn't go in there, unless I had a lot of soldiers with me. Then you are trying to get this village people, who really just want to harvest their rice and sow their rice...

12:33 The village used to have a village chief and a security chief, administration chief and all this sort of thing. So there was half a dozen of these responsible to the Vietnamese government for their village. So that would go to through the district chief, the province chief and eventually to the government if that is far as it went.

13:03 They didn't have much. There were poor people. Like a lot of Asians. And we've got poor people in this country, anyway. So we had to work pretty hard to get their confidence, I guess. And I'll always remember... Kids are kids, no matter where they are. And I saw an American

13:30 vehicle went through, and good-naturedly they threw lollies out either side of it, and here's all the kids scratching in the dirt and sand. So I went away to this American PX [Post Exchange - American canteen unit] store and bought all these boiled lollies wrapped in paper. Myself and one of the other blokes came with me, we had our pockets full of these. Pull one out, take the paper off, put in the mouth.

14:01 And these kids... And it was through them that we were able to get in with the people. And they did. The kids would come up, and all smile at you, and you would feel this little hand go into your pocket, and out would come a lolly. So they knew we would had lollies on us and they were most welcome to take one. You had to be watchful, because a kid could kill you as

14:30 well as anybody else. So you kind of looked and made sure their hands were empty before you let them anywhere near you. Because it was known, that a kid could drop a grenade in your pocket, if they were that way inclined, or their parents would do it. "You are going to do this." I never personally encountered any of this, but I heard about it. So again, you were very alert, even though they were young children.

15:00 This leads me onto this subject, where the government said that each village would have its Peoples Security Defence, or something. These boys were around about twelve, thirteen. And they were to taught do night patrolling in the north. They wore

15:30 little black shirts and things. Most of the weapons they had were American. Some of them were shorter than their rifle.

**They had arms?**

Yes. Eventually they got down to us. So we would practise patrolling in the daylight, sort of thing. All sorts of weapon training and...

- 16:00 no rounds at this time. Then you would take them out on the sand dunes and they would have a little shoot. Then the time came for us to get fair dinkum. And these are kids. And it's a game, but it's to be serious business. I went out, and I had two of my corporals with me... We'd gone in the village
- 16:30 all nice and quiet, in formation, all armed and I think we had gone past two or three houses, and there was a little pull on my trouser leg. It was one of these little boys. And at this time I had an interpreter, and I said, "What is he going on about?" "He'd like you to come in and have tea with his Mum and Dad."
- 17:02 That was the last place I wanted to go, because I didn't know who they were, and yet I couldn't say no because that kid could lose faith. So I said to them, "You stay there, you come with me," and the interpreter came. And his mum and dad, Vietnamese, too. Little 'cookies' or 'crackers', or whatever they called them. So we had a cup of tea
- 17:30 and a quick talk through the interpreter. There were other kiddies in there. So we did the right thing, thank you very much. We were only gone about two minutes. You couldn't say no. So after about eight
- 18:00 cups of tea, I said, "Okay, cut this." We had to have them back in the compound where they put their weapons away by midnight, so they could have a good sleep before they went to school the next day. So I made out a roster, and said them to them, "Here's the roster, three of you only. For a cup of tea, so I can say G'day to your mum and dad. No more. Because we've got to do the job."
- 18:33 And that worked. The Australian officer who was responsible to our CO, for the success of all this, contacted me to say he was going to stay a couple of nights with me to see how we were going. So I told his boy, "Big boss coming up from Saigon. We do good job for him tomorrow and the next night?" "Yep."
- 19:00 Still had the roster. His name was John Hartley. He was captain, and he retired as a major general. He was an excellent soldier. So he asked me all the questions, I said, "Yeah, well, you've got to realise they're kids. They're not adult soldiers. They're certainly not adult Australian soldiers. These are little boys, that I reckon
- 19:30 if they fired their American rifle it would break their back." But the danger was, that when you went into a village, they would load their weapons. You used to say, "Now load your weapons, but put the safety catch on. And don't put your finger anywhere near the trigger." I know, because I used to watch them, practising, the damn finger would go in the trigger guard. Dear me. That's what I said,
- 20:01 I was more petrified of being shot by them than by anyone else. So John and I went in and took a couple of corporals with us. And I suspected that... No, no, they wouldn't do that, because they knew it would be big trouble. We had gone in. A tug on John's trousers. And he said, "What's happening? What's going on?" "You have to go in for a cup of tea with the dad." "No, I can't do that."
- 20:32 Anyway, I said, "Well, you better, because if you don't, they will pack up and go home. It's as simple as that. However, we had three cups of tea, got back to the compound and he said, "Ian, that's quite not good enough now, is it?" I said, "Well you tell me a way to make it better, because I cant" think of one. And I have to live here." he came in by chopper...
- 21:01 I said, "You hop in the chopper and fly away, and I've still got these kids. And the only way I can get them to do the job is three a night. And we only stop for five minutes here, there and there. For the rest of the time we are going around this damn village, and patrol it, and I'm dreading if we ever make contact. Because I would have bet money...
- 21:32 And I would probably do the same myself, if I was a twelve year old boy and somebody fired at me with an automatic weapon, I'd run away, too. That's human nature. Fortunately in my time, anyway, these kids and I never made contact with any Viet Cong unit. I'm only talking about the children. There are other times that we did, but not with those kids. And
- 22:00 I was always very grateful about that. Because I didn't agree with the policy, but however, that was the government and you did what you were told. I used to think it was highly dangerous, I'll tell you. Mum and Dad can control say, two little kids. Try thirty of them. At night, all armed, and with a loaded weapon with the safety catch on.
- 22:33 We'd always look and say, "You've got the safety catch on, fine." But in the dark, did they flip it off? Yeah, I can tell you this. And I came so close to being fatally wounded... I used to carry this kind of roll of rain-proofing,
- 23:00 a roll about so long, and I used to pit it there. I used to use it as a cushion or something like that. And we're going along. And I heard the rifle fire. And I felt a tug. And my medic was behind me by about three paces. I said, "What happened?"
- 23:32 And when we got to the compound, you could see where the round had gone through this damn thing. I suppose it missed my spine by about this much. I never found out... It wasn't deliberately done. This was the danger, of this young kid... The army used to call it accidental discharge, where a soldier

24:00 would accidentally fire his rifle when he shouldn't have. He was in a lot of bother. So I just emphasised the danger of these little boys, inexperienced, handling weapons. Even though you taught them not to point a weapon at anybody, unless you're going to use it. Make sure your safety...

24:30 If you pick up a rifle, it's always loaded until you, yourself, makes sure it was safe.

**Where were these arms kept? Were they kept in the village?**

Yeah. A so-called security compound.

**Was it secure?**

I think you and I could have got in and lifted the lot. They were pretty old weapons, too. But an old weapon will kill you just as much as a knew one will.

25:01 They were checked each day. I suppose it was my business, but the village chief and the security chief, would be in a lot of bother with the district chief, and then probably to the province chief. And they probably would have lost their titles as well.

25:30 So that is just about the kids. I have a friend, who was here yesterday, and some years ago... Obviously we've got civilian friends as well, and two of them like to hear it all again... And Vicky says, "Ian doesn't say much about the war."

26:00 "What was it like?" And Bill is a character, he comes from Western Australia. He's married here and lives up at Woodside. And I heard it and I thought, "Oh, last thing I need." And I looked at Bill's face, and he wears a very short neat beard, and he said, "Vicky,

26:30 we had some marvellous times. It was absolutely marvellous to catch up with a couple of your mates and have a few drinks and know that your safe and so forth. Intermingled by pure terror." And I thought, "I never even thought about it that way." He and I met a couple of times, and we kind of got very close. But I couldn't think of any better way of putting

27:00 what he was trying to say. He was abandoned. The Yanks daren't leave anything around. The greatest scrounger you could ever meet. He was a real professional scrounger, and a very good friend, and we still are, and we never talk about this. But I looked at Vicky's face and she had this

27:30 look of horror. And it wasn't because he had said anything, it was just that he had woken her up. But it wasn't a thing that we talked about.

**So these kids have given you an interesting set of experiences. Tested you a bit. What else were your main responsibilities? Did you do any intelligence gathering?**

Not...

28:03 Not as like the professionals, the intelligence gatherings, and those who disseminate the information. I never used to go to bed much before midnight, on any night. And this night I was going around the compound,

28:30 I had one of my corporals with me. Just making sure they were awake. Those people on duty. And we went back to our little command post, and I had a starlight scope [night vision scope on a rifle]. And I don't know why, I just thought "Ahh, I'll have a look out there." And here's this figure,

29:00 to me, looked like digging. I said to the engineer, "Have a look at that." And he said, "That's a bloke." You could see through this starlight scope. It was early days, it was kind of a green thing, and as long as you had starlight, you could make out shapes. "Oh, probably a villager."

29:30 However, I went for a walk with two of my blokes, just for a walk to see if we could see him, and we couldn't. It had to be a villager. And a couple of nights later, I thought I'd have a look, and there he was again. Now I'm getting close to coming home, and

30:00 we went to have a good look. Anyway, I put it into the system [reported it], that maybe somebody was doing things outside the defences of the village that perhaps they shouldn't be. And there was... We sent our patrols, platoon sized patrols,

30:30 and we had a lay-up at night, just to see if we could get him. And it was the last day... I wasn't there, later on I was told that my blokes with the company were coming back after an operation, and the lead, as the Yanks called it "The Point,"

31:00 or as we called it the first scout, saw this face disappearing down a hole. And pulling this thing down on top of him. So they soon fixed that up. And the Viet Cong had been digging, so that they could have ammunition and food

31:31 to supply a couple of Viet Cong companies in their attacks around the area. They found... they were excellent in their camouflage. So of course, they went down, the top was pulled up and a couple of grenades went down. My memory of it,

32:01 I think there were three or four of them, digging down there during the day, and coming out during the night doing what they were going to. And of course, I'd left by that. But I was told that that was the exercise of these people, and their patient... And there was nothing to see. There was no spilt dirt. God knows where they took it. It was like

32:30 that movie, called The Great Escape or something, and this fellow walking around the compound, letting all this dirt out. But they were very good at camouflage.

**What was the standard operation that you would be doing?**

Well, search and destroy.

33:00 Sometimes a bit of cordon. We cordoned our own village, on one of the operations. We found, like a cache of arms and ammunition and that sort of thing. I think a couple of people were taken away for questioning, but to the best of my knowledge, they came back. They must have

33:30 had a suspicion. But we cordoned the whole village, and there was nobody getting out of the village. And I think the search was... if you wanted to put a figure on it, their efficiency would be fifty per cent. But with the poor old RF and that thing, you couldn't do much more.

34:00 They did a job as they could. Not as good as the ARVN, because the ARVN would have torn the place apart, anyway. But normally search and destroy, as they used to call it. Cordon and search. If some information would sneak into the village, the security was

34:30 heightened to a degree where, if you were Viet Cong it was advisable that you didn't come in. So a lot of the stuff that you got come from the villagers. I helped a young schoolboy, I think he was about twelve. When I say I helped, I just saw him one day and he had these nasty sores on his legs, which turned out to be ulcerated and all this.

35:02 And I said to him, "You better come with me and I'll get a doctor to look at it." And he wouldn't have a bar of it. And then another day I was up there, he was there and there was an older lady with him. I had my interpreter and I said, "Ah, he is her grandson," and he was. And through the interpreter I said to her, "If he doesn't get his legs fixed, he is going to be a very sick boy."

35:30 So their discussion was too quick for me to pick up. He got his ears boxed by his grandmother. And we had a vehicle out on the main sort of road, (UNCLEAR) and the rest was all dirt.

36:01 And, "Can you drive?" His eyes widened. "Would you like to drive my vehicle?" So I sat him on my lap, I did all the gears and he steered with a bit of help from me. And he said, "We go to your compound?" "Yeah. But we go up here first, and I'll turn around so you can drive through the village and you can wave

36:30 to your mates." And my medic, I said, "Whatever you do, don't hurt him." We gave him a can of whatever drink there was. And Mick, over about three weeks, four weeks, worked on his legs, got them all cleaned up. So for being a good boy and a brave boy, he used to get a can of drink and a couple of lollies.

37:00 Providing we were within the compound, he used to drive my vehicle around. Which was all sandbagged and that sort of thing. I didn't have any big worry about him, he seemed to be pretty good. And meeting his grandmother, there was no nonsense with her. So I suppose you did a little bit of good.

37:30 He might remember the Australian soldiers that looked after his legs. If he is alive today, I don't know. I reckon he would remember the lollies anyway, if he was alive today. But we used to do those... I use the term lightly, I guess. I acquired a water pump, with all its connections and pipes and that sort of thing.

38:00 And the people of the village would obviously drink from the water of their wells. If you and I drank that water, it would kill you. But they drank and bathed in and cooked in it. So we thought it would be a good idea if we went around and cleaned all the wells out. So at least they could start with pretty good water. Jeez, there were all sorts of things down

38:30 the bottom of a well. And the water table is pretty high, anyway. We went around the village. Obviously protected by the soldiers, and we got rid of all the junk that we could from their wells. We got ten marks for that. And the village chief had a big smile, and it really came from him, not us, that the chief reckoned it was time to clean the wells up.

39:00 So he got a pat on the back.

**What was down them?**

A lot of sludge to start with, but there was you name it, I think, cans, bottles, bits of barbed wire. One of them that was cleaned out had a lot of empty canisters, from artillery. Empty,

39:30 not dangerous at all. And of course, they were drinking this. To their standards, they were very clean people. Each day you would see them, even the ladies, pour over the bucket of water and put the soap on. All modestly dressed. And the blokes the same, every day. And the water wasn't too...

40:02 But that was all that they had. People said, "Oh, they're dirty." By our standards they are, in our own country. But there it was quite presentable. Their hygiene was pretty non-existent. Particularly their toilet habits and that sort of thing.

40:34 But they've been living like that for thousands of years. From one generation to another.

**I'll just stop there.**

## Tape 9

00:43 **Was this part of the so-called 'Hearts And Minds' campaign, that you were involved in, in helping out the villagers?**

I guess it was. Because the Americans had that policy of

01:00 winning the hearts and minds of the people, and obviously the South Vietnamese Government would have had the same idea, I guess. You must remember that us garden-type soldiers weren't involved too much in the politics.

**Were you briefed to actually go out there and get involved in more of these social-welfare sort of things.**

The only briefing I got, and I assume the other fellows did as well, was that we

01:30 were to help the village, to run and organise their own security, and we were there to assist them, in the training. Because of the RF [Regional Forces] companies that were living around the village. And don't forget the little schoolboys that used to patrol at night.

02:01 I really don't know the politics of it. It eventually came down... It was briefed when I came from up north down to do that job. I don't think, in the media, put it that way, to win the hearts and minds of these Vietnamese people. And the Vietnamese government is saying to them, "We can protect you in your village.

02:30 But you've got to help us." But that is as far as I ever went with it. I don't know what the idea was amongst the hierarchy of the Australian forces were.

**Were you briefed to actually fix the wells and do things like that?**

No, we just did it, on our own. I suppose in the briefing were the words, "Assist where you can," but it was just an idea that we'd kind of say to the village chiefs... and I wouldn't be the only one to do that.

03:00 **Can you describe the smells of the village for us?**

Well, the cooking, because of their diet, their cooking smells are a bit different to ours, in as much as their staple diet was rice, cooked in big coppers.

03:32 I don't know whether you've ever smelt it, but you know how rice will burn and then as the rice was handed out everywhere, you could smell the smell of burnt rice. And I would head straight forward to get a piece, it was damn beautiful. But it had a smell, all of its own. I guess there was the

04:00 toiletry smells, that were there. But generally speaking, the air was pretty good, I guess. Because you didn't have, unless you were unfortunate, where you had a contact or something, but you didn't have the smells of the war, as we discussed earlier.

04:32 Unless of course, the Viet Cong got into the village, and so there was a bit of a fight.

**Did that happen?**

Oh yes, a couple of times.

**Would you care to tell us about that?**

It was on a bit of information, I guess, we knew they'd come in not only to put the fear of god into the village, but they would come in for money and clothing

05:00 and food and that sort of supply. And with them would be the propaganda thing as well. So we just knew that they were coming. And the Viet commander and I, we planned an ambush. And most of them didn't hear the Claymores [land mines] going off, because they were dead.

05:30 So that kind of put a stop to that nonsense for a while. But a couple of times, small groups got in and terrorised some of the people. And as soon as they knew you were coming, they left. They sometimes weren't very nice people at all.

**What did they do to terrorise the civilian population?**

- 06:08 They would kill the son or the daughter of the village chief and tell him to behave. Or someone in the village committee. They would shoot one of them, or whatever. So the message would be,
- 06:36 "The South Vietnamese government can't protect you because we can get in any time we want." So there was a fair bit of terror amongst the civil populace. And it was very, very difficult to keep them out, really.
- How did you feel about the Viet Cong, as an enemy?**
- 07:08 I suppose to put it bluntly, I didn't like them. I didn't like their manners, in as much as picking on innocent people. Now, within the Viet Cong structure, there was the regular Viet Cong units, that would fight.
- 07:33 But then there was this element, also, and I've got no idea what they were called, that would do this terror thing. It was very bloodthirsty, indeed.
- It was on both sides of course, wasn't it?**
- I don't know, how you mean?
- There was a thing called Operation Phoenix, I believe, that was also operating in a similar vein on the South Vietnamese soldiers...**
- I have to be honest, I was never, ever involved with
- 08:00 the Phoenix [The CIA still had a role to play, however. Called Operation Phoenix, it was an assassination program plain and simple.] [see [http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/CIA%20Hits/Vietnam6475\\_CIAHits.html](http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/CIA%20Hits/Vietnam6475_CIAHits.html)] program. Sure, I know about it. Half that I heard about it I disbelieved anyway, because a story will be exaggerated. But I knew they were pretty dangerous people that you didn't mess around with. Nobody. But that's about all I know about the thing. If you wanted to know, you would have to talk to someone who was involved in the program.
- 08:30 **Were you counting the days until you left Vietnam, at this stage?**
- Not until I got close. And I used to see some people, and they had a map of Vietnam and there was three hundred and sixty five squares on it, and they would tick off each one. I thought, "Jeez, that would drag." So it wasn't until I got very close...
- Did you become more**
- 09:00 **cautious as you got towards the end of your stay?**
- The policy was, by our commander anyway, generally speaking, but about three weeks or so before you were due to go home, you came out of the field. And were put in a more secure area, because your time was so short.
- I've had courage described to me like a box of matches.**
- 09:30 **You start off with a full box, and one by one you use up all your matches. Do you think that is a fair description?**
- I guess so. You hear all sorts of descriptions about it. I guess sub-consciously you say, "I don't know if I can do this much longer."
- 10:02 That was a close shave, and this was a close shave, and I'm getting short." And that is one of the reasons why our commander, anyway, said, "Out you come. You come live with me." He put you on the plane and sent you home. Courage? I really don't know...
- 10:31 I think the human mind is pretty good, where you made contact with the enemy, you knew your responsibilities and what you had to do, and you became so busy that a lot of it, you didn't remember. Unless somebody said, "Remember so and so?" "No, I don't. What happened?" Somebody saw it,
- 11:00 but your mind didn't register, until probably a day after, and, "Oh jeez, I hope we don't have any more of those." And then you would go out on operations, and I think you were very apprehensive about it, until you made contact, then away you went again. So a box of matches? I suppose.
- 11:44 **You obviously need to steel your nerve to go and do these hazardous things. How you deal with that is quite...**
- I reckon that you go back to the standard that has been set
- 12:00 by my previous peers, and I'm talking about the platoon. And then go back a bit further to Gallipoli, and your mind says, "My God, I couldn't let those men down." By doing nothing. Now whether that's courage or whatever you call it. I think I said before, you were waiting for the first contact.

12:30 Am I going to be good enough? I know that I'm not going to run away, but am I going to be good enough to do my job and shut out the horrors.

**In that situation, what is your greatest fear before you have the contact? Is it the fear of a personal wound or letting the side down, or letting your mates down?**

I don't know.

13:03 I don't know whether you can call it a fear. I never became blasé about anything. My concern was that I did my job. I suppose that I had a bit of a fear that I didn't want to spoil the reputation of my unit.

13:31 And I didn't want to... I wanted to do a good job because of these people before me, who had the courage to lay down the standard, so I can't go much past that.

**What wound did you fear the most?**

I'm not sure I feared...

14:00 Obviously you fear being hurt. I don't think I thought about it, except maybe losing the sight. However, I'm assuming I would have coped with that. Because I had met old soldiers who had lost their sight and they were pretty good. Most of them were damn scallywags. Yeah,

14:30 and I suppose losing your limbs. I had a fellow who lost his legs to a mine. I didn't see it, I wasn't there. But I knew him, briefly, later on. I met him in Canberra a couple of times, and he was in a wheelchair. He didn't have any legs. His attitude, I thought, was tremendous. And he got on with his life

15:00 and he did what he had to do.

**What is your happiest memory from Vietnam?**

Oh, there's a number of them. I suppose you'd have to say happy memories, where you'd go down to the house in Da Nang, and there would be a great feeling to see these men,

15:30 as well as yourself. Which you hadn't seen for three months, but you had probably picked up a little bit and say, "Well, I'm glad I'm not there." Yeah, they're the happy ones. Yeah, they're the happy times. And to enjoy their company and their good-natured stirring and the darts... Yeah, I think they're our best times,

16:01 I'm sure they were.

**Getting letters from home? Did you look forward to that?**

Yeah, it was always great to hear from your wife. And young Phil, he was getting older and going to school, and he would say, "Hi, Dad, I've been doing this..." four lines. Yeah, it was a great feeling.

16:30 I suppose then your mind says, "God, I miss them." But you are one of many who miss their families?

**How did you feel the war was going, and how did that change between when you first arrived and towards the end of your time there?**

I'm only speaking of myself,

17:00 and more learned people would have a better idea than me, but I always had a feeling that... it was a waste. But I would try and look to the horizon and say, "Are we doing enough? If we are, then how

17:30 come they are still coming down from the north?" And they were, and not only that they were bringing lots of armaments and so forth. And I think I had been home about a year or so, and I used to listen to a little bit...

18:00 The Americans were pulling out a lot of their troops, and handing over responsibility over to the South. And in my little world, because the generals did all this, the politicians, the South had no hope. They were doomed, without the support of the Americans, really. And the money they were pouring into the country.

18:32 No discredit to them. I just felt the North had more will than what the South did. And more determined. But I've got to say this, there were some very determined ARVN men. And I go back to mine, back to the whole division, because they would have met the blunt of it, when

19:00 they stormed across the DMZ. And I doubt very much whether a lot of them survived. I don't know. That's just my opinion.

**Towards the end of your stay, how had you changed, personally? From the person who stepped off the plane, before...**

You'd have to ask my doctor, or more importantly my wife. She... never

19:30 said much for a long time. And I just thought I was all right. And then one day she said, "Why are you so short with the children?" And I said, "No, I'm not." "Yes you are." Then this led to other things, and she

said, "You always seem to be angry." I said, "No, I'm not."

20:03 So, she said, "I love you dearly, but you're not the man I married, from thirty five years ago," sort of thing. So it made me think, so then I went, of course, and had a yarn to Martin. He said, "Yes, of course, I've seen the signs." He said, "You just need to be able to get over some of the stuff. And you need skilled help to do it, and he was a great help, as a matter of fact, because

20:35 he was an ex-army doctor, anyway. And with the help of that lady out there and my kids, I was able to overcome these things that had been gnawing away at me for years. And I'm not ashamed of it, I take a medication to keep me calm, I suppose.

21:04 I haven't spoken about Vietnam as much as I have today, and I probably never will. And I don't watch the warries [war stories, yarns], and I don't read the warries, because I don't want to be reminded of it. Because it reminds you of the people as well, not only the soldiers.

21:32 And you look back and say, "Why was this? What good was the effort, at the end of the day?" Australians, Americans, Vietnamese lost lives, and the other side lost lives. But I go back to my point, I don't think the South Vietnamese had the will to win, as a whole body.

22:00 Parts of the body had a will. There are people in more places of authority than me, might have a different answer. But you saw the things on TV, didn't you? When there were choppers being pushed off aircraft carriers. People trying to escape in choppers, to get out of the road of the North Vietnamese.

**You saw that on television, how did that affect you at the time it was being shown?**

It annoyed me.

22:30 Here you are... and you've got to say, the will of the American people as well, their will was fading, but the will of the North wasn't. It was grabbing momentum.

**What was it like jumping on the plane coming back to Australia?**

23:00 I don't want to get too involved in this...

**Just tell us what you can?**

I got injured, and I spent a little bit of time in the Australian Field Hospital. I was shipped out by Hercules [C130 aircraft] to Butterworth, with other casualties.

23:30 The next night we flew from Butterworth to Richmond. I have no memory of the trip at all. Just a beautiful nurse in a RAAF uniform said, "It's time you went to sleep." She gave me this thing, in a little bit of orange juice or something, and thirteen and a half hours later she was tightening my straps and saying, "We're about to land." I spent a little bit of time

24:00 in the army hospital at Ingleburn, where I saw specialists and all this sort of thing. It was my shoulders and upper back which was hurt. "You suffered nerve damage in the soft tissue, badly bruised..."

**Can you tell me how you injured yourself?**

Yeah, I got... I can tell you this and that's as far as I'll go. There was a huge explosion and I was just

24:30 close enough for the blast to move me some twenty feet. That's what I was told. And some of the people close to me were killed. So that was basically what happened. So I was very fortunate. It was this man again up here. I was just far enough away from it, that the blast knocked me down. I wasn't

25:00 knocked unconscious or anything, I was just probably stunned a bit. But my first memory was to look at my rifle, here it was in my hand.

**What caused the explosion?**

Yeah, a rocket, got into our mortar and ammunition and blew about eight hundred bloody rounds up,

25:30 and to this day I can't work out how this damn thing got in there. But however, it did and up it went. Sandbags and all. One of those things, not much you can do about it.

26:00 **It was a heck of a way to leave Vietnam...**

Yes, I left by Hercules.

**You didn't get a real chance to say goodbye to people?**

Some of the people who were very close to me saw me in hospital, and said goodbye. The others I met when we all came home anyway, somewhere. Some I didn't see for years. And that's the beauty of our unit, every five years we have what we call

26:31 the anniversary of our team. And it goes for a week. And we go to different states.

### **Where was the explosion, just for the record?**

This was up in I [Infantry] Corps. And like a fool, I should have stopped there... I was injured up there, and because I was going to be in hospital more than seven days I was shipped down south

27:00 to the Australian hospital. And after seeing all the American doctors and all this sort of thing. And they wanted me to go home, and I wouldn't. And I spoke with my commander, and he said, "Okay, I was going to take you out of there, anyway. This is the job I've got for you and we'll see how you go." I was still kind of strapped up, but however... And then down

27:30 the track, I suddenly woke up and said, "You may become a liability and you may cost some of your team-mates their lives, if they've got to go and get you." By this time, I was getting in a worse way, anyway. There was a doctor, who lives here as a matter

28:00 of fact, he was kind of an unofficial teams doctor. Well, he blew his stack when he saw me. I'm in bed and the CO came in, and he said, "You're home." And Kitchener said, "I should have sent you home months ago." But I was just determined, I wasn't going home. I'm just glad that I did, and I said to myself, "You're a fool. You could have cost somebody their life."

28:30 That's being a soldier. And you get to this standard, and you can't get away from it. I was not in... like my injuries were not... although they could have, according to the specialist. It could have gone this way or that way. I had a few vertebrae's, not right out of line, but just moved...

29:03 So all that had to be put back in. But I had some good pain killers. Nobody knew except my team. In as much as what I was going through. We were talking about that yesterday, with my medic. There were some friends around who knew a little bit

29:30 and he said, "I remember evacuating my boss." And I said, "Yes. It was the proper thing to do for sure." I never mentioned it to my wife until they came over. She's got enough worry anyway, without that, and it wasn't life threatening. If I had been badly

30:00 injured or wounded, you automatically... If you can't function, you're out, you're gone, you're finished. But I thought I could function at least fifty per cent, and I did, more. But then of course, it started to wear me down. It does today, I go to physiotherapy about four times a year. I have people come in and mow the lawns. I have rails around the place.

### **30:33 What was it like landing back in Australia and what was the reception?**

There wasn't really any reception because you're taken from the aircraft, put in an ambulance and then you went straight to the hospital. The only thing that I can remember is looking out the side and seeing parts of the Richmond Air Base, and bits of Sydney.

31:01 So if you call it a reception, of medical people. Then you got to the hospital, you were put straight into bed, the next thing is the doctor. Here we go again, then another doctor, then a sister came said a specialist was coming to see you, whatever day it was. He came, and by this time of course, my wife knew

31:30 where I was, and that I was okay. My parents lived in Sydney and Mum and Dad came out a couple of times to see me. Then it was determined I should be with my family, and then they transported me up to Darwin, with the intention of going to hospital there and receiving treatment. I saw another doctor up here and he said, "You're better off in your bloody home." And he said,

32:01 "If you feel like a beer, don't take that tablet." And it was the best treatment for me, anyway. The army vehicle used to pick me up twice a day, into the hospital, you do all their treatments and they bring me home. It took about two months, I think, to get me back into... to reasonable shape.

### **Can you tell us about the support you received from your family**

#### **32:30 and your wife and the...**

Just being able to put your hand out and rub your son's hair. And this little fellow coming along and giving me a hug. My wife used to... and her just being there and hearing her voice. Going crook at the kids. You missed all that.

33:02 "I told you not to do that. "Don't do it again or otherwise you will get it." This sort of thing. My God, that sounds good. Yeah, so, I never forget that doctor, because he was a navy doctor, and he was the rank of a commander, who I saw quite regularly. And I thanked him, because I was looking at another two or three weeks in that damn hospital.

33:30 So I just thanked him for that.

### **How disorientating was it to be suddenly in an air-conditioned hospital back in Australia? Did you wake up sometimes thinking you were back in Vietnam?**

Many times. I don't know how to explain this, but for ages... the kids thought it was a great old joke, we would sit down together for a meal, and the meal would finish and

- 34:00 it was time for me to get up, and the first thing I did was reach here, looking for my rifle. "What are you doing, Dad?" "Nothing." Edna knew. And it stayed with me for a long time, because you never went anywhere, unless you were armed. And it was just automatic, because the rifle was always there. Just there. So I did this for a long time, and I've got to say I wasn't the only one.
- 34:30 You talk to your peers and we're all doing the same damn thing. And I'm assuming other soldiers did the same thing. Whether they threw rocks or spears or whatever it was, it was just a part of being a soldier, under those conditions. It took a time to... And see this is, technology isn't... The fellows in the Second World War came home
- 35:00 by boat, and it took a long time from wherever they were. We were out in the field one day, and the next day we were back home. Because a chopper would take you to there, and you got on that plane that flew across the ocean and you landed in Darwin or Sydney or wherever. Within hours, say at the max two days, you were in your own environment. But you're still, at war.
- 35:30 So you still had to... unwind, I guess. But it took me a long time to stop going for that rifle. I'm all right now, because I've never allowed a weapon in our homes, in any case, of any description. After a while you grew out of it, I guess, and the brain said, "You can relax, old fellow.
- 36:00 You're not in that dangerous situation any more."
- Did you still have dreams about it, though?**
- I used to. And that's why I don't watch all these things, because it will wake up something. And Martin has said, "If you watch a film and you dream about Vietnam, don't do it any more." Because all you're doing is waking up things that you are trying to forget. And I don't. I'm not a good sleeper, by any means.
- 36:32 If I get four to five hours a night... If I get five, I consider myself doing really well. But I don't think that's anything to do with the war, probably a little bit. As the years have gone on, my fighting the pillow has been reduced by about ninety per cent. Because she used to wake me up years and years ago and
- 37:00 I would be really getting into this damn pillow. I don't know why, I've got no memory except of her waking up and said, "Leave the pillow alone." So some sub-conscious thing... was aggravating things. So I don't read about it. Or watch those sort of things, particularly those about Vietnam.
- Looking back on Vietnam now,**
- 37:32 **how do you feel about your role and Australia's involvement? Looking back on it, from this distance?**
- I feel very proud about it. I thought the Australians did a magnificent job. And I still say that they're one of the best damn soldiers in the world. Not only because of their training, but their attitude. They're larrikins, all these things in these great big circle and this pot that you mix up, and there's this Australian
- 38:00 soldier, or sailor or airmen. And now of course we've got a mixture of sexes. Like the woman who goes away to East Timor and does her job.
- How do feel about the war generally? Looking back on Vietnam with the outcome of what happened there?**
- I think personally I was just disappointed, in the outcome. You had high hopes of saying,
- 38:30 "Well at the end of the day, these two governments will get together and work on a peace." Well, that didn't happen, as you know. So you look and say, "Was it a waste of time?" I don't know. I just thought that we, the Australian soldier, airman and sailor, did a damn fine job for that country.
- How important to you coming back**
- 39:00 **was it to know that the army looked after you, and all your comrades were there? The people who had gone through similar experiences? How important to you was it?**
- I haven't given it a great deal of thought. As I said, you'd meet and you would know and I would know and we would never talk about it.
- Do you talk about it with your colleagues?**
- 39:30 No, I haven't spoken about the war for close on thirty years. We just kind of... I know there are some fellows who will never forget it and talk about warries, and all this sort of stuff. But the circle that I'm in and had been in, the actual physical presence of them there was enough, without conjuring up all the things that you
- 40:00 don't want to talk about. If somebody watched this in fifty years' time, and they were a service person, I would say to them, "Never forget your traditions and this wonderful country that we live in and it's

worthwhile protecting.”

**Thank you very much on behalf of the Archives.**

Thank you.