

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Kevin Barker (Kenworth Kev) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1361>

### Tape 1

00:34 **So I'll just get you to introduce yourself and take me through.**

Hi. My name is Kevin Barker. I was born in Melbourne, I grew up in Brunswick, Greybrook and my teenage years in the eastern suburbs.

01:00 I left school when I was sixteen. I was in the air-training corps for about three years and I started work with the Victorian Railways. After the railways I went to a place in Melbourne, car parts, W.L. Ryans then to Repcos. While I was at Repcos I joined the CMF [Citizens Militia Force].

01:30 then the engineers in Ringwood East for two years and then I decided to go into the regular army. I kept quitting my jobs of all things. I went into the regular army and after training they put me straight into infantry, which was really nice and I got sent to the reinforcement wing, from there into battalion,

02:00 and I stayed in the army until 1984 really. So, what else can I say?

**And can you just take me through a bit of the detail of where you were in Vietnam; when you went and where you were based and...**

Based in Vung Tau, the main Australian base and travelled all over South Vietnam

02:30 virtually. I was in operations all over the place from right down the bottom end of South Vietnam right up to the large American base at Long Binh. I done operations out of there and then I was in a village for a couple of months doing driving and protecting of a civil aid mob,

03:00 doing civil aid work. We were building a school for the local village and we were living in the South Vietnamese army compound in the village area. We did quite a bit of civil aid there and in Baria we rebuilt a few school rooms that the Vietcong had damaged. So

03:30 if you want to start at the bottom base when we first arrived in Vietnam it is quite frightening at times and quite exciting because you get off the boat after ten days at sea and you get into the American Chinook helicopters and they are full of bullet holes. That sort of gives you bit of a thrill. We flew to Nui Dat and were in tent lines with sandbags all round.

04:00 And from there we did the operations. What did we do? We got there. Mostly patrols went out from there, overnight patrols, ambush patrols at night. We had movies and other entertainment there too, the boozer [pub]. We had an open-air picture theatre there.

04:30 That's about all the entertainment you could get out of the place.

**What year was it when you went?**

1969. From March '69 to March '70. We were with the 5th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment which are up here in Darwin at the moment. Now 5/7 RAR [Royal Australian Regiment] so that's changed a bit. Their collars were changed the other day, just before Christmas.

05:00 The old collars were sent back to Sydney and the new collars for the new battalion were presented to the unit. I didn't go in. I was supposed to go but didn't. I forgot all about it actually.

**And can you take me through some of the things you were doing with the regular army when you came back from Vietnam?**

Came back? After I got back

05:30 I left the infantry, probably two years after I got back and transferred to transport. 2/86 Transport Troop, that was troop carrying and that. And then I went to 158 and from then onwards I was carting the armoured vehicles around, tanks and APCs [armoured personnel carriers] on the tank transporters

- 06:00 and that was all over Victoria and a couple of trips to Sydney with the bulldozers, carrying plant equipment too. Where else did we go with them? We had Diamond-Rios there too, some normal semi trailers which we did interstate work carrying normal freight. And from there I was actually detached to Melbourne Transport carrying things interstate to all over Australia;
- 06:30 I travelled Brisbane, Sydney, Perth, Adelaide, everywhere. I actually never seen my kids grow up because I was never home. And I come back from that detachment and it was only a couple of months later that they posted me down there permanently. I stayed there for a few years travelling everywhere and then we went to...I was posted to 85 Transport
- 07:00 in Sydney which was semi trailers again. A few years there and I was the first section commander of the bulk fuel tankers when they brought them into service. We were the first once to drive the tankers and operate the unit. And that was quite exciting for a while plus a lot easier because there was no loading and unloading; it was just turn a tap to load and turn another tap to unload.
- 07:30 No tarps, nothing to tie down and it was quite interesting. And from there they sent me to DSU, District Support Unit, Watsonia in Melbourne. I was a transport supervisor there for that unit for a few years and from there they sent me to the field force battle school in Tully in North Queensland.
- 08:00 Which was much like living up here with the heat and the rain was more in Tully. It is the wettest place in Australia in Tully. Mostly cane toads and jungle. It is not a very nice place to live I can tell you. I was up there for a year or so and then after that place I took my discharge and got out and come back up. I got out in Darwin instead of Melbourne
- 08:30 and I went to...I went to the wreckers yard for a while as a motor mechanic and I've been doing mechanical work on cars since '84. Actually I got out in '84 but I was on six months long service before that. So I was doing mechanical work and I'm still doing it. Working at a place in town and I've been in the same job for the last thirteen years, which is a dead end job.
- 09:00 I can't go anywhere because I'm the only mechanic there so it's just dead end. But I've got a good boss so there's no problems there. If I want to borrow a car I can borrow a car and if I went to go four wheel driving I can borrow a four-wheel drive, which is quite excellent. He trusts me enough that he even lent me, this is a few years back now, but a late model, '90 model Dolton Pontiac
- 09:30 Transcend Firebird, I borrowed that for the weekend. That was quite an interesting drive around. And that's virtually what it is up till today.

**That's excellent. That was perfect. That's great. What I would like to do now is take you right back to the beginning and we will talk a bit about growing up in Melbourne. Can you tell me a bit about your parents? What was your father like?**

Dad was ex-navy. He was a instructor in

- 10:00 in Telecom...or PMG [Post Master General] it was then. He was their chief instructor at Doncaster in Melbourne. Mum was a nurses' aid but Mum had a lot of problems. She took fits because of a head injury when she was a teenager and that ended up killing her when I was sixteen I think, no fifteen. At fifteen she died. She took a fit and just never came out of it.
- 10:30 Dad, he remarried after a couple of years but that didn't last long either. He died probably early seventies. He retired, he had two years retirement and he just dropped dead. So that's the only part of my family that's left except my auntie, Mum's sister is still alive. That's the only one I know of, the rest I don't know where these others are. But where I grew up in
- 11:00 teenage years and that we were boarding out mostly, living in boarding house. Getting out of home it was. I was living with my mate for a while and his Mum. But we used to muck around in town with cars doing the usual garbage, wheel spinning in town, stirring up trouble. I got in trouble once with the police but
- 11:30 that was...I lost my licence for six months.

**What were you doing?**

Excessive noise. I had an eight foot piece of copper pipe on my old Holden and no muffler. They didn't like it.

**And tell me about the boarding houses?**

Well it's not actually a boarding house. It's somebody's house and you go and live there if they'd got a room to rent. It's a family home. I had one in Ringwood with Archie and his wife and it's like a bungalow out the back,

- 12:00 I just rented the bungalow. I could come and go as I pleased. I had meals with them. I paid board to them and they cooked the meals so I just let them know whether I was gonna be home or whether I wasn't gonna be home. That was about it.

**What age were you at?**

That would have been, well eighteen then. I had my licence then. From eighteen to nineteen I was just running amok around Ringwood, Ringwood East, Croydon, Melbourne, a couple of times going up

12:30 to Echuca and Mildura and that

**What kind of a group were you and your friends?**

Drunks. We used to go and park our cars in town and go out on the town and then you'd come back the next day and get your car. It wasn't worth getting caught. I didn't drink that much, just occasionally I got drunk. I got that drunk I came home one night and my old man [his father]....I don't know what he gave me one night but some stuff, but I felt good the next morning.

13:00 I didn't have a hang over but I still never found out off him what it was but one of these days I'll work out what it was.

**You'll make a fortune with the miracle remedy.**

I could. I know one but I don't know how to mix it, a friend of ours made one when Sandy and I got married. I was that drunk I couldn't do the bridal waltz. He gave me a drink, it was called a Russian Gin and Bitters and I don't know what was in it besides the gin and bitters but I drank it and half an hour after I drank it I felt as good as gold, didn't even feel like I'd

13:30 been drinking at all and drove home that night. I don't know what was in that either but it sobered me up. It was very interesting but Nick wouldn't tell me what it was. It was her father's next door neighbour that mixed the drink up. So yeah, it was quite funny.

**And when your dad had been in the navy...**

That was before in the First World War, ah the Second

14:00 World War.

**What sort of...any stories that he told you?**

Not a lot. I knew the ships he was on, two corvettes. One was the Anking. She was sunk in the Sunda Straits just near Indonesia there. I know he was wounded in the leg. He was picked....The ship actually blew up. He was a radar operator when the bomb went down the funnel,

14:30 it was a fluke shot and blew the bottom out of the ship and she went straight down. But he was blown out of the wheelhouse radar room and landed in the water and all he had on was a singlet; blew everything off him but he never got any other injuries out of that. He got picked up by American ship that was sunk in the same action as the [HMAS] Yarra and the [HMAS] Perth went down in. What else did he tell me? I can't think... The other ship was the Goulburn, HMAS Goulburn; she was sold at the end of the war and

15:00 she survived. I've actually got his medals sitting up there at this end of this case. That's all I know about his....He told me some stories about picking up a, they were in Singapore Harbour, Christmas Eve. They found a pig swimming in the harbour and they rescued it and had it for Christmas dinner. I don't know who owned the pig but usually a pig cuts its own throat when it swims because they bring their legs up under their throat

15:30 and they'll kill themselves. They don't do it deliberately. They found it swimming there so they grabbed it and cooked it. That's the only story I can remember him telling me.

**Was the navy a big part of his life?**

Well yeah. Actually I just thought of another story he told me too. They had a dog onboard and they called a Stuka because over in the Middle East every time they got strafed the dog used to chase the bullets up the deck and never got hit. It was a mongrel

16:00 breed, some spotted thing they had. No, I suppose it started him off in Telecom because he did the electronics with the radar and everything and when he got out he went to telecommunications. I can remember as a kid going to work with him, putting phones in houses, fixing telegraph lines and that and I actually did

16:30 it myself for a couple of years and then I left, as usual. And then he just transferred, slowly got better and better at his job and they just put him in as an instructor in the finish. He started at Fishermen's Bend and then he went to Doncaster when they shifted over there and then became senior instructor so he knew what he was doing in electronics and stuff like that. He used to bring phones home and rig them up for me to muck around with but I never got interested in them.

17:00 I was interested in cars more than anything and model aircraft. I used to make model aircraft and fly them. Some of my mates used to get together burn them. We'd set them alight and take off from the ground on fire. I don't know about all the films, they had movie films of them too.

**As a kid did you have an interest in the navy or the forces because of your dad?**

The air training corps

17:30 I was in when I was at school - I wanted to go in the air force and wanted to be a pilot like every other kid - and that was good. The military interested me all the time but I knew I'd never get in the airforce as a pilot because I didn't have the education for it. And besides I was too lazy to do anything, like maths, science and english and that sort of thing you had to have for a pilot. I couldn't see any use in that so

18:00 I ended up joining the army reserve after that and the engineers. I didn't go that often but enough. It was good money, extra money.

**How did the air training corps work?**

Dad suggested it. My Dad suggested it. Well it got my interest going and taught me how to use weapons. They teach you how to...

18:30 what else did it teach us? They had us learning navigation and they had us learning anything to do with aircraft and air bases and stuff like that. Plus I did a guard at Government House one weekend and got to meet the Queen.

**Tell me about that.**

We just went over there as like a guard of honour for the Queen the air-training corps, all lined up in the blue uniforms with the white belts

19:00 and white gaiters and everything on and she just went along inspecting us and talking to the odd people as she went along. I know Prince Phillip wasn't there because he shot through to the cricket. So I remember that one.

**Did she say anything to you?**

All she said was, "How long have you been in?" and you had to answer with I think it was one year then, I said, "A year your Majesty". Then any questions she asked after that was, "Yes m'am, no m'am", or whatever and that's about it.

19:30 **What was that like?**

Thrill for a kid. I had met Princess Alexandra before when I was at school so meeting the Queen was interesting. That's as close as I got to royalty that way. But it was a good weekend. We didn't have to do nothing, just stand there. That's the only thing we did with the air training corps. We were supposed to go to a camp but I couldn't go,

20:00 at an air force base but I missed out on that. Plus the other thing they had scholarships where you could do your pilots licence. You could do that at sixteen which my mate's sons, he got his pilots licence at sixteen before he got his car licence, which you can. It's stupid in a way.

**And how is it structured? Is it a bit like the boy scouts or boys brigade?**

No, the same as the military. You have the same ranks as the air force; you have a squadron leader in charge,

20:30 we had corporals, sergeants, warrant officers, leading aircraftsmen and all the same structure as the air force. It is run by the air force. The other ones the air league which is private and is run through schools. There are two separate ones.

**And did you learn anything valuable about it looking back?**

Discipline, that's the big thing you learned.

21:00 Do what you are told when you are told and don't argue.

**How do they drum that discipline in to a bunch of young boys?**

At that stage you are fascinated more than anything and you'll do what you are told. It's when you get up around the sixteen, seventeen year old that you start getting rebellion. Well in those days then, now they do it younger. That's the main thing you just learn discipline, you learn comradeship, you learn to work together.

21:30 What else did they do? They used to give you books on aircraft recognition and there'd be games to do like they'd put aircraft up, just the silhouette of an aircraft and you've got to identify it, see how good your eyesight was. You used to get medicals, free medicals so that was good at times and all your uniforms; everything was supplied by the air force so it was free.

22:00 **Looking back at your time in the army in Vietnam, was there anything you learnt in the air training corps that helped you out?**

Yes, just the ranks and the military side of it. You know what you are doing, you know who you're talking too; You know he's an officer or you know he's a warrant officer or a corporal or whatever. The only difference is one flies planes and one walks on the ground. That's about it. The discipline and everything

22:30 is exactly the same. If you muck up you get charged.

**And when did you leave the air training corps?**

I was living over at Braybrook then and I was going down to the air training corps at Footscray and we bought a house over in Vermont East, the other side of the city. So virtually when I left there I never joined the new units over there, I just left after that and finished.

23:00 **How old were you at this stage?**

Actually I wasn't even sixteen then, fourteen or fifteen...something like that, around there. I can't remember all of it.

**And with your mum's illness, how did this affect you as a kid? What was your understanding of it?**

I knew all about it right from a young age.

23:30 I missed a lot of school because I'd be...I remember one day there I was going to school and I heard Mum collapse in the bedroom and I did the usual thing, put a pillow under her head after she stopped fitting, take her teeth out and let her sleep. I'd just stay home with her and it happened quite often. There was nothing you could do about it.

24:00 I would just ring Dad at work and tell him what's happened and say, "She's asleep at the moment" and stay home. I'd look after her for the day until she woke up. She'd probably wake up a couple of hours later.

**That's a lot of responsibility for a....**

There was nothing else we could do. There was only me, I'm the only child and I can't walk out and leave her. I can do what I can for her and that's it, that's all Dad used to do. I couldn't lift her back into the bed, he could. I couldn't, I just had to leave her on the

24:30 floor where she fell and bloody give her a pillow and everything to make her comfortable and that was it.

**And what was your relationship like with her?**

Mum was good, she was terrific. I used to go to work with her when I was a kid, to the hospital, Footscray Hospital and I used to go to the hospital Christmas parties there. Which was great when you were little because one of the blokes was a wrestler we had in those days, he was called Chief Littlehawk. He was

25:00 a proper American Indian but he was an Australian wrestler, he lived in Australia. I used to meet him and talk to him which was great when you were a kid. You used to see the wrestling on TV and to see him there and then to go and meet him and talk to him.

**What was he like?**

A lovely bloke, really nice. Only a little bloke, only short but like near solid muscle, a solid bloke. He used to come in in full Indian headdress with the bloody big

25:30 feathers and everything. The kids used to love it, the ones who were sick in hospital. Yeah it was good, good days.

**And what was I guess...How did your mother dying affect....?**

Well I was in bed asleep one day and I heard my Dad because the phone was outside my bedroom door and I heard my father say that he wouldn't be in to work, I knew Mum had gone to hospital the night before. I got that used to it.

26:00 And I heard him on the phone say he wouldn't be in this morning to work because his wife died last night. That's how I found out. He hadn't told me, he thought I was still asleep. My grandmother was there, Mum's Mum, she was living with us and that's how I found out.

**So what did you do?**

Screamed and jumped out of bed. I didn't want to go to work and the old man made me go to work. I took a week off after that.

26:30 Like, I was used to her being in hospital all the time. She had meningitis and everything, you know the sickness. I got that used to it I became virtually blasé about it, "She'll be right, she'll be right" but that time she wasn't. I knew it was going to happen eventually because every time she took a fit the brain damage was getting worse but it never affected her operating around the house

27:00 or nursing or anything. It was just bang, gone, finished.

**And what sort of changes happened in your life after she had died?**

Probably another twelve months, eighteen months later when the old man got married again I didn't like the woman he was with. I didn't trust her. I was right, she packed the house up and left, took everything.

27:30 And I threatened to kill her son, he was a mongrel. I didn't like him either.

**What was he like?**

"I'm better than everyone else" and I pulled the carving knife on him. He took off out of the house and rang Dad. I got out of the house after that. I moved out and moved in to my mate's place. I was alright after that.

**Did your relationship with your dad change after your mum had died?**

28:00 After she had gone he went on a drinking binge for a while and then once he come good and was getting married a third time, she seemed alright. She had three kids of her own. He seemed to be happy and I was welcome around there. The other place, the other time I wasn't.

28:30 And then well I was away most of the time anyway. When he decided to marry her I turned up. He wanted me to be in full dress uniform, best man so I did that for him. He died while I was away in Sydney and they rushed me back to Melbourne for the funeral. That was it.

29:00 **What was it like being your dad's best man?**

Revenge, because I got to read the telegrams and there were some beauties in there too. Things like... Do you know Ron Barassi the Melbourne footballer? He's been there for years. One of telegrams had on it, "May your wedding night be like a

29:30 Ron Barassi Speech, forget about the flanks and strait up the middle". And Dad looked at me in shock as if I wouldn't know anything about that when I had been married for a few years. Things like that. He told me about his thoughts. But anyway I didn't worry about it.

**When you were kind of a teenager and that sort of age, what things about popular culture at the time, music**

30:00 **and films and that were affecting your life?**

Elvis Presley and horror films; Dracula, Frankenstein, The House of Wax, Vincent Price [horror film actor] - I've seen that five times. There was another two mates and myself and we used to go to the movies every Saturday into town into the old picture theatre called the Lyceum in Melbourne,

30:30 used to see horror shows. If you watched them once you could stay in the theatre and see them a second time if you wanted. They didn't charge you any more. We used to do that all the time or go wandering through the museum with the dinosaurs and stuff, that's what we were interested in. Actually the two mates were up this year before Christmas, still in contact from school

31:00 probably from '62, '63 onwards we have been mates. And John and his kids come up here and his wife. Bob had the first time up here. Bob's a Thalidomide [children affected by the morning sickness drug of that name taken by their mothers]. He's got no left arm and half a right arm, and he's got the elbow, the wrist and two fingers is all he's got and he's alright. Everybody just looked at him and wouldn't go near him at school in first form.

31:30 John and I had met and we were talking and we talked about it and thought, "Oh we'll go and talk to him" and he's been one of the gang ever since. We've just stuck together for thirty odd years.

**Would you sort of stand up for him?**

Oh shit yeah, he's one of the mates. There's a lot of things Bob can do that would surprise us. We used to make movies. We had an eight millimetre movie camera and we made movies down at the Maribyrnong River.

32:00 Used to take the rifle down there and put a tube down the barrel and a bit of flour in the end of it and you'd hold it up to your face you couldn't see the tube in your mouth and you'd blow the end and it blew a puff of smoke out the front like the gun's going off because it was all silent stuff. And we'd do things like that and blow up model boats on the Maribyrnong River. I don't know what happened to all the films we made. I wouldn't have a clue what happened to them.

**And you mentioned Elvis Presley, how did**

32:30 **this sort of interest in Elvis Presley...?**

I've still got the hair, the sideboards. Oh we just used to sit around and listen to his music. We loved it, his movies, his music. Bob's brother Brian actually went to America. He got in and actually met him and got into the mansion for an hour. So he's got records you wouldn't believe. He's got a wardrobe like the size of it in there and

33:00 they're full to the top of every record, LP [long play record], everything he's made, he's got the lot. He's

even got gravel from the driveway in a jar from the place so it sort of affected us a bit. But then I met Sandy and I didn't mind The Beatles either. I don't know whether you noticed in the lounge room the, there's photos up on the wall and she was given them only a couple of months back. Someone was throwing them

33:30 out. "Thank you, they're mine".

**What was your favourite Elvis song?**

'Old Shep', a real slow one. I've still got all my LPs out there behind the bar that we play occasionally. I've got a heap of Sandy's too. She's got some like Neil Diamond, Elvis Presley, Roy Orbison, I've got the Mersey Beat, I've got

34:00 The Beatles, Tommy Steel - that goes back, Tommy Singers and that. I've still got all the LPs.

**And is there any way that Elvis would affect lifestyle? Would you try and dress like him?**

I did. Actually on those films I've got there I've got a blood red shirt, black stovepipe pants and actually I was wearing flying boots then, the ones that come right up here that they use in the air force

34:30 and the rocker hair style hanging down, the whole lot, and long hair. But when I joined the CMF I had to get rid of that anyway or most of it. The only thing at that stage the sideboards had to be level with the centre of your ear but then they changed it, it could come down to the bottom and that's where they've been ever since, I've never changed it.

**And when did you join the CMF?**

35:00 Now you're asking questions....about '64, '65, something like that. I can't remember exactly but it was a couple of years or a year or two before I joined the regular army. When I transferred to the regular army I kept my CMF army number. You were meant to get a new number but most of the blokes that I joined up with their numbers went 39, mine went 36, CMF.

35:30 I stayed with that number.

**Had you met sandy when you joined the CMF?**

Yeah I was married. Hang on no. I was in the CMF. I met her not long after I moved to Vermont East. I was working on the Mitcham Railway Station when I met her. She used to catch the train to go to work every morning. She can tell you more about it because she was chasing me.

**How did she chase you?**

Oh stop and talk to me every night

36:00 when she came off the train. I got in a lot of trouble, I had three girlfriends and they all got together. It didn't work out too well. I got told a few words from two of them and then when they'd gone she asked me were we going out that night. She got rid of them. So I've known her since, I've known Sandy since she was fourteen years old and we got married

36:30 and had Vicki, the first daughter, and then I went into the army. The photo I was trying to find was Vicki standing on my lap.

**And what was it that made you decide you wanted to marry Sandy?**

We had to. We didn't have to

37:00 but I said, "No way, this is my kid, we're getting married. That's it". Then I joined the army because it was the only way I could stabilize myself because I just changed jobs like changing socks so I joined the army and that was it. And then I had no choice because in those times you had to sign up for six years and you were there for six years no matter what. So I did that. Now they don't have to, they can

37:30 get out any time they want to. They resign.

**At the time I guess when you are in the CMF or before you joined the army, what did you know about the political stuff to do with communism and the situation happening in South East Asia?**

I knew all about it Vietnam because I watched it on TV every night. The blokes who did join up it was like an adventure.

38:00 That's what it was to me, it was like an adventure and something new until you get there and see what's going on, then it scares the hell out of you. But you've got to do your job. The funny thing is you might have forgotten everything you've been taught but when you got into action you did it without even thinking. It was automatic. You didn't even think about it. You just did it.

38:30 It's uncanny, you've forgotten about it but then you did it. Like when your mother taught you when you're kid to eat, you do it automatically and don't even think about it but you do. That's the frightening bit about it is that and the things they teach you. Virtually all you're taught, no matter what service you're in - probably the air force is different - but

- 39:00 the army, it doesn't matter what you are doing whether you are a cook or cleaning the dunnies, the first thing you are taught is to kill, that's exactly it, you're taught to kill. It doesn't matter where you are, who you are or what you are. I was talking to the kids about it and they were talking to other boyfriends, Danielle wanted to join the army. I said, "Don't be stupid. You've done year twelve so join the air force. You still get good money", she said, "Why?" I said
- 39:30 "Well the simple reason is the navy the officers and the sailors go to war, in the army the officers and the soldiers go to war and in the air force the officers go to war". He looked at me I said, "The diggers stay home at the airfield looking after the aircraft aren't they? When they come back they fix them and send them out again. You don't get shot up, join the air force, it's safer".
- Did he?**
- I don't know, she's still thinking about it. She wants to join North force first and see what it's like. But
- 40:00 oh well I'll see what she wants to do.

## Tape 2

- 00:35 **I'm interested in the rocker culture in Melbourne, I mean what was it like? How would you describe it?**
- Idiots. Virtually idiots, that's about it. You'd do some stupid things. The car was the thing. You'd go up to the local picture theatre in town and hang around there dropping wheelies
- 01:00 and doing stupid things like that. What else did we do? We used to drive down to Phillip Island for the weekend and camp out there on the beach. We didn't go to the pictures much but the drive in, we went to the drive in a lot.
- 01:30 Three were a few mates I had up there but actually I didn't hang out a lot with them. I've forgotten most of what I used to do when I was kids. Where else did we used to go? I used to drive across to the other side of Melbourne to Braybrook to the mates places over there and sort of nothing much
- 02:00 happened over there. Back to the Ringwood Bowl, we used to go bowling a lot because there's not much to do around town, not around that area. Used to drive up to the Dandenongs, up into the mountains and go up into the snow and mucked around up in the snow. I took Sandy up to the snow one trip and it was that cold up there we packed the snowman
- 02:30 on the front mudguard of the old FJ Holden and when we got back to her place in Mitcham, in Ringwood the snowman was still there, it hadn't melted so that's how cold it was. We actually had it snow in Ringwood itself a couple of times. Where else did we go? I used to go down to Rosebud with my Dad's sister and that. Her husband used to go down there, her cousins used to be down there
- 03:00 at Christmas time. We'd camp on the foreshore down at Rosebud. And I used to go down there and stay with them. And I got on, Margaret the cousin was the same age as me. We used to knock around together there. We used to do stupid things like muck around on the beach and go swimming and that. And then actually she joined the army
- 03:30 first and I thought about it after that. It sort of made me think about joining up. But CMF used to take a bit of my time because we used to go away on weekends to Pucka [Puckapunyal], camps and that and a lot of shooting on the rifle range.
- Did you have to cut your hair for the CMF?**
- I used to have square back and sides. I cut the long hair off, yeah. We had to do that.
- 04:00 They didn't let you have long hair at all. It didn't worry me that much, now I can't stand long hair.
- Did Elvis being in the army have any input?**
- No, not really. The thing that really got me interested in the regular army was Vietnam. I used to see all these things on TV at night. Being a young bloke it's as I said before, it's
- 04:30 like an adventure until you actually get there and then you find out it's not an adventure any more. It's the real thing. Because like movies in the old days, they're not as graphic as they are now. Kids today see exactly what you are going to see in the real thing. Vietnam started it off I reckon, it's a TV war and like every war we've had now, what do you do? Sit and watch the real thing on TV.
- 05:00 Some young blokes still join it for the adventure, others join it for the money because they get damn good money. At one stage I was getting four hundred bucks a week and that was to do what I wanted with. I already had me board taken out and meals were there and I had four hundred dollars a week to spend. I didn't have to worry about anything. And a lot of times you blow that on booze [alcohol],



05:30 your car or going into town and just mucking around in town. I wasted thousands just doing that. I could have had a fortune in the bank but you don't, you just blow the lot. In the old days you didn't get enough money to do that.

**And with the rocker stuff was there a bit of a**

06:00 **gang of rockers?**

Not really. There was a group probably about three or four of us. All we virtually did was went to movies and drive around and wasted petrol. That's all you did on Saturday night and sleep in Sunday. Yeah, that's all we did. Now I think about it it was boring but there was nothing else to do.

06:30 **Did you come into conflict with annoy other groups?**

No, I never got into fights mate. Not interested in that sort of thing. We had other groups there but we got on with them. Fighting and all that, no not interested. We kept right away from it because you ended up with the police and all the trouble under the sun so no, not interested.

**And you talked briefly with Naomi [interviewer] before**

07:00 **but I was just a bit interested in that whole idea of how influential the communist news and talk was in Australia at the time.**

Well as the usual thing, nobody liked communists. It's a lot of propaganda but you see it on TV what they do, what they talked about what they do, the papers tell you what they do. Nowadays

07:30 I'm dubious about it because I'm older and I'm more wary what they report, I don't believe everything that's written. Mainly newspapers, they embellish things; make them look more grand than what they are. And when you find out the truth it's not as bad as what it is. I know they're bad, I don't like their ideology. Their ideas were good in a way but

08:00 it still comes down to a small group having all the power. They get all the money, they get all the food, they get everything. The people are just peasants. No I didn't like it at all. I learnt that in Vietnam, seeing the people over there, the way they lived.

**What were they reporting about the communists - China, Vietnam and Russia?**

I don't know, I can't remember exactly what they said. Probably just

08:30 the same as what they say now about North Korea, the same thing. They starve their people, the usual garbage, like saying in the military they want to invade you and all this sort of thing. The same as with North Korea as I say they could possibly fire missiles at us. Why would they want to? Why? It's not going to give them any advantage other than the nut cases running it. So it's just the same thing in the '60s

09:00 with President Kennedy [former President of the United States] and the Cuban missile crisis there. Everyone jumps up and down and worries about it but it's gone, went away. It's just scare tactics. People get scared, they talk and people get wrong ideas. So I don't worry about it till it happens.

**Was there a genuine**

09:30 **fear of domino theory and the northern Asian neighbours becoming...?**

No. Mostly younger people in those days, they don't give a rat's about it. Like there wasn't as many Asians in Australia then. Most of them were Italian, Greek and that and I grew up with Italians,

10:00 they didn't worry me. I had family friends who were Italians. I used to go and visit them and when I was younger I used to take their baby daughter for a walk because they lived next door to us. I was only eight or nine years old and I used to take her for a walk in the pram up the street and back. That didn't worry us. I used to go and have tea with them. As far as I'm concerned they just spoke different. It didn't worry me in the slightest what nationality they are. They treat me right, it doesn't worry me. So

10:30 yeah that sort of thing didn't worry me. Like everybody hated communist even though you didn't know fully anything about them. It's just that everybody did and that was it. Like most Australians they don't like getting told what to do, they baulk at it. It's the same today. Trying to talk to teenagers, it don't work.

11:00 I had a blue [fight] with Danielle last night. It doesn't worry her, it's gone straight over her head. She's back to normal the next morning.

**Why did you want to go to Vietnam then?**

As I said, adventure. I joined the army and I knew I was going to go once I joined up. It was just a matter of when. Plus I'd never been overseas. So why not go overseas, well admittedly going to war but

11:30 I would get to go overseas and not have to pay for anything and get paid to do it. I got to see South East Asia for nothing and got paid to do it. I saw a good portion of Vietnam and I could have gone on leave

from there on my annual leave in the middle of the year I could have gone to Singapore or Hong Kong or anywhere and had a holiday there. But I came home because my son was born while I was over there.

- 12:00 But yeah it was just an adventure, but you find out it's not an adventure. Most of the time over there, a lot of the time we were back in camp except when operations went out and you'd probably go out for four, five, six weeks. And then come back in and then once you're back in camp it was just normal daily routine the same as you are doing in Australia;
- 12:30 doing the odd jobs round the place, go and pick up rubbish, go into town, go down to Vung Tau to pick up stuff, take the hospital people down and bring them back. It was just like normal daily work. The only difference was you were carrying a loaded rifle with you, that was the only difference. It was still an adventure at times. That's what made me join up I suppose,
- 13:00 just the adventure. I thought about it, my Dad had been to war and my grandfather had been to war in the First World War so I thought, "I might as well go and see what it's like". Me old man didn't want to but he had no choice, I was eighteen anyway so I joined up for the adventure.

**Did you talk about it with your dad?**

No, not a lot. I told to him about a couple of things but most of the time when we got together we didn't talk a lot.

- 13:30 When we did we used to go to the RSL [Returned & Services League] with him and have a few beers with him. I didn't see him a lot once I was in the army because I was never home, I was never there. Once I got out of the infantry and I went back to transport I was posted back to Melbourne where he was, only a few miles from him but I was still living up at Pucka and I'd be away all the time.
- 14:00 We'd be out on an exercise or I'd be away on a truck somewhere interstate. So I didn't see him much. Maybe if I was lucky I'd see him two or three times a year and he was only sixty mile away. So I had a funny relationship with him. He was very very strict
- 14:30 and I was very rebellious. I wanted to do my own thing, which I did most of the time and got into trouble for it. That's the old-fashioned way I suppose, being bought up in the thirties and that with different disciplines. I never knew his parents - his mother and father, my grandparents - never knew them. I never knew his brother. The only ones I met of his family were his two sisters
- 15:00 and that was it. So it used to go on and on and on.

**Tell us about that initial time you were taken in after joining up. What was the process? What was first day?**

Yeah, interesting. Kapooka, no went in to Watsonia the first day, slept there that night and then we were bussed up

- 15:30 no trained, we took a train up to Kapooka and that's when the fun started. In those days the NCOs [non commissioned officers] when you first come in they swore and carried on and now you're not allowed to swear at the troops, they get upset. In those days you'd get sworn at, abused, belittled, everything done to you
- 16:00 plus getting your head shaved. You end up with probably an eight of an inch of hair on your head, they shaved the lot off. By the time you get out of your training your hair had grown back anyway. But that was quite an experience actually. I was lucky because I had already...My training I had had in the CMF I was going through the same thing again and I knew everything anyway
- 16:30 so I just kept my mouth shut. If you were a smart arse you got picked on. So I just kept shut up and let them do the training. They knew that I was in the CMF straight away because when we started learning the drill I knew everything. As soon as they'd show you something and we'd try and do it I was the only one who did it and he said, "Hang on. Have you been in the military?" "Yeah" so they pick on you after that. "Get out the front and show them". "Get out the front and show them".
- 17:00 No thanks but you've got to do what you are told. But we had six or twelve weeks of that, of abuse and learning and everything before you actually get allocated to what corps you are going to, whether it's armoured, infantry, artillery or anything like that so you go through hell for twelve weeks and I mean hell.
- 17:30 But you've still got your nights off and occasionally you'd get a weekend off but most of the time it was flat out for the whole twelve weeks. Fitness, exercises, drill, weapons, how to keep the uniform upkeep... What else have they got?
- 18:00 And then the boozier at night, that was the usual thing. Just learning how to live military style.

**What kind of abuse would they say? What kind of things would they say?**

I couldn't say it on camera, it was the usual words, usual abuse you get. "You're an F'n idiot". It just goes straight over the top of your head anyway because the old man usually told you that half the time when you muck up.

18:30 That sort of thing, not physical just verbal and it would make you sort of think of what you were doing. It worked most of the time. Some blokes got upset about it. No, straight over the top of the head. You've got to. If you got upset about it it wouldn't do you any good. You couldn't go anywhere, you'd signed up for six years. It was either put up with it and shut up. Which we did most of us. Some blokes

19:00 cracked up and they got kicked out. But I just put up with it and got used to it.

**What kind of affect does it have on you?**

It probably makes you the same way. You get a bit abusive of different

19:30 people when they stuff things up. I know I did for a while. When I started getting rank you get the same way. But I wasn't as bad as them because I found that if I talked with the blokes and I would make it an order, they've got to do it,

20:00 but I used to turn around and say, "Okay, whose going to do it?" Nine times out of ten a couple of blokes that are good mates together would say, "We'll do that" And you didn't have to worry about the job any more because you know it's going to get done. So, "Okay, you've got the order, you go and do it and the rest of you go clean your trucks". That's it. I found it was easier that way than getting abusive because a lot of blokes, they'll get their backs up too and with the equipment I was operating

20:30 it's not worth it because I had like twenty-five thousand litres of bloody aviation fuel on board a truck. You don't want a bloke who was going to go stupid in it because that stuff explodes. We used to carry ammunition. We did the biggest ammo lift since the Second World War when I was in one of the units. Thirty-six semi trailers travelling all over Australia. We cleaned out the ammo [ammunition] depot at Ettamogah in Albury and it was the biggest one since the Second World War. We were carrying Bangalore

21:00 torpedoes, plastic explosives and grenades and bombs and everything so you had to have a group that worked together. I changed my attitude after a couple of years, after Vietnam mainly and we worked together. Like in Vietnam, other units rank was everything but in the Australian army rank is there but

21:30 a lot of the younger officers, the junior officers and that, used to call their blokes by their first name. Not private so and so. When another officer was there, a higher-ranking officer, he'd do it but when he wasn't it was first name. And we used to call them sir. No disrespect. Don't call them by their name but they could call us by our name. Our rank system worked different to any other army. In the Brit army if you do that you'd get charged straight away.

22:00 And like I was in charge of eight semi trailers and I was only a corporal, and they were fuel tankers. In the Brit army the minimum is a sergeant for six trucks and I was a corporal and had eight. One of our mates went over there, he was in charge of six semi trailers, just normal semis, he went over on exchange to England and he couldn't do the job he was supposed to do. The sergeant that came over here was supposed to take over his section

22:30 and it's a corporal here. And over there it is a sergeant so when he got over there they gave him a car and said, "Here you go, go off and have a look at England" and a fuel voucher so all he did for his two months over there was drive around England, across to France, had a look around and they paid all his accommodation and that was his exchange. I couldn't even get one myself. But no, just it changes your attitude and

23:00 yeah it just changes your attitude for life. I am more wary of people, since Vietnam I don't trust people. I don't trust anyone except for my mates and close friends. But anyone else I'm very wary of. I won't get into fights because I know what I'm capable of and what I've been taught because

23:30 I could kill someone, I really could. We did unarmed combat and the only thing that worries me is that if something like that happens I'd do it without thinking, you do it automatically. As I said earlier one you are taught something you forget it but when something happens you do it automatically before you even think so I don't get into that position. I don't let myself get into that position

24:00 because I do my block too quick. I don't discipline my kids, I yell at them a lot but I don't touch them, don't lay a hand on them. Mum does that and I leave that to Mum because I hit too hard. Like Danielle last night, it was a yelling match, she lost out. She did come back and apologise later on so fair enough. The other two

24:30 just yell back at me because they are bigger than me. Vickie's not but Steven is, he's six foot six but he back answers me but he can get away with it.

**This kind of automatic thing you were talking about, was this learned?**

It's training. It had been drummed into you and drummed into you and you forget about it until something happens then you just do it automatically. That's what's frightening. That's why some of these

25:00 Vietnam blokes go off their brain, it's just done automatically but it doesn't work. I've seen too many of

them do it so I just...normally I'm pretty quiet, it takes a lot to get me going. I haven't had a fight since school. I just control myself, I walk away.

25:30 I don't care what anyone says or what they think; I'll just turn my back and walk away. Well I'll back off, I won't turn my back. I'll back off and walk away from it. It's not worth it, it's not worth the trouble. If they want to do something let them get into shit and get locked up. I'm not. So it's all control, that's all it is.

**And with this training that twelve weeks, what kind of**

26:00 **things were you doing exactly?**

Just the normal stuff, learning the drill. Learning what the ranks are. The drill you do, weapons you do, uniform maintenance, the basics it is, it's just basic training and that's it. Weapons, uniforms,

26:30 and your medical stuff is all done prior, all your needles. What else do they do then? First aid, they teach you a bit of first aid, swimming, survival in water...That's it. Twelve weeks drummed into you, day after day after day. You'd probably have eight lessons a day in different subjects, every day,

27:00 five days a week most of the time, sometimes seven days a week. So when you leave the unit you know virtually how to act like a soldier; who's an officer, who's a warrant officer, who's a sergeant, who's a corporal and the way you're supposed to act. Just how you're supposed to act. That's about it. What else?

27:30 I can't think what else, it's been a while back now. You have six weeks then you have a break and then you have another six weeks and then you march out. When you march out you go to another unit. They actually post you to a corps. You march out to infantry, you march out to engineer training, armoured,

28:00 or whatever corps they decide to allocate you to. In Vietnam most of it was infantry. Out of our intake I think only three got different corps, the rest of us got infantry.

**Could you request for something?**

We did put in requests. I put in for armoured but I was too tall to get in a tank they reckoned. My head would have stuck out too far. I ended up in infantry but I was engineers beforehand. That was the joke, I was CMF engineers and then when

28:30 I joined the army they put me in infantry. It didn't count anyway. Just whatever they wanted the numbers for that's what they got. We marched out of there straight to Ingleburn in Sydney. So that was it, "You're infantry, finish". I didn't change corps until 1972 I think, '72 or '73 until I changed corps because I got sick of walking. All

29:00 you do is walking in the bush, navigation exercises, it might be five thousand metres you've got to travel over mountainous terrain and everything and you've got to find things every thousand metres you've got to find an object that's hidden in the bush. That will give you your next coordinates and you take a map reading and a compass reading and off you go again. It might be a group of six to ten blokes and they send you on a navigation exercise like that. And

29:30 things like that to fill your time in every day. Otherwise there's idle hands, that is very rare. You might work ten or fourteen days straight and then they'd give you, if you worked a weekend they might give you two days off. You might work two weekends in a row and they give you four days off and in the following weekend you can put in for those four days and have six days off so we had a lot of time off.

30:00 In the army because you'd be working long days, twenty-four hours a day. When you are out bush you work all day and then you work all night because you'd be on picket and guns and everything all night playing war games. And a few times we played enemy and we'd go and raid other places, other units and try and get in there and pinch stuff. Which is part of the war games; they'd pick you coming in and shoot you

30:30 with blank rounds, thank you. Yes. That would keep you going day after day after day. I'm trying to think, I can't think of anything else.

**And where did you go from this training?**

From Kapooka to Ingleburn where you do all the infantry training which is good stuff. That's where you start learning navigation in the bush.

31:00 Where you start learning living out in the bush, eating rations, cooking rations out in the bush in pouring rain, when it's cold or hot it doesn't matter you go. What else did we do out there? Bayonet training. They come at you with a bayonet fixed to their rifle and you've got to fend them off and kill them. Unarmed combat was a little bit there but not much.

31:30 Mainly on the rifle range, shooting, getting used to the weapons; machine guns, rifles, pistols. We did six weeks I think or twelve weeks there, the same again, it's a lot of drill, discipline, lectures,

32:00 so you've got twelve weeks of that. Then they send you to your next unit, which in my case was the

reinforcement wing which was reinforcements for any troops injured or sent home from Vietnam. They take troops from there and send them over to those units to fill the blank spots. But when I was due to go

32:30 I had been sent to Canungra. I was due to go to Vietnam with reinforcement wing but they changed it after a couple of weeks. I had already been on seven days leave ready to go and then they changed their minds and sent us to the battalion here in Australia in Sydney. They had not long come back from Vietnam and we made up the numbers that were missing from that unit, the 5th Battalion.

33:00 And then we spent the next twelve months or so doing exactly the same as I'd been doing the twelve months before. Just rifle drills, training, shooting. With the battalion I did a snipers course, anti tank weapons, car boot stuff and then

33:30 we were put into Delta Company, 5RAR and that was a new company. They were building it up again and I was in support section with the anti tank weapons and learning them and they had a major come out and say, "Do you know anything about pays?" I said, "No. Don't have a clue." He said, "Well you are going to learn." And he picked me out and put me in the office

34:00 in the orderly room. I spent quite a few months in the orderly room as a pay clerk. A total complete reversal. I was sitting on my butt in there for eight hours a day doing pay books, doing the company's pay. And a few courses I got onto; radio operator, I qualified as a sniper, and then

34:30 I got onto the transport drivers course. I did the course in the battalion as a transport driver and finished up getting posted after that to the Admin Company, which was the battalion transport and then the training starts all over again. That's never ending. I was a transport driver and I ended up getting onto the trucks in the unit

35:00 and all we did was go on exercises, one after another, in the bush until we got notification that we were going to Vietnam.

#### **How long all up did the training take?**

From September 1967 to when we sailed for Vietnam was the end of February '69.

35:30 It was all training, training, training the whole lot before you go. It was just seven days a week, twelve months of the year. But you had to get it drummed into you before you knew it back to front and as I said you just do it instinctively without thinking. That's what they kept telling you,

36:00 "You'll remember it, don't worry about it. You'll remember it". And you sure do. You just remember it instantly and you just do it before you even think. Because all you hear when you get shot at, all you hear is the crack, as the bullet passing. That's the bullet breaking the sound barrier, you don't hear the gun go off. You hear the crack and then you hear the gun go for and it's too late. It's the shot you don't hear that's the one that hits you.

#### **How did Sandy feel about you going?**

She wasn't too happy about it but she knew that I wanted to and she didn't object. She moved back with her mother. She had Vicki to look after and she had another problem when I left anyway. She was

37:00 pregnant with Steven. It was quite funny actually because her sister was pregnant at the same time with her baby, Carol and both myself and , I was in 4RAR in Vietnam and my brother in law... I was in 5RAR sorry; he was in 4RAR in Vietnam. We were both there at the same time. Both the girls had the babies on the same day within a

37:30 couple of hours of each other. It hit the Melbourne papers, the Melbourne Sun and god knows what. It was a big thing, it got over there I know I got drunk there because I was drunk in the boozier for probably three days. Over there a can of beer was fifteen cents. And then in the morning the major, when I came back off the ambush patrol told me, took all our weapons and everything off us, took all our packs, told his batman to clean everything up

38:00 and put them in our tents, took us down to the boozier at eight o'clock in the morning and put fifty bucks on the bar and that goes a long way at fifteen cents a can. Father Shannon, the Catholic padre did the same thing just after lunch, put the fifty bucks on the bar and walked out so we didn't get out of the boozier for three days. I was a mess. But he got drowned. Things like that you used to do because over there it was like a tension relief, to get away from everything,

38:30 to forget everything that's going on outside the wire. It's not nice, not nice at all.

#### **What's the feeling like hearing about your baby being born when you're away?**

Well all the major said to me, he yelled out to me. He said, "You had a telegram this morning from Australia." I said, "Yeah, what?" He said, "You had a son born at three o'clock this morning" or some bloody thing.

39:00 And well it would hit you, "This is alright. I've got two kids now". And then, "I need a beer. I've got to go and have a beer". The major said, "No problems" and went down and opened the bar. It's a good

feeling. Of course when I came home he didn't even know me. When I arrived and got off the ship, Vicki was alright but Steven,

39:30 he wouldn't have a bar of me. He was a few months old then sitting in the pram. Yes, that was interesting. It took a week or two before he got used to me. But I wasn't exactly straight in the head then because I shot through down in Melbourne and left her in Sydney. I went down to her mother's place, picked up her mother's car and come back and got her.

## Tape 3

00:37 **So can you take me through the build up from when you got your orders that you were going?**

Once we get the orders that we were are moving we all got seven days pre embarkation leave. We were sent home for seven days.

01:00 Then when we returned, packing gear up, packing the battalion up itself so everything is put away before we go. Bags are collected, trunks are collected... oh bags are kept sorry, trunks are collected and the trucks were packed and sent down to the wharf separately, you didn't take them with you. You just carried your bag and your rifle.

01:30 All you had in your bag was a change of clothing for onboard the boat and private stuff; utensils and hygiene stuff. And then we boarded the boat at Garden Island in the morning. I can't remember what time it was, it was fairly early in the morning. The family

02:00 and friends were there - Sandy wasn't, she was still in Melbourne - and my father turned up to see us off. He talked to me for a few minutes before we boarded.

**Were you surprised that he...**

No, I knew he was coming. He said he was going to try and make it up and he drove up from Melbourne.

**Was that a...**

Probably a bit emotional for him because he knows what it is like going.

02:30 He didn't show it though, he never did. He didn't say much to me about it. He didn't like it but he had no choice. But once I boarded the boat that sort of excitement gets to you. I had never been at sea to start with, which was one thing, and we were allocated our mess decks,

03:00 which was below the flight deck of the aircraft carrier, the old HMAS Sydney. And on the flight deck was stacks of trucks all tied down on the flight deck, half a dozen helicopters tied down there, they were going to Vietnam. There was Holden... HQ Holden's on the deck too with diesel motors in them going to Vietnam.

03:30 Below deck was all the equipment and everything stacked up in the hangar decks. And then we left Sydney Harbour and we heard the band playing and all the other garbage that goes with it.

**Where was the band?**

On the dock. Just the usual garbage, it was like a cruise ship going out. We all had to line the flight deck, stand on the edge of the flight deck

04:00 which is a navy tradition, entering and coming into harbour and leaving harbour you had to stand on the deck.

**Does hearing the band add to the...?**

Oh it adds to the excitement, yeah. It was just a military band, that's all it was. It was more or less to entertain the family while the ship was moving. It takes a while to get moving and we sailed out through Sydney Harbour.

04:30 We had a lot of boats following the ship out. People with protesters and all the other garbage that went with it. We kept trying to get the captain of the Sydney to run them over but he wouldn't.

**Where were the protesters?**

In boats, following the boat out.

**What were they doing?**

Oh just war against Vietnam as usual demonstrators.

**What was your opinion on the protests?**

Couldn't give a damn. I didn't like them anyway. They were all nutcases.

05:00 They had nothing else to do. They were all dirty, filthy, bloody...I think that's all they did for a living is protest, they didn't do anything else. I'd never hire one. Like the long hair they had at the time was never clean, never combed, never washed, they smelt. So I had no time for them at all. As a matter of fact a lot of blokes who would come back from Vietnam on holidays used to go round looking for them, punch them up

05:30 for something to do.

**What kind of feeling was it to be leaving for war with people protesting?**

Well at that time it didn't worry us. It was about half way through our tour that we started to find out different things and I can tell you later on what happened there. But we just ignored them completely. We had a large...We had nicked, on one of our

06:00 exercises in New South Wales we had nicked a tiger off an Esso Garage. You know how they used to have a tiger on the tank? The owners had a huge cut out wooden tiger on the side of the garage on a big sign and all the boys on the bus and they were getting something to eat on their way back to the unit and the boys unbolted it and when the bus took off they were hanging out the side of the bus windows hanging onto the tiger on the side of the bus. They nicked it because the tiger

06:30 was our mascot. We had a live tiger in the battalion.

**Where?**

It was kept at Taronga Zoo, his name was Quintus. He was a Javan Sumatran tiger and he only died recently. He was kept in the zoo. I used to cart him around in the back of the land Rover. When he was a cub, about that high, isn't - wasn't - too bad, you could handle him. When we got him home I wasn't going to handle him. He was thirteen-foot long and weighted three hundred and eighty pound.

07:00 I wouldn't go near him. But yeah that was our battalion mascot so we pinched the tiger and we had that hanging over the side of the Sydney when we went out. It was on the newsreel showing the tiger out through Sydney heads and then we were having bets which way we were going to turn, whether we were going to turn left and go up through the Barrier Reef or turn right and go our past Perth. We turned right and went down through the Great Australian Bight.

**What's the seas like down there?**

07:30 **It wasn't too bad then. A little bit rough but it didn't worry the aircraft carrier. We had quite a good trip over actually. It was like a cruise. A lot of the companies were making their blokes work doing rifle shooting off the back of the ship. They used to get a mob of blokes, we had to do it ourselves, go down and get a mouth full of water, blow up a balloon and throw it over the side. That's what they were shooting at off the back of the ship.**

**Was that hard?**

Oh yeah, very hard to hit.

08:00 Some blokes would have more success at shooting flying fish because they come out of the wake of the boat. But we had two escort destroyers with us, the HMAS Yarra and one of the old destroyers from the Second World War, it was still in commission then, it was the Duchess was our two escort ships and it was just shooting and

08:30 what not off the back of the ship for something to keep the blokes occupied plus the navy did a demonstration. They put a float in the water out in the middle of nowhere and the aircraft carrier, they opened up with the anti-aircraft guns trying to hit it. They never hit a bloody thing with the anti aircraft gun, they couldn't get anywhere near it. And then they opened up the guns on the Yarra and she fired one shot

09:00 and blew it to pieces, it was a radar-operated gun. And then they did a run past the Sydney and they showed us what depth charges do. They fired depth charges over the side, sunk them down fairly deep and they exploded. A lot of these things you see on TV with a big splash of water going in the air and everywhere, that's a load of garbage. All you get is a white ring and it disappears because they're that deep the water can't come up. But it hit the bottom of the Sydney, the shockwave

09:30 and all the sulphur and that, it's like a sulphur taste comes out of the funnel from the boilers and urch, it's all you could taste for days was sulphur from the oil burning. What else did we do? When it was cool and windy we used to get a suntan by going and hopping in the helicopter because there is a big bubble nose on the helicopter. We'd hop in them and sit in them and bake in the sun out of the wind. We also had to do

10:00 picket at night and that was walk the flight deck. Two blokes walked the flight deck, which is a bit scary because it's pitch black, no lights, and you've got to know where the edge of the aircraft carrier is. You had to walk around in case someone fell overboard. You weren't going to hear them anyway. Then we had crossing the Equator for the

10:30 first time they did the King Neptune [crossing of the equator ceremony] bit. They had a swimming pool

on the deck full of custard and jelly on the flight deck and they were putting blokes through that. We weren't in it, we were on the side of the boat but they still got us. They got us with the fire hoses.

**Who dressed up?**

Oh the navy blokes dressed up as King Neptune and all that bit. And they got heads shaved and they got bloody chucked in this

11:00 junk that was in there.

**How come you guys didn't get it?**

We were smarter but they got us with the fire hose anyway. Yeah so we got out of it.

**How do the army and navy blokes relate with each other?**

Good, the army and the navy are good. It's the air force that doesn't usually get on with the other services that much. I don't know why. It may be because the army and the navy have always been together in war, the air force look after their own.

11:30 They have their own sort of security and everything. The navy I never had any problem with and even on shore leave when you are in uniform you run into some navy blokes and that can be trouble because you get in the pub together but they never fought. But that was good.

**And what was it like in the first day or so trying to find your way round the ship?**

12:00 That was interesting, you get lost a couple of times. You had to ask directions, "Where the hell am I?" There's a lot of walkways on an aircraft carrier. The easiest way to do it was to head for the middle of the ship, because you knew the flight deck was there. If you could find the flight deck you could find where you were living. After a couple of days you got used to it anyway but the interesting part was on the rough seas and the ship was tossing around was trying to eat your own meal, it would slide round the table. That was interesting, trying to hold your plate and cut something at the same time because they had an edge on the table about that high so the plate wouldn't fall off.

12:30 That was interesting.

**What was the food like?**

Good. The food was good. Cooking onboard the ship was no problem. Excellent, really good food.

**And what about seasickness?**

It never worried me, never worried me. I got seasick on the cruise but not on the aircraft carrier. That had me buggered, that. I suppose I was occupied on the carrier and I wasn't on the cruise ship.

13:00 Plus I had the water on the cruise ship running past the hull when I was in the cabin and I could hear it day and night. Anyway Danielle got sick too. Yeah so the cruise over was ten days of that.

**So what sorts of things would they get you to do just in general day-to-day stuff to keep you occupied?**

Well the shooting was on and other than that my section we did bugger all. We spent half the day laying in the hammock.

13:30 We weren't allowed to have any drinks until about four thirty I think it was. And they had to give us... They had large cans of fosters about this big and it was twenty cents for a tin. We probably had a dozen or so blokes in our mess deck who didn't drink. So we just split them up and said, "Here's 20c, you take these, go and get the beers" and we'd all come back and we'd have about five or six of these. It would only take two and you were drunk but you would drink the lot anyway. So we had

14:00 quite a merry time, we slept well at night. The hardest part was getting into the hammock that was hanging from the ceiling. But I got used to that and worked that out eventually after hitting the deck a few times and that's bloody steel, it doesn't help much. But it was quite good laying there at night because the boat could do anything it liked and you didn't move. We had the port holes there open during the night if it was a hot night we'd have the doors open. All you could hear was the water

14:30 going past the hull, just the sound of the sea.

**And were there things like PT [physical training]?**

Some were doing it, some weren't. We weren't. We were transport then so we didn't do anything and no one wanted to know us. We didn't have an officer, we only had a sergeant. He said, "No the blokes have done enough today". That's it. No PT. Still had to get up at six o'clock in the morning

15:00 and try and have a shower and stay under your own shower when it was rough.

**Were there any sort of things that you'd do for your recreation?**

Cards, we played cards. We had movies in the hangar deck. They put a movie screen up one end of the hangar deck and you'd sit on the steel floor and watch a movie.



**Do you remember any movies they showed you?**

No, I wouldn't have a clue what the movies were. I know we only had

15:30 about three movies on the ship. What they used to do is - I've got photos in that album out there - is use the boson's chair and swap movies with the other two ships. They'd have different movies and we'd swap them around so we all got a different movie each night. Some of the blokes actually got to go across on the boson's chair between ships - I've got a photo of one of the blokes coming up - and spend the night onboard the destroyers

16:00 just for something to do. They'd just draw a raffle and whoever won it got a night on the destroyer because the destroyer was air conditioned and the Sydney wasn't so that was a bit of a bonus there.

**What sort of card games would you play?**

Poker, pontoon, five-hundred was a popular one. Yeah. Pontoon more than anything because we didn't have a lot of money there. Our allowances didn't start until we got to Vietnam.

16:30 **Would you gamble?**

Oh we used to on a card game. One night I won the other bloke's whole pay. The whole bloody lot. He wouldn't take it back. I tried to give it back to him and he said, "No, you won it fair enough." What else did we do? Played games, poker, cards, movies, or we'd just sit down and drink.

17:00 Out on the open mess deck, opened over the water, we'd sit out there and watch the water. It was boring but there was nothing else to do. We couldn't do anything else.

**Was there any sort of briefings or anything about what to expect?**

Oh yeah we had a few, what to expect when we got over there, which wasn't a lot because where we were landing was completely secure. A lot of American ships and everything there when we got there.

17:30 The only thing we were briefed on was how to get off the Sydney because we had to step off the little gang plank on the side of the boat into a landing barge which could be hard at times. It depends how rough the water was. The barge can rise anything from six to eight feet and we had to step off at the right time to get into it which was quite interesting.

**Did anyone?**

No. No one fell off. They only had a platform probably about that square hanging off the side of the aircraft carrier and the boat was beside it

18:00 going up and down like this and you had to wait till it was coming up and step onto it carrying a bag and rifle. It was interesting. There were two navy blokes there ready to grab you as you stepped off so that was no worries.

**And where did you land?**

In Vung Tau.

**And what's the first thing that hit you?**

The amount of military there, the Yanks were everywhere. The main Australian base was there but also Vung Tau had an air force base, American, they had American army there, marines, everything.

18:30 And there were helicopters everywhere flying around, gun-ships. There was larger vessels there, the battle ship [USS] Missouri was there actually, she did a bit of work off Vietnam. We were taken from there....Once we landed on the beach, well it was a concrete ramp we landed on. We got off the barge straight onto the bus, no

19:00 trucks and from trucks straight to the helicopters, Chinook helicopters and we all loaded onboard them and they flew us to Nui Dat.

**What was the feeling like of actually being in Vietnam?**

Exciting. It is exciting because there is no danger there. It is just like arriving as you do on a cruise ship, another country you're going to see.

**Was there anything about the physical environment like did the air feel different?**

19:30 It stunk, the stink. Vung Tau used to be the Paris of the east when the French had it. When they left or were kicked out, the place went to ruin and all the sewage systems blocked up and there was no sewage. Like people used to crap in the street and you'd be walking down the street and some old duck or some woman walking in front of you would stop, lift her dress, squat and have a shit in the middle of the footpath

20:00 and then walk off. Just that was it, it's the way they lived. It just stunk, it was a foul smell. But after a couple of months you just ignored it, you didn't even notice it in the finish. The villages outside the main city were cleaner than what the city was. They at least cleaned their streets up and made their own

latrines, dug holes in the ground and did it that way. But in the city, no, they'd chuck their rubbish out the front door.

- 20:30 And that was it. It just got washed away in the monsoons later on. That was sort of a culture shock when you see people living like that. That's the way they chose, they didn't want to fix anything or have anything done for them.

**And what did you get to see as they took you through Vung Tau in the trucks?**

Just the people, the way they sell their food just on the road. All fruit and vegies [vegetables] and

- 21:00 stuff like that just sitting on mats on the road and that's how they sold their food, straight off the bitumen road if it was bitumen, if it was it was dirt, it was dirt. They just sat the vegies on that and sold them as is off that. The other thing was a bit of a surprise seeing the butcher shops there with all the meat hanging just out in the open, dogs, skun, hung up for sale. They eat dogs, snake,

- 21:30 monkey, they just eat monkey, any sort of meat. The place was full of buffalos and the brahman type cow, the sacred cow like India, they've got heaps of them over there. But animals...rabies was bad over there. Just about every dog had rabies of some kind or some disease.

- 22:00 As I said it's like a culture shock; you've seen it on TV and all these different things but it doesn't actually hit you until you get the smell to go with the scene then you know exactly, "Phew, that's it". And these are the people you are trying to stop communists going for but you never trust anyone, you never trusted anyone.

**Had you been told about that before you got there or was it just a...?**

- 22:30 Yeah we were told, "Don't trust anyone. Doesn't matter who they are, what they are, whether they are a child or not, don't trust anyone". There was a few times where a kid's walked up and the kid's had a hand grenade in his hand and you didn't see it and he dropped the grenade beside you and ran. They'll do it so you shoot first and ask questions later so it's bloody hard. I never had to do it thank god.

**Is that a hard sort of thought to try and get your head around?**

Yeah it is but

- 23:00 if you see a weapon in their hand you'll do it but we never had to do it anyway thank god. They...I don't know, there's something about the Yanks that people don't like and I think it's their arrogance. Because the only ones we got on with over there were the blacks, the Negroes. The white blokes were arrogant. They were better than anyone as far as they were concerned but the Negroes, not

- 23:30 a problem with them. Great people actually. We drank mostly with, at American bases we drank with them so it was very good, nice people.

**And these Chinooks that they took you in...Was this your first time?**

No, we'd been in helicopters before as part of our training. Not so much the Chinook but in the Iroquois helicopter, we had flown around in them. I got used to them.

- 24:00 You had to get used to them because you sit inside the helicopter and your seatbelt is virtually not done up, it's done up but it's loose. And they throw the chopper around like that and you are looking straight down at the ground, but you can't fall out. You've got no sensation of falling out because when you are going round like that the gravity is going the opposite way. It doesn't pull you down, it throws you into the seat and you can't move. I've got photos in the in the album out there of me hanging outside the helicopter taking photos past the pilot and that.

- 24:30 You can't fall out unless you physically jump out because the gravity of the chopper manoeuvres hold you in the seat. That didn't worry me in the slightest.

**How hard is it to get used to that?**

I love flying, flying is my thing. I started to learn to fly with the planes up here but it got too expensive and I had to give it up in the finish. But flying doesn't worry me, it's the crashing that hurts. I've seen a Chinook go down and what happens when one of those goes down so

- 25:00 it's nothing but a big hole in the ground. So we used to do a lot of things over there like the first job I got over there was helping them load the choppers going out from one of the bases just near our camp. They got some of the blokes from 5 RAR to go over and help load up the choppers. And what we had to do was scary as hell was stand on top of the load with a huge ring in your hand which was attached to the load,

- 25:30 and the Chinook helicopter comes down on top of you. It comes down like that and you've got to hook it on the bottom of the chopper while it's hovering above you. And this huge aircraft hovering above you, you've got to hook it on and jump off and then he just takes off and takes the load with him, that's scary. Because there's a couple of tons sitting above you, just overing above you and you've got a bloke looking out the hole in the floor above you saying, "Yeah, it's right" telling the pilot what to do. Yeah, that was interesting.

**And this first Chinook flight from**

**26:00 Vung Tau to Nui Dat, what was that like?**

That was freaky that because it was full of holes, bullet holes, you know through the fuselage? There was no damage done to the aircraft, just holes through it, you could see daylight. You sort of look around like this, and you are sitting in the seat and you look under the seat and there's a couple under the seat and you go, "Ooooh, okay" and then you realize that they are playing for real. They don't bother patching them, if they did that they'd be doing that twenty-four hours a day so

26:30 unless there's something major wrong with the aircraft they won't patch the skin, just leave the holes in them.

**And could you see anything of the environment outside?**

Oh you could see out the windows and the back tailgate, they don't close the back tailgate they leave that open. You can go down to the back while you are flying along. They put a strap on you, around your waste to strap you to the aircraft and you can hang out the door and have a look down.

**What did you see?**

Jungle, just jungle and the odd smoke coming from the bush,

27:00 the odd village. The villages are just mud huts and some of the huts are made out of tin cans that have been flattened out nailed to a wall and that. So it's quite funny to see a house made out of olive oil tins, flattened out and nailed onto a wall to make a house, not big. It's probably the size of this bedroom the whole place and there's probably two or three families living in there and parked out the front of this place is a brand new Mercedes Bens, a car.

27:30 In this little village with dirt huts and that and there's a beautiful car parked there so it was weird that way.

**And given the fact that you guys were the new ones in was there any sort of tricks played by the helicopter pilots or anything?**

Not coming in, no. They were Yanks the pilots, they were Yank aircraft they weren't ours. Ours would have been patched up, we don't like having damaged aircraft.

28:00 The Yanks would fly anything, that's why we liked them over there because the simple reason is if we got a dust off, got into action and got wounded and we had to have a dust off, the Yank pilots would fly the choppers in right into where the firefight was. Bullets flying around everywhere and they'd still grab the wounded and take them out. Our blokes wouldn't go in, the aircraft would get damaged and we didn't have that many over there. The Yanks had heaps so they'd just come in, bang down and grab you and take you out. So we didn't mind that,

28:30 we got used to that after a while. Their medical teams were phenomenal. A couple of their hospitals and that were better than we had in Australia and they were in the field. It was like watching MASH [television series based on the Korean War], that's exactly what the hospitals were like except they weren't tents there they were tin sheds, a proper building. And a couple of the hospitals we were in looking around and we had a laugh and a chuckle to ourselves about the blokes getting purple hearts

29:00 for wounded. They'd hand them out like lollies. If you got shot in the foot or neck from a bullet you get a purple heart, a medal. We'd laugh at the Yanks and say, "Are you gonna give us some?" They'd say, "What have you been shot at?" "A mosquito bit me". We used to stir them up something shocking but they'd get a medal for anything. Yeah so it was quite an experience when you get to the main base though.

29:30 We had two airstrips there; one was the helipad which was one side of SAS [special air service] hill and on the other side we had the main airstrip which ran down the back of our battalion. We used to have a lot of aircraft coming in and out of there. I got a lot of that on video of the aircraft coming in and out plus some of the Yanks used to come through there if they ever... They'd do a kill out in the bush, the fighter pilots, with their 104 phantom aircraft

30:00 and they used to buzz our airstrip and stir it up something shocking. They'd come down there flat out like at fifteen hundred miles and hour and hit the sound barrier. They're stirring bastards. At the end of our airstrip was a road, it was a half curve and there was cliff walls there and it was just a dust bowl, just dirt. They used to come down the strip, put the plane on it's arse and hit both after burners and dust would go up in the air for a couple of hours.

30:30 They'd get in the shit for it but they still did it. Our pilots used to try and do it too but most of the planes we had there weren't fast enough.

**What was Nui Dat like on a first impression?**

Big tent city, everyone's in tents. The only fixed buildings there were the kitchens and the Q [Quartermasters Store] Stores, all the rest was tents.

**What's a Q store?**

A Q store? Quartermasters store of all these

- 31:00 uniforms and boots and all that sort of gear was kept. When you're out bush you don't wash or nothing for probably five, ten, fifteen days, could be anything up to five weeks. What they used to do was bring clean uniforms out and you'd hand your old uniforms in and put the clean stuff on and they'd take the old stuff away to be washed because we weren't allowed to use soap
- 31:30 or anything out in the bush because anything you use out there can be smelt, it's not the normal smell of the area. The people don't bathe out there either, there's body odour everywhere but no one takes any notice. If you have a shower and a shave with soap you smell pretty and they know where you are. So you don't shave, you don't shower, you don't wash or anything. We did shave but only, you'd make a mug of boiling water about that big
- 32:00 and you would pour a bit into a dish and have a shave with it and the rest you'd make your coffee out of, that's about it. Didn't wash other than when you've got the...At night time all you do is get a wet flannel or a bit of rag and wipe your feet, under your armpits and crotch just to get the sweat off otherwise you get the sweat rash. And then they give you a powder that had no odour to stop it
- 32:30 and that's your extent of your bathing in the bush. You stunk when you came home, I tell you. You wouldn't believe it, it's an absolutely foul smell. You don't smell out in the bush but when all the blokes are together trying to get into the showers, "Phew" a sewage dump smells better.

**And what sort of scale was Nui Dat on?**

It was huge. There was two battalions there,

- 33:00 there was a couple of artillery regiments, there was the headquarters regiment, there was engineers - two or three engineer squadrons, in the middle of the camp on the hill which was in the middle of Nui Dat was SAS, there was an American mobile gun battery there, 155 guns. There was one near our base, which
- 33:30 come there three times while I was there or twice. They had the biggest guns I had ever seen in my life, the barrel was seventy-five foot long these guns. They are like on a tank frame and this barrel stuck out about here somewhere, huge 175 guns. They actually had a dozer blade on the back of the things so that when the gun fired the blade dug in so it didn't roll backwards. That's how big the gun was and when the shockwave went through the ground
- 34:00 you could feel the shockwave going through the ground.

**What sort of things did it fire?**

Projectile shells about that round and about that long. So they're huge and they go something like twenty or twenty-five miles.

**And how are they transported?**

The gun's on mobile, it had tank tracks on it, they drove it. They actually drove along the ground.

**Did they use it much?**

Oh yeah all the time.

- 34:30 The other one the 155 was a smaller gun and they were on tracks to, they drove along the ground. It was like a tank without a turret, the gun is fixed in the middle of the vehicle. They were huge guns too and they were at the Base. It was a big base; we had a dam in the middle of the base or water supply and everything. We occasionally washed our vehicles over there, we used to drive them into the dam and park them in the dam.
- 35:00 There was no women in Nui Dat so you just throw your clothes off into the cab and you'd wash the truck stark naked. You'd get half a dozen blokes to come out for a swim, at the same time you'd cool off and then back to camp. That's how we washed the vehicle; you couldn't wash at the camp, you didn't have the hoses or you didn't have the water. All you had was tank water and the water was brought around in trucks every day, twice a day. They would come around fill up the tanks. The battalion had, we had two tankers
- 35:30 and they were busy from morning till night filling up tanks from the four companies...hang on, there was A, B, C, D, company, Admin company, Support company... so six, seven plus headquarters... seven lots to fill up and you'd probably have fourteen or anything up to twenty water tanks that you had to fill up each day and the same with the boozers. Another truck would come around and he would bring in the ice around.
- 36:00 We used to have ice-making facilities with the engineers and we'd go and collect ice to keep all the drinks and the cold beer and soft drinks and stuff cool because the kitchens had their own fridges. So that was a daily task there, plus courier runs over to headquarters from our headquarters, driving back and forth, so it was a big base.
- 36:30 From our place to headquarters and back it would probably take you to get other there fifteen, twenty

minutes. So you can work it out how huge it is.

**To walk around it, like around the perimeter, what sort of...?**

It was about five...To walk around it would probably be about five miles. And my CO [commanding officer] used to run that every day. 'Ghengis' Khan his name was Brigadier Khan

37:00 He was an Indian, he was six foot six. A big boy. He actually wore the Military Cross, which is one medal below the Victoria Cross and he only had one lung and he still ran the lap of Nui Dat every day. It kept him fit.

**What was he like?**

A lovely bloke.

37:30 He was a CO that any bloke in the battalion, no matter what he did or what rank he was could approach the CO and he'd take other blokes problems in there. I was there one day and he asked me and said, "What's your problem?" I said, "A bit seedy at the moment sir." He said, "What's wrong?" I told him my son was born at that time. He said, "No worries. Well I've got an hour or two before we're going anywhere." Drink driving's nothing over there. Took us inside he said, "Here you are, go and help yourself out of that fridge". And I opened up and said, "There's only beer is there?" He said, "Well take one." He said, "Don't touch the other fridge."

38:00 I said, "Why?" He said, "That's mine." I had sneak look and it was full of Johnny Walker, black label. He was that sort of bloke. If you had a problem and your OC [officer commanding] couldn't sort it out they'd send you up to see the CO and he'd sit down and have a beer with you and talk to you like we are talking now and he'd fix the problem, no problem at all. So there's a good bloke.

**What was his background that he had been in?**

Life in the army.

38:30 He retired only a few years back as a brigadier so I believe. I don't know where he is now, what he's doing now.

**And how did having a CO like that affect the morale of the...?**

Oh they were wrapped, the blokes loved him. Except when we were on operations because he had a bad habit of going up in a helicopter and dropping hand grenades on them, on the enemy. He had two helicopters shot down from under him

39:00 but he still went up and did it. He was a bit gung ho when it came to war but that was him.

**Would he push you?**

He pushed the units, yes. That's why our battalion was the most decorated that served in Vietnam. One of my mates with young kids, he got the Military Medal after a mine explosion in a mine field in Delta Company and quite a few wounded out of it. He was wounded himself but he was a stretcher-bearer. He refused

39:30 to be touched himself until all the blokes were choppered out. And then they choppered him out with his wounds was all shrapnel wounds in his back and so they put in for a medal and he got it, so he got the Military Medal. That's was quite good, there were a few medals and mentions in dispatches from the unit. We did quite well over there. I think the CO wanted one kill for every day of the year, that's what he was like, and we got three hundred and

40:00 sixty-five of the enemy and we lost twenty-five of our own in the thirteen months we were there. That wasn't a bad ratio. Still we lost twenty-five and one suicide, so you get that. You get the odd one that doesn't handle it and he didn't handle it. He shot himself.

## **Tape 4**

00:35 **Just before when you were talking on the last tape you mentioned a suicide.**

Yeah we had one suicide. Actually we had two blokes new in country. The first one wasn't a suicide. He thought he would be smart, now he had got into the country he was going to get his ribbons so he shot himself in the foot so he could go home.

01:00 But then he doesn't get the ribbons so he mucked up. But the other bloke, I don't know what was wrong with him. We just heard a rifle, we were out on an operation and we heard a rifle shot and of course everyone jumped up and nothing happened, one shot. And one of the blokes was going back to bed and next minute we heard him yell out, "Medic". This bloke had put the rifle under his chin and pulled the trigger.

- 01:30 He had tried to awaken him on why he didn't get out of bed, shook him, he felt funny, put the torch on him and this half of his head was missing. Yeah, don't know why he did it, maybe it just got to him. He had been in country for probably six months. But some blokes had to go and see the psych cause they don't debrief you
- 02:00 after operations. That's what my problem is now. I've been to see the psych and I've got what they call Severe...Sandy knows what it is... Post Traumatic Stress, that's what it is. Plus I've got the rash and everything I get occasionally. And that's from non-debriefing, not talking about it
- 02:30 after it actually happened. Twenty or thirty years later is too late, even in that time. And a lot of blokes who had that time have had the nightmares and everything and they didn't do nothing about it. That's probably what got to him over there, got to him too much and he said, "That's enough, I've had enough" and pulled the trigger. But blokes, it's strange because blokes
- 03:00 who were back in Australia were quiet at the boozer. They'd have a few beers and pretty quiet blokes who sit down quietly and have a drink. Over there they were total reverse. Blokes that were loud and mouthy at home were suddenly quiet. I don't know why, it just happened that way. So it affected people in different ways. The blokes who never went out bush, it didn't worry them in the slightest, they didn't
- 03:30 see any action. Same with units like...Well 161 reccie [reconnaissance] flight, they never went out. The only time they went out was occasionally an ambush patrol and that was it. Engineers? They got affected pretty badly because they used to go out in bulldozers and they had a bulldozer with armour plating all over it and they used to drive them through minefields. The bulldozers
- 04:00 would actually explode the mines so they got these explosions going off around the bulldozers all the time and they're making a path through the minefields. No wonder they go nuts. You know that affected quite a few blokes but it had to be done, someone had to do it. Because you couldn't detect the mines, they were all plastic. The anti-personnel mines were only about that big and all plastic except for one little metal part and the mine detector doesn't pick them up. So you don't know about them until you step on them. They've just enough explosive to blow your foot
- 04:30 off and that's it. The ones the North Vietnamese had we called jumping jacks. They were a tin can with three or four prongs sticking up and when you stood on the prongs you would feel the click and if you took your foot off they would jump out of the ground, explode out of the ground and they'd blow up above ground. So you were very careful where you put your feet over there. That's why our boots used to have a steel plate in the bottom of them too because
- 05:00 they'd put pits in the ground covered over with stakes sticking up and they'd rub shit on them, excreta and that all over them and they'd poison your system. So we had steel plates on our boots for that. Not a nice place to walk around. Plus the animals that were over there like one night we came out from the boozer, I'd had a few beers, came out of Charlie Company's boozer and I thought I was drunk because I saw a tiger.
- 05:30 I was right. It had walked through the minefield, through our camp and out the other side through a minefield. They know where the mines are, they can smell them. The tiger was walking through the camp. There were elephants roaming the bush out there, cobra snakes, a small snake which is one of the deadliest in the world, the crate - we used to get them in our tents. If you had a mongoose living around your tent you didn't worry about snakes because
- 06:00 mongoose would kill the snakes. So a weird country and scorpions were like that long. You used to take your boots up and bang them on the ground, shake them before you put your foot in them because the scorpions would love going into them. And when you got into your bed you got the mozzie net all over your bed but you used to tuck it under the mattress before you went to bed. That's how creepy the joint was and spiders that would jump out of trees and attack you. The bird eating ones, the big bastards. You don't put
- 06:30 your foot on them because they'd eat your foot so we used to shoot them with a pistol. I have done that a couple of times. A very weird country.

### **So apart from the war?**

A creepy joint. You go out on a night ambush, you've got no lights or nothing and it's pitch black and you are laying there in the bush on the ground and you could hear insects walking around you. We had a bunker there, we went down into that and something just caught my eye and I looked

- 07:00 up and there was a spider in the top corner inside the bunker. I came out backwards faster than what the spider could move because he came at me, attack me. I took a nine mill pistol back in and shot the bastard. I wasn't going to stand on him, he would eat my foot. The bloody body on it was about this big. That's not a spider, that's a bloody monster. And deer, normal deer you see in the bush like jumping around, quite placid little animal, they bark like dogs. You'd think you had a dog out in front of you but it's a bloody deer.
- 07:30 Weird, totally weird country but you get used to it after a while. You just ignore them except the spiders - I couldn't handle them and the snakes, the king cobras, I didn't like them either. We had a few of them come into our camp area, come in for the water. Very nice. They spit the venom so they can get you

from a distance.

08:00 So be very careful of them.

**So was this rather stressful?**

It was at times other times you just couldn't give a damn because you were too pissed to worry about it at night, you'd have a few beers once you're in camp it's like you would knock off at half past four unless you were on a picket duty or a gun duty or something like that, you go and hit the booze and didn't worry about it. It would put you to sleep for the night. I came out of there an alcoholic because

08:30 a forty-ounce bottle of Bacardi Rum, I think you paid about two dollars something, three dollars for. I used to send that stuff home, post it home to the father in law. I was always getting the shit on that because he would drink it like a fish. What else could you get there? Even a packet of smokes was only fifteen cents. You never paid tax, all the tax money you got back in your hand plus you got zone allowance so

09:00 you had heaps of money to spend. You could go down to the canteen, the PX canteen [American canteen unit] and you could buy radios, TV and that, stuff you'd pay in Australia pay two or three hundred for you could buy them down there for about probably twenty or thirty bucks so everything was dirt cheap. You couldn't eat in the villages, well some of us did but we only had cold drinks from the place in Baria, which made up fruit drinks

09:30 out of ice and bananas or pineapple crushed up in a little vitamize type machine but we used to have that what we used to call Hepatitis ice because you didn't know what was in the ice. It was just water frozen with little bits of dirt and twigs and everything in the ice. You didn't worry about it after a while, just pick it out and drink it. What else did we used to do? We'd

10:00 swap our beer for Yank beer. We'd get two cartons of Yank beer for one carton of ours. Which I didn't mind the American stuff. You didn't get drunk on it. It's different alcohol.

**When you first came in...I mean all these stories of bugs and animals, I mean in that first week what kind of orientation did you have?**

Nothing on

10:30 the animals. We knew there was tigers there, elephants around but other things, all we were warned about was the scorpions. Other than that we never worried about it until we came across them. Over the twelve month period we came across the odd one here and there and that. When you see them at a distance, you don't worry about them at a distance, but when they come at you that's a different thing. But I don't know, you become blasé about it,

11:00 you just don't worry about it. We locked ourselves back in the boozier when the tiger was going through and then opened the bar again. That's all we could do, we couldn't walk out so we may as well stay there and have a beer. So that was it. When he was gone we walked back to camp, back to our own lines. We used to walk around the lines with a rifle and when you go to the pictures you would take a rifle and an esky full of grog and your chair. You'd just sit down in your chair put your rifle beside you and start drinking the grog and you've

11:30 got a loaded rifle down there. A couple of times there were a few bullet holes in the movie screen because they didn't like the movie. Someone didn't like it and shot a few holes in it but they got charged if they got caught. All the movies we got over there and stuff was all American stuff. They had their own mob and all they did, was all this American mob used to do was entertain the troops, that was it. All the movies we got were uncensored.

12:00 The boring part was to get all the bloody gridiron games with it because it was all one reel. You'd end up watching gridiron, the American news plus the two radio stations we had there; the Australian one and the American one.

**When you say the movies were uncensored what?**

They're not cut. Like the movies we get here the censors say, "No you can't show that, that's a nude scene". Completely uncensored,

12:30 as it was filmed you get the lot, warts and all.

**So what were you seeing?**

I can't remember the movies we saw. What was the name of it? I can't think of the name of it. These movies were going to Australia but they were all censored back here and had bits cut out of them. I can't think of the name of them.

13:00 All late releases, brand new releases and everything. But half the time you were too drunk to remember what the movie was in the finish. You only went there to get with your mates and have a few beers and try and watch the movie. So it was all westerns and there was war ones, murder stories and stuff like that. They weren't going to put love stories on or there'd have been nothing left of the screen.

- 13:30 Plus there was no women in the camp anyway, only blokes. So there was car racing ones, drags we used to get the American drags which were good and that was it. That's all you got.

**Were there any blue movies [pornographic films]?**

No. There was an American team that used to go round and do them, that was their job. All they did was blue movies. But once you've seen one of them they're all the bloody same anyway.

- 14:00 And half the blokes would laugh and carry on watching them but mostly the blokes, "What do you want to watch them for?" We know what they are going to do. We have all done it. Why watch them do it when we can do it? They still watched them though, they still got groups together. A couple of times we were lucky to go to the USA shows, American ones. We had our own shows coming
- 14:30 over. We had Johnny O'Keefe, their mob come over. Col Joy, Little Pattie and a few others came over and did shows for us. Olivia Newton John before she was famous overseas. And American shows with Bob Hope, one of his shows, and
- 15:00 that's about the only shows we got to come over and entertain the troops. Someone else came over but I can't think who it was now, I've forgotten.

**What were your quarters like?**

A tent which would be twelve foot by twelve foot square. Four beds

- 15:30 around the outside edge of it against the blast walls, which were sandbags. Wooden frame around the walls inside the tent with mosquito fly wire on it. Fly wire door to keep the insects out, mosquitos and that because you were on tablets morning and night for malaria and
- 16:00 we had three in our tent. We had a table in the middle of the tent, around the post. That's about it, it had a basic wooden floor in it and that's it, finish. That was the living quarters. And you had a trunk to keep your gear in. We didn't have cupboards, well we did have cupboards, we made them out of ammo boxes and stuff.

**Who was in your tent?**

- 16:30 I had the transport corporal and another driver and myself and that was it. Barry Right, Pricie and myself, three of us and we spent thirteen months living in that tent. There were a couple of things, I bought a TV set over there which I put in. It wasn't much good anyway unless you could understand Vietnamese.
- 17:00 We had the radio there to get the six o'clock radio broadcast. I remember that movie that Robin Williams did, where he says "good morning Vietnam" one. We were over there when that bloke was doing it, the real bloke and every six o'clock in the morning you'd get that voice. "Good Morning Vietnam" at six o'clock and then we'd get the show was Chicken man. It was a little serial on every morning, bloody Chicken man on.
- 17:30 You could hear all the blokes going off, all making the Chicken man noise when it came on because we were just getting out of bed. That was the amount of entertainment in the tent other than we'd try and play cards at night. Put a blanket around the table and hang it off the ceiling so that no light came out of the tent. We would try and hide in there and play cards and every tent had their own private boozier. We'd cut the hole in the floorboards and dug the dirt out underneath and place an esky in the floor.
- 18:00 You're not allowed to have booze in the tent so we had it covered over so you couldn't know what was there and we'd have a few beers after hours. Everyone had one. So yes, full of beer every night. Like two dollars fifty would buy a carton of beer. I wish I could do it now.

**Would you have hangovers?**

Oh yeah, we had some beauties. It didn't worry you

- 18:30 because you'd work it off the next morning. After starting work it was that bloody hot that it would sweat it out of you anyway. But quite a few blokes were at the RAP [regimental aid post] every morning with bloody hangovers. Go to the doctor, get some pills, and go to work. There's nothing else to do.

**Take us through that first week or so where you were told things? What were you told when you arrived at Nui Dat?**

Well to be blunt,

- 19:00 "If you run over someone in the village or on the road, back over them and make sure they are dead". "What?" "Because if you don't they sue the army". "What do you mean?" "They sue the army. Their system is that you've got to pay for all the relatives too, cousins, the aunts and uncles, the lot. But if they are dead you don't. So back over them again". I thought, "OK, yeah right". Plus we drove on the other side of the road
- 19:30 which made it hard too. We had right hand drive vehicles and we were driving on the American side of the road. So we spent thirteen months driving on the wrong side of the road. But I never heard of it



happening. We had a couple of crashes and the people over there had a few prangs and that but nothing really bad's happened in that way.

**What did you think of this kind of comment?**

Strange but you could see the reasoning once they had explained to you why.

20:00 Because some people carry explosives and walk out in the middle of the road. You don't stop, you just keep your foot down. Actually with one of my loads I hit a mortar bomb buried in the road and it exploded just behind my fuel tanks. It didn't puncture them, thank god. White phosphorous, which burns in oxygen went everywhere but it missed the blokes in the back of the truck and it missed me. It hit

20:30 the dashboard in front of me because we got no doors or anything in the truck but I kept going. No flame, no fire, no one was hit. I just kept going, get out of the place because if there's a booby trap there there could be a booby trap somewhere else. So you did what you had to do and worry about the consequences later.

**And you knew you were going to be in transport?**

Yeah, I was in

21:00 transport before I got there but I was in the infantry transport. So whatever the infantry companies did out in the bush we did. We used to take them out in ambushes, drop them off, pick them up at the ambush sites and then we'd walk out at night, we'd go out last thing at night on a patrol just walking. We'd go out and spend the night out in the jungle on an ambush and come back the next morning if nothing happened. We'd set up an

21:30 ambush waiting for any enemy movement.

**Why would you have to do this if you were in transport?**

Everyone did it. Your priority in the army is you are an infantry soldier. It doesn't matter what trade you've got, your first priority is infantry and whatever you are you go out bush and do infantry work, that's the Australian Army's thinking where the Americans go a different way around it. But every soldier is an infantryman. It doesn't matter whether he is a cook or whatever he

22:00 does the infantry work. That's why I said when I got out of battalion I left transport initially but I went to transport corps and I didn't do so much walking, the walking was cut down by about three quarters because I drove everywhere. In the infantry it is the other way around. You drive out, you might park your truck, they'll leave a mob to guard the vehicles and you'll walk ten or fifteen miles through the scrub on a patrol, come back to the truck

22:30 and drive home so it doesn't make any difference. That was their mentality and that is why our army is one of the best in the world, every bloke does the same thing.

**Take us through how you were briefed before going on a patrol?**

Not a lot. All they give us

23:00 was intelligence on the area, whether there had been any movement at night through the area, how many possibly, all your map references, grid references and where you are going to set up the ambush, what weapons you are taking out, what explosives you are taking out, what mines you are taking out and then your section commander that's taking you out,

23:30 the corporals taking you out, they sit down and work out where they're going to set up the ambushes in the area. You'd get into the area at daylight and very quietly set up all your Claymore mines and everything, work out where the killing ground is going to be and then you go up on the high ground and that's basically it. You're a prop, you don't move till daylight and when daylight comes and if nothing's happened and everything's still clear in the area you radio in, pack up your gear

24:00 and head back to camp. It might take you an hour, an hour and a half to walk back in. That's basically in. That's your briefing to start with, you're out and back in.

**Just the one night?**

Yes, one night at a time. Anymore than that like you can't... we didn't like staying out overnight because you're only a small group. There would only probably be

24:30 probably a dozen blokes and you don't take bugger all with you. You take a few rations to chew on, snacks, but that's it. You don't carry any webbing other than what you carry ammo in and your water bottle and that's it, no bedding or nothing, you just lie on the ground and that's where you stay all night with your weapon in front of you waiting for something to happen. You can't take any food or anything with you, it's not worth it.

25:00 You go in, go out or go out and then come back in that's it and the next night someone else goes out. And that happens over thirteen months. It's like an early warning for the main base. If the enemy is

heading in then you're the first contact and if you get a first contact and it's a bigger force than what you are when you initiate the ambush

- 25:30 while they're in confusion you bug out and head back to camp as quick as you can and warn the camp, "There's a large force heading in". We never got that because we they never us attacked like that, it's just an early warning post.

**Do you spend the night awake?**

Oh yeah. Probably...You sleep but you're awake. It's strange because you know what's

- 26:00 going on around you but you are asleep. I don't know what it is. You do doze but the first sound you hear you are wide awake, instantly awake. No one has to shake you or nothing, you only hear one sound and you are awake. You are very alert the whole time but one you get back to camp you are buggered. It hits you. It hits you like a ton of bricks.

- 26:30 And you get back in and usually when we got back in we take our gear up, cleaned it up and by lunchtime you'd go back and do half a days work. You wouldn't knock off or anything. You'd do half a days work and then just have your normal night's sleep. You got used to it. It just come a natural reaction, you just did it and didn't think about it.

- 27:00 All you were hanging out for was a cold beer that night, that's about it. You'd have tea and then go to the boozer or the movies or whatever you were going to do. Sometimes you just stayed in the tent and slept. So there was not a real lot going on there at night, not that you can talk about other than occasionally we had sports days on a weekend, we had no operations on. We'd have a game of football or touch football or something like that.

- 27:30 What else did we do? That's about it. We used to play sports, volleyball, we played a lot of volleyball. And just after we got there we got hold of a go-kart made out of a steel frame with piping welded together, lawn mower wheels on it

- 28:00 and a small four stroke engine stuck on the back of it. We used to push start it and race round on that. And then we got hold of another one with a Yank motor, half a KBA or a KBA motor, generator motor which was like half a Volkswagen motor, two cylinders. Pretty powerful little thing too. We put that on a go-kart and we could go down Luscombe airstrip, which was the airstrip behind us.

- 28:30 On a Sunday afternoon when there was no flying we used to race down there at a hundred mile an hour, no breaks. We just turned the motor off at the other end, hop out and someone would go down the strip and they had a helicopter chasing us one day down the strip and they clocked us at a hundred and five mile an hour. And it was one to one ratio straight off the gearing from chain to the motor was the same gearing so whatever revs the motor was doing the back wheels were doing and the only way you could stop it was turn it off and lock the back wheels up. You know, you'd do stupid things like that.

- 29:00 We sold that after a while to some blokes in 8RAR and they sold it to a couple of Yanks and one of the Yanks got killed in it. He couldn't stop it at the other end and hit a brick wall, put the steering shaft went through him. We told them there was no brakes on it. So these sort of things you did, stupid things.

**Were there any accidents amongst you guys with it?**

Oh it rolled over a few times but no one got injured out of it, a few scratches and bruises.

- 29:30 Because we used to just turn it off and spin it out on the dirt, she'd just spin round and stop and that was it. We didn't have any accidents on it, we were too smart for that. But it was something to do, a bit of fun. We'd get a few cracks in the chassis, go and weld them up in the workshop and take her out again. We changed the wheels on it one day and put wheels off a Cessna aircraft on it and made it bigger. It went even faster then.

- 30:00 So you know, you do stupid things and put four lawn mower tyres on the single rim. One rim and you'd put two tyres together on it. We didn't have any Cessna tyres so we put lawn mower tires on the rims and bolted the rims together and pumped the tyres up. It was only the outside edge of the beading that was holding the tyre in place because the other two were matched together in the middle. You wouldn't do it here.

- 30:30 But over there you'd do a lot of things like that. Fun and games.

**Is there a feeling of not immortality but that kind of sense not thinking about...?**

Yeah.

**Describe that for us.**

It's hard, you can't describe it. It's just... "It won't be me I'm not going to get hit" and then after a while in the country you say, "Well if I'm gonna get hit I'm not going to know about it anyway"

- 31:00 because it's the shot you don't hear is the one that hits you. And one of my mates got shot and we asked him, we said, "What's it like?" He said, "It's like someone hit me, kicked in the guts". He got shot in the

lung. He said, "Like someone kicked me. The pain doesn't come till later, that's it". He was lucky he was wearing a flak jacket and it stopped the bullet from going right through. He's blasé about it. He's got a hole in the bloody lung and he's got this clear plastic patch over here

31:30 that the Yanks had put on him which sealed the lung up. He had only been in there an hour or so, two hours he was in hospital and we got to see him and he was having a smoke. He said, "Watch this" and he smoked up here. That didn't worry him, it didn't worry him in the slightest. We called him Aspro because he was black, he was Aboriginal and his nickname was Aspro. But so it didn't worry him in the slightest.

32:00 He said, "I've been shot, So? I'm still alive. It's just like getting kicked or punched in a fight. That's it. The initial hit doesn't hurt it's the few seconds later you realize what is going on and the body goes 'u-oh' and you feel the pain. The bullet hits that fast that you don't hear the bullet until a minute later". So no one really worried about it.

#### **What happened to Aspro?**

He got sent home. He got patched up and once his lung was healing up

32:30 he got sent home. He got his medals, he got sent home early so he was happy. Go home for rest and recuperation and long leave.

#### **Did Aspro have any different treatment at all?**

No. The American hospitals were good. It doesn't matter who you were or what you were, if you were wounded and it was life threatening you were first in. It didn't matter who it was.

33:00 I was sitting there once in the hospital waiting to see him actually and an American Negro was bought in and he was wounded, he was hit with white phosphorous and he was screaming because it burns. It continually burns while it's got air to it. And they put him in a big tank of water right in front of us and once the water sealed it off the air the burning stopped. He had to sit there in the dark with a pair of tweezers and you could see the phosphorus

33:30 in his skin glowing in the dark and they picked it out with a pair of tweezers before it can heal, otherwise it would keep burning and he lit up like a Christmas tree. He had it all over the place. It took them hours to get it out but it was really nasty shit that stuff, it sticks to you. That was before we went in to see Aspro, you know. That sort of makes you, "Ugh".

34:00 You think how lucky you are. But our blokes, ours have a different attitude. If we got in to fight we go in, our force will go in if we know we can overwhelm them, beat them. The Yanks go in en masse. They right half their troops off when they leave the country. All their equipment is written off when it leaves America.

34:30 They go in en masse, that's why they used to have so many fatalities. They used to go in, charge in and our blokes didn't. We'd hit and run if we had to, harass them and that's why we lost less than they did because we didn't do it the way they did it.

#### **How does it compare in numbers?**

What the Yanks?

35:00 **In a platoon?**

I don't know what their platoons were?

#### **No. Sorry I mean in an ambush?**

In a fight? They'd go in as long as they had the advantage of at least ten or fifteen to one but then the enemy with the weapons those times with that number coming in you would lose more because the enemy didn't have to aim at anything. They'd just fire in the general direction and it'd hit you. Our blokes were more into camouflage, concealment.

35:30 Hit them in a big way straight off and then back off so we try not to loose any men. And while they are recovering hit them again and again and every time they get hit they go to ground and you've got them. The Yanks are totally different. Like we went through Canungra up in Northern Queensland, which is the jungle-training centre and we had American marines up there. They bought them in to

36:00 to do the course and they were specialists. Some specialist mob like SAS and they saw what our blokes went through in their training up there, they were a normal soldier, and they jacked up. They reckoned they were crazy doing the things we did but our normal blokes did that. We had Gurkhas [regiment of Nepalese] up there that did the training with us.

36:30 They loved it, the Yanks hated it. Said, "We don't do any shit like this." "No wonder you get killed, we do". Jumping off towers with full battle gear into the river, running into barbed wire, under barbed wire in full battle gear with a machine gun actually firing over your head, only a couple of inches off your arse. They did that up at Canungra. They had a fixed machine gun, an old Vickers machine gun firing at a mountain just above your head.

- 37:00 You kept your arse down I tell you, crawling along the ground with a gun firing over your head. These sorts of things. It was interesting. It certainly taught you a few things. But when you get over there the first shot fired you hit the deck, very quickly. They didn't have to fire a second shot but most of the time, the Vietnamese were only small blokes and they always fired their weapons on automatic.
- 37:30 When they did if the first shot didn't hit you the rest went above your head because the guns, they couldn't hold the guns down, they'd go like that. So if they didn't hit you with the first shot the gun went up in the air with other half a dozen shots. They couldn't hold the gun down; they were all hanging on to the gun like that. You don't, you hang on to it like that when you're firing it. You hold the gun down if you fire forward, they just fired straight up so if the first shot didn't hit you're laughing. You got away with it.
- 38:00 Most of the blokes we lost would have been probably forward scouts, the first blokes that made contact. Other things we were trained in, ambush and that, if we got ambushed...The Americans, they'd go to ground and fight back. If we got ambushed, say on the left hand side they opened up on us, if we were in the middle of an ambush area we wouldn't go to ground. We don't go ground,
- 38:30 we turn and go straight through them. We turn left and go into the ambush that's firing at us. That was our training, we'd go in firing at them. That's the least thing they think people are going to do. They are waiting for us to go to ground then they got ya. We don't, we go through them and kill them. If they are on the left or the right or whatever you just turn and open up and go through them. That's how you were trained to do an ambush.

**Is that a hard thing to do?**

It is but you do it instinctively, you don't want to die.

- 39:00 If they haven't got you in the first shots you turn around and you open up with your gun, and you let fly with everything and nine times out of ten I used to carry the machinegun. You open up with the M60 machinegun and in a hundred metres distance it would cover one hundred metres of the ground in an oval. The gun never fired in the same spot. You pulled the trigger on a hundred round belt and it would cover a circle. So whatever's in the circle is
- 39:30 dead. So that was your training. You just turn and opened up. You don't worry about anyone who was hit; you go through the enemy first and then you come back through and remove the weapons. Well you don't come back through, you go to ground at the other side and some blokes go out and they go and check the enemy. We'd take weapons and anything we can find off them and then go back to our wounded and then go from there. But the Yanks didn't, they'd just go to ground
- 40:15 and that's why they lost a lot of people. They'd go to ground and try and fight the enemy and the enemy is always on higher ground. We're not stupid. So if they are on higher ground you head to that higher ground and go straight through them. Don't stuff around with any of them. So that was it.

## Tape 5

**00:37 Initially can you take me through the step by step of the first patrol that you went on?**

It's virtually what I've already said. The briefing you get first. Once the briefing is over you got your gear ready

- 01:00 to start with anyway. You go out at last light, probably, depending how far you've got to go you'd go about three thirty or four o'clock in the afternoon. You'd get to the place where you were going before dark. If it was an ambush you'd just set up, stay the night,
- 01:30 and if nothing happens you'd return the next morning. If you are doing a patrol, a set patrol it's the same start, briefing and everything before you go. Once we've taken out an American on patrol with us and one of our blokes has gone with them on their river patrol. We went out, we did
- 02:00 an all day one which took in, probably six or seven kilometres and virtually all you are doing is doing a straight line on a trail. If you are on a road you zigzag on the road, you're opposite each other, well not opposite but adjacent. I'm walking down the edge of the road. Your
- 02:30 weapons are pointing to the scrub on either side of the road. You've got two men up front which are forward scouts. You've got riflemen, section commander, radio operator, gunner, number two on the gun and every man behind there carries a couple of belts of ammunition for the machine gun
- 03:00 and you probably have about five or six riflemen behind. And you just follow your compass reading if you are going by track or follow the track, to each given point, at which point you stop and change directions. Unless you contact anyone it's a set like a grid square you do, part of a grid square and then you're back into camp. But
- 03:30 if you were contacted the drill is the forward scouts will go to ground because they've been the first

contact. Your 2IC [second in command] and radio operator will go to ground, your gunner will either go to the right or to the high ground. That way the rest of the troop know exactly where the gunner is going to be. If there is high ground they know he's up there, if there is no high ground they know he is on the right and that's where the ammo is passed to

04:00 to feed the gun and that's how they operate on that area. If the contacts broken of course they move off again. Once you've done your grid square or your patrol line usually you head back into camp and debrief. They find out what you've seen, who you contacted.

04:30 The other patrols we used to do is roadblocks, go out and block the road off and search vehicles for enemy, explosive, weapons, anything like that.

#### **All vehicles?**

All vehicles, everything. Civilian, military the lot. Well military not so much, our own military but the civilian vehicles.

#### **How did you make them stop?**

By standing in the middle of the road and pointing a gun at them. They stopped very quick. They know the routine anyway.

05:00 Most of the people around Nui Dat knew out blokes, knew the Australians, and they called us 'Number one' because we never treated them like crap. We'd go into villages and help them out if they were having a party or something like that for someone, sometimes we'd go in and help them out. We'd build roads for them. We built bridges for them.

05:30 Just the general work the army does here in Australia, go out and help the community. That's what we do. The difference is over there you have an armed patrol, armed people with you to keep you protected while you are doing the work because if you do the work and the Vietcong come in which they do at night at times, they destroy everything that's been done. That's just the way they do it and the first thing they do is kill the village chief. The women, they'd rape the women. They didn't care whether the woman, the female was one-year-old, six months old,

06:00 or fifty year old, they couldn't care less. They were just pure animals. What else? Patrols, ambush, normal patrols.

#### **Did you ever find anything in a roadblock?**

No. We had a bus blow up on us. I don't know what happened there but we heard the explosion and by the time we got there the bus had been destroyed anyway.

06:30 They were lucky there was only one killed and that was the driver. We found part of his body in the scrub. The only way we found that was by following his intestine into the scrub. He was still sitting in the seat and the other half was out in the bush. The Vietcong didn't care whether it was civilian, military or what, they just killed anyone. Half the time they were

07:00 doped to the eyeballs, they were full of dope. We had one mob attack one of our companies and they shot his legs off, one of the Vietcong and he ran three hundred metres through the scrub on stumps. No pain, he couldn't have felt any pain. But when they got the bodies, we take the bodies back and identify them and did tests on them and found they are doped to the eyeballs. They're just given the weapons and told to charge and they just do what they were told and bugger the consequence.

#### **What kind of drugs?**

Anything. Marijuana, opium, it's all grown over there and readily available and their medical supplies were all out of date. All stuff that was five, six, seven year old. We took out a hospital in the Long Hai Mountains, we carted equipment out of there and the drugs and that were ten years out of date. We found medical equipment supplied by Australian universities

08:00 all engraved nicely, supplied by such and such a university.

#### **How had that gotten there?**

They had donated it to the North Vietnamese. They said, "They don't use it in the military", bullshit they don't. They have tons of it inside the mountain. There was a whole hospital inside the mountain; tunnels and tunnels, beds, equipment, and operating theatres, everything inside the mountain.

#### **How did that feel to see?**

Well that's why most

08:30 of the Vietnam veterans and that used to hate the people back here, especially the young ones. We had our supporters, yes, but the ones back here didn't have a bloody clue what's going on. They just had their own ideas and they just listened to the newscasts. The reporters weren't reporting the truth anyway half the time. They embellished stuff and made it look even worse than what it was to make a good story to sell papers. It didn't work. It stuffed us right up. All we wanted to do when we got back was shoot them and that's what some blokes did.

09:00 That's why they went off their tree, because they got treated like crap. So, not nice. That's why I don't trust people.

**And in those patrols in the bush, in jungle what sort of things are you looking for as you walk? What are your eyes doing?**

On the ground and looking through the scrub, not at the scrub.

09:30 You get trained to look through the scrub because that's where the enemy's hiding. If you are looking at the scrub you are not looking at the enemy. You've got to look through the scrub. You are looking at the ground for booby traps, mines, anything tell tale, thin pieces of wire which are strapped to hand grenades and stuff in the scrub. You are always looking down. If you find something all you do a signal back, you don't talk. The Yanks used to talk but we don't. We just signal, point, step over the wire, show it to them, we'd mark it on the map and

10:00 the engineers would come in and blow them up.

**How would you signal?**

Oh God, what was the signal? Now you're asking the bloody question. Normal things; halt, listen, look, enemy, clear, left, right, whatever it was. You'd say, "Enemy, right". I can't think what the ambush was. I think it was like that, ambush.

10:30 And we used to go up into the scrub and ambush them. Anything you could find, for a booby trap you point to the ground and step your leg up and over and the next bloke behind knows exactly what's there. We never talked unless we were in a contact where the bloke who made the contact, the number two, the first one would keep him engaged and the second one moves back to the commander and let him know what was going on; how many enemy he'd seen. If there was too many we'd back off and get out of there.

11:00 Probably set up a Claymore and roll the wire out as we move back, let the enemy get near it and blow it. The force of the explosion used to blow out eight hundred ball bearings so anybody in front of them, "Ta ta". So you carry all these things in the equipment.

**And what's it like without the communication? Is it**

11:30 **without...?**

We don't talk. We might go all day and not talk.

**Does that affect you?**

No. Just like being quiet and don't say a word. That's what upset the Yank, he wanted to stop and have a smoke every five minutes. If we stopped we'll have a smoke but we'll stop in an area where we picked where we could see everything for a few hundred metres or more. We just don't light a smoke while we're walking along. That's a no no because then you're giving yourself away.

12:00 Anything will give yourself away. Even a ration tin left on the ground will tell the enemy where you are and they'll make a bomb out of that ration tin. So we used to crush the stuff all up so it was unusable and either take it with us or bury it deep. Usually we'd take it with us, we'd take all our rubbish back.

**And how does not talking for such a length of time affect mental patterns and your alertness?**

12:30 Didn't worry us, you are always alert. You know it's a war zone, your mind is ticking over, you're looking, thinking what you've got to look for. It kept you busy the whole time you were out there. There was no slack period. Even when you are sitting down having a smoke you are watching. You are watching everything that is going on.

**Has this transferred back, say looking at your life when you come back?**

Yes. I'm more observant, I watch

13:00 things. Like when I'm driving a car now I'm always watching the driver behind and the driver left and right and I'm waiting for him to do something stupid. And it actually saved my life once up here. I stopped at lights at Berrima and I'm always watching my mirrors, being an ex-truck driver I heard in the wet the sound of a truck skidding. The first thing I did was to let the clutch out me van I was driving and put the foot down and I moved into the next lane, the outside lane

13:30 and a road train had come through with only one trailer on side ways. He had jack-knifed and took out about eleven cars. I would have been one of the first he would have hit with the trailer so my thinking and quick movement got me out of the way. So it's just things that stick to the mind. We used to do skid tests in the semi-trailers and I knew the sound of a truck skidding and it made me react straight away and I just did it and as soon as I was clear I rang through an ambulance.

14:00 So the army training has paid off.

**And how about things like if you walk into a restaurant. Is there a place you'll sit where you**

**can...?**

I always like to watch the door. I like to sit with my back to the wall, always. It's probably that that's caused it but I'd prefer to sit with my back to the wall.

**Why is that?**

I don't know what's behind me.

- 14:30 If I don't know what's behind me I don't like it. If someone comes up behind me I jump and I've got a tendency to swing if they frighten me, if they come up behind me without me knowing they're there. If someone is just standing behind me and talking and he's talking to someone else and he's one of my mates and he puts a hand on my shoulder like that, that doesn't worry me because I know who's there, who's at my back.
- 15:00 On the street if a stranger did it I'm liable to deck him, just reaction. I haven't yet, I've come close. My fist has been closed ready to swing but I've actually looked first before I did. You get a...Your reactions change all together because when I come home any sound made me jump. I don't sleep at night. I sleep but I don't sleep.
- 15:30 I can hear the cat padding around the floor, that will wake me up. Any smallest sound wakes me up. If someone comes in the house I know they're in there straight away. It just conditions your mind, your sleeping and I used to be able to sleep standing up. I'd be asleep but my eyes would be open. It's hard to explain how you do it but you do do it.
- 16:00 It is frightening but I've had patches driving the semi trailer when I can't remember going through a town and yet I'm about a hundred kilometres the other side of the town. How did I get through the town? I don't know. I had to be asleep driving through and yet my eyes were open. I don't do it now but a few times that's happened to me and I just can't work out how I got to the other side of the town and that is freaky. It was a good thing I had no one with me.

16:30 **And when you were out on patrols you wouldn't sleep would you?**

No. On ambush patrol you don't sleep all night. Normal day patrols you go back to sleep anyway. But sometimes on some of the patrols if you're out with a company then you do get a chance to have some sleep because what they do is make a circle virtually with a gun at each point

17:00 and you put people in between the guns and the guns will be on picket. Everybody will take a turn at the gun, you might have an hour or two hours on the gun during the night. So it's dark at say six, six thirty, seven o'clock you're in bed. You don't get up till first light or just before first light in the morning so if you've got twelve hours say and you've had two hours on the gun for the night, for the rest of the night you sleep. So you

17:30 always know there is someone awake on the machine gun all night, two actually, two people awake on the machine gun all night.

**And how do you bed down?**

Straight on the ground. You used to have blow ups that they'd give you to sleep on the ground and you could spend half the bloody night blowing them up and then they'd go down again so we never bothered. We'd just take the hootchie [makeshift bed] they give us to make a tent out of, we didn't even bother with them over there. All we did was wrap it round the waist, put the belt over the top of them and we stopped

18:00 for the night, we had our food in pouches to cook. I used to put the hootchie on the ground and sit on that and when I'm ready to go to bed all I did was opened it up and put the shiny side outside, lay down on it and threw it over yourself and just lay on the ground asleep. I used to lie on the ground to sleep. I could go to sleep on the floor here, it don't worry me. I just got that used to it.

**And is there any sort of communication when you say camp for a night? Can you talk a bit more?**

18:30 Whisper, yes. We could talk very quietly but mainly if you were mostly inside the camp. If you were out on the perimeter...Yeah you could talk but only very, very quietly. Sound carries at night something shocking. We got shown that in basic training for infantry how much you could pick up sound. Someone lighting a match, well not so much lighting a match but opening a tin cup

19:00 and putting the handle into place or opening their dixies to make a dinner. You could tell exactly what the sound was because you could hear it over a hundred metres. They could be out at the front fence there and I could tell you what they are doing at night because it's that quiet that sound just carries phenomenally at night.

**And what sort of food did you carry on you to cook and stuff?**

Oh we had the normal rations, mostly American rations over there. It was all dehydrated stuff. Some of the tinned stuff wasn't too bad except that it was very salty, American food.

- 19:30 We used to have tins of ham, prawns, tins of fruit, cream, believe it or not, reduced cream that didn't have to be chilled. We used to have coffee, milk, sugar. The biscuits we had, the Australian biscuits we used to soak them and make breakfast serial out of them with jam and cream or condensed milk it was in the tubes.
- 20:00 What else did we have in the ration packs? In the American ones we used to get chewing gum, cigarettes in the SP packs, we used to love getting them. We used to get cartons of cigarettes for nothing, cartons of bloody chewing gum and all this sort of gismo. Chewing tobacco. We used to get all this.

**Was it surprising that they rationed you with cigarettes?**

No that was only out in the bush. It's just a ration pack, when you get so many pack you got a big carton that carried all this gear for blokes in the bush. But when you were at camp

- 20:30 you could buy say half a dozen packets and put them in your pack and take them with you. But you never bothered because they'd get wet anyway with sweat. You'd only take one pack, if you run out your mate have or something. Plus you go into a village a good bargaining was cigarettes. For some unknown reason they loved Menthol, Salem Menthol Cigarettes and they loved them. You could swap them a packet of cigarettes for some fruit or anything you wanted. You know.
- 21:00 A tube of toothpaste, they couldn't get that. They give you, you could sell it virtually. I could sell, like I get a crate of apples about so big from the kitchen and the blokes might have an apple each so you still have half a crate left and you'd give it to the local shop and they give you fifty bucks for it, American. A carton of cigarettes we used to get fifty dollars for a carton of cigarettes and we'd get them for \$2.50 because they couldn't get them.
- 21:30 So we used to keep the Salem cigarettes for the Vietnamese because they loved them. And they'd get you information. "Has Charlie been through?" "Oh no. Oh yeah, yesterday." They'd tell you, just a packet of cigarettes. A couple of Vietnamese that we knew there that got really well known was a young girl in Baria named Diane. We actually....She migrated to Australia
- 22:00 when the war finished. When we all pulled out she moved out too, she came back to Australia. She is living in Sydney somewhere and we used to give her apples and oranges and stuff they couldn't get. And I used to get stuff off her like silk, Vietnamese clothing, dresses and stuff like that and a pair of nipples bra and crutchless strides which I gave to the Mrs.
- 22:30 Last time I seen them they were hanging on the wall with balloons in them at the Tatunga Football club in Northern Victoria. They were hung on the wall with balloons in them. I was glad to get rid of them. The stupid things you buy. What else did we get? I bought a yellow silk dress for the Mrs and I bought a red one home
- 23:00 and I think the daughter got that one. Vicky got that one. I've still got a few things. Actually I've got a - it's in the draw there or the bag over there I'll show you later - It's a cigarette lighter the old gasoline one. The Second World War even had them, they flip open.

**A Zippo?**

No, it works as well as gold. It's perfect.

**A Zippo is that...?**

A Zippo. It's got a naked girl on the front engraved on it.

- 23:30 On the back it's got, "Ye they I walk through the shadow of the valley of death I will fear no evil because I'm the evilest son of a bitch in the valley." That was on the cigarette lighter and I actually gave it away to Sandy's uncle years ago and he gave up smoking. It was only ten years ago and he came back up here to see us he gave it back to me so I've got my lighter back.
- 24:00 There were over there, stuff they couldn't get that we took for granted. Toothpaste, soap, they don't get. I don't know how they cleaned themselves half the time. But they still had a laundry in Baria. Mamasan, she was supplied with the soap powder for the army, she was paid to do the laundry. She'd do
- 24:30 the whole battalion's laundry in a day. It was unreal. That's all our uniforms, socks if you wanted them done, you bagged them up and put your name on it, take them in, give it to her, she'd do them. You'd go back the next day and the truck would pick up all the laundry and bring it back but we had our own washing machines and stuff there but half the time you couldn't be bothered. It was easier to give her ten dollars and she'd do the whole weeks washing for you. Why not? She's earned her money. Ten dollars is a lot of money to them.
- 25:00 It was American because all our money over there was based on the American dollar.

**Was there a...what's the word...like a currency?**

Yeah, they had the dong, their own currency. But we had, instead of getting the American dollars in our hand we used to get what they call the military payments, MPC [military payment currency] and it was the same as the American money but smaller and just paper and it was marked with ten, twenty, thirty,



25:30 fifty, hundred dollars or whatever it was and it was equal to that and it was just for the military. You'd get paid in that and you could use that at the canteen or wherever you went at Australian bases or American bases, you could use it there too. If you went on leave and you were going to Singapore or any place like that you could get it in American dollars or Singapore dollars. The same as going home they paid us before we left Vietnam in Australian dollars. When you arrived home you already had the money on you.

26:00 You didn't have to do any exchange.

**And could the Vietnamese people use the military dollars?**

They used the military dollars. Yeah. They'd take it because it was American dollars. It was worth more. I think one dollar of ours was probably a thousand dong to them and that's bugger all. That might buy one loaf of bread or two loaves of bread and that's about it. They used it too but every six months they changed it, the military and

26:30 new stuff was issued, different design. As soon as that was done, that date the old stuff was no good. So if the Vietnamese had it and accumulated a heap of it you might as well burn it. They used to come to us and try to get us to change it for them. There was thousands, you couldn't do it. Some of the people we knew quite well that we worked with, we'd take it in and change it for them on the quiet saying it was ours. They'd

27:00 give us probably a hundred bucks for doing it and they might get two grand back. They're happy, two thousand dollars they could might buy six cars and a house. It gave us a few quid in the pocket and helped them out illegally but who cares, I don't. That's why our blokes got on well with the Vietnamese where ever we went.

**On the patrols again**

27:30 **how did...You talked to Kiernan [interviewer] a little bit before about the sometimes nasty animals and stuff in the general environment. How did they affect patrols at all?**

Didn't see them, only at night they move around. Like most things, oh you'd occasionally run into spider webs and stuff like that through the scrub and you watch for snakes, but most of the time when they heard you coming they moved. Because the war has been going for that long over there

28:00 most of the animals are conditioned that if humans are around they take off because they know the explosions are coming, they didn't hang around. Insects? They're a different thing all together but the bigger animals kept away, elephants and that kept right away from us. You didn't have to worry about them too much. Tigers, they don't move in the daytime anyway, they move in the evening or at night. It they smelt you, which they could from a good distance,

28:30 they'd go somewhere else and move away because they know it is dangerous. It's just conditioning after what, it's nearly a hundred years they've been having a war over there.

**And how about the noises of the jungle?**

Yeah, you get the odd birds. You can hear the animals but you can never see them. It is like normal jungle that you see on TV; you can hear all these animals but you never see them. It's the same over there you just never see them.

29:00 Occasionally something might take off through the scrub and you might get a glimpse of it but that's it.

**Was it different if it was really silent? Would that indicate something?**

Yes. The birds are quiet or the birds are startled and something startled them then you do stop, look and listen and see what's happening before you move again. There might have been someone moving an arm down there and the birds have caught a glimpse of something moving and they've taken flight. It could be an ambush

29:30 so you move away from that area and go round it. You've just got to use the old noggin, before it gets knocked off so that's what we used to do. Think, "Don't know what's in there, can't see anything in there, nothings moved for the last half and hour, well we're moving out in the other direction". That's the first thing you think of unless they're moving through and they didn't see us

30:00 and they're only a small group and then we'll do an instant ambush. If they are coming in our direction we move straight off the trail, drop and as they come through they get hit. If we've got no other way to go we'll probably hit them and bug out quickly while they're in confusion or if there's too many of them. It all depends, everything is different. It doesn't matter what you're taught it all changes out there. Your section commander is the one that is responsible, he's the one that's got to think about it

30:30 and the forward scout's got to think about it. If he thinks there's too many, he'll send a signal back and move out of the way and let them pass. What you do is when they're gone you get on the radio and report it and a bigger patrol will take them on so you just let them know the movement. There's not much more you can really say about patrols.

**Well what can you say about your job in transport in Vietnam?**

31:00 It changed day to day depending on what job you were given.

**Well tell me about first of all the kind of vehicles you were using?**

We had Landrovers with the tops off, no doors, no tailgate on them. The trucks we had two and half toners, no doors, five toners with no doors, no tarps on the back. They had no doors so you could get out quickly.

31:30 What else did we have there? We had a couple of gun jeeps, four actually; two cut down Landrovers-short wheelbase that moved pretty fast and they had mounted on a tripod at the back of the jeep, two of them had M16 machine guns. Another one had a 109 or 106 it is

32:00 Recoilless rifle which was like a bazooka; big tube with a large shell probably about that long that goes in it. That was the full length of the jeep and overhung the front and the back. And we set one up of our own. We got hold of a mini gun off an American helicopter that had been written off. They gave us the mini gun and the belt feeds and all the gear to go with it and

32:30 we set that up in the back of a Landrover. And that mini gun all up was probably about that long and about that round with about six barrels. And that would fire...I think one minute, sorry a thirty second burst out of that gun up in the air would cover every square inch of the Melbourne football ground with a bullet. Deadly things they are. The barrels rotate, spin, you've probably seen them on TV shows, the spinning barrel thing?

33:00 That's the mini gun and when you see them at night all you see it's like a ray gun at night time. You see a red line coming out of an aircraft to the ground which was Snoopy. It was an old DC3 and it had about six to eight mini guns on it. And you couldn't see the plane but it looked like something up there was walking on long red legs. When you went in the area there was not a blade of grass or a tree standing, there's nothing.

33:30 It just flattened everything. When you think about it every fifth round out of each barrel is a tracer, that's the only one that lights up. In between those red ones there's five more rounds and yet it looks continuous red to the ground so that's how many rounds were coming out of the barrels. Phenomenal guns, dangerous damn things they are.

**Did you ever have to fire it?**

We had a fire at the range on one just to see what it was like. Just a, "Brrrrt" and that was it, there's about ten thousand rounds gone.

34:00 It's electrically operated. We couldn't fire it on the jeep too often because if you fired it sideways on the jeep it would roll the jeep over because of the recoil. But the M60s were alright I suppose but they were mainly used for escort. We had a jeep up the front and a jeep about a quarter of the way down, half way, three quarters one at the end, all armed

34:30 plus everybody in the convoy is armed anyway. And it was just in case we got ambushed which they did once. We just spun the gun jeep around and fired the 106 recoilless rifle and they were killed centre with one shot because the shell that comes out splinters and when it explodes it explodes into lengths of steel about that long and they fly through the air, thousands of pieces. They just pin them to wherever they are.

35:00 If there is a guy on a tree they are pinned to a tree, which was the ambush. They never hit anything anyway. They never hit anything, I don't know why.

**Tell me about how a convoy is set up and how it drives together and that sort of thing?**

It's no different to in Australia except for the gun vehicles. The gun vehicles front, rear, middle, half way, quarter,

35:30 and they're always sort of watching everything coming toward them, coming past them. Every truck's got a shotgun bloke with a rifle sitting in the passenger seat. The driver is armed. I used to drive my truck down the road with an M60 machinegun sitting out through the front window, I had the window open and the ammunition box was sitting on the engine cover. So all I had to do was grab the gun and that was it. My number two had an Armalite rifle.

36:00 If there are troops in the back then you've got all them blokes armed too. They're all carrying weapons and hand grenades and stuff. But if you did get hit there would be such an amount of ammunition going back into the enemy that it would be stupid. They tried it once on us and never did it again.

**What kind of a truck did you drive?**

International. It was one of the ones...They haven't got them now but they used to have the old six wheel drive trucks; so petrol,

36:30 cab over thingy, no nose on it. It was a five toner. That's all you could say about it. A five-toner six-wheel drive. When you wanted it six-wheel drive. Normally four-wheel drive at the back, bogey drive but when

you pulled the lever up she'd go six-wheel drive high and low range. So it could go anywhere. Good old truck.

**What sort of gearbox do they have?**

37:00 Five speed gear box, manual. The automatic is no good. A manual gearbox, twin carburettor, petrol motor. I can't think of what size the motor was. I think it was about four and a half, five litre I suppose. Big petrol engine International made. All made in Australia the trucks.

37:30 We had nothing in diesel, even our Landrovers were all petrol.

**Is there any sort of tricks or quirks about driving them?**

No. There's no keys or nothing to them. All the controls are up the top above the sun visor. You just hit a button, flick a switch down it turns the ignition on and you hit a button and it starts. That's it, there's nothing else. No keys. Nothing on a military vehicle. The Landrovers were the same, there was no keys to them either. You couldn't lock up or do anything to them.

38:00 No door locks. So you could pinch once but it stands out quite well and who'd want to pinch a Landrover? No one. You see a lot of the old trucks around, there are quite a lot in Darwin. There's one that's actually a tourist vehicle, one of our old army trucks. Someone has put a back on it and carts tourists in the back and proper seating and everything, put a diesel engine in it and they go out bush in Arnhem Land. You can't break it.

38:30 All the modern stuff breaks but the old mark five International just keeps going and going and going.

**And what sort of speeds would you be able to drive at?**

A hundred kilometres an hour. They went pretty well. In a convoy you were probably sit on eighty Ks [kilometres]. They used to make us sit on eighty Ks an hour and keep probably fifty to a hundred metres apart here in Australia. In Vietnam we used to be

39:00 probably fifty metres apart, just enough room for a passing vehicle to pass in front. But over there we used to go flat out, flat stick and why we used to keep gun vehicles behind and we'd always carry a workshop vehicle in the last bit. So if one breaks down it could be repaired and got going again straight away and you'd go flat stick to get there, load up and back again so you didn't get shot at. The faster you go

39:30 the harder it is to hit. Everything was done pretty well flat out.

**Were the roads good enough for that sort of thing?**

We didn't care. Most of them were bitumen we were on but even the dirt tracks, we used to go flat out down the dirt tracks too. If you are going to break them you are going to break them. We didn't care, just get in there and get out. We went in one day to get a mob of troops out and we were fired on as we went in. We got half way to the troops and the next thing shots started

40:00 to get fired and I jumped out of the truck while it was still running, grabbed my gun and jumped out. The truck stalled itself on the side of the track. Left it and when the fighting was finished I took the truck in and got them out. I wasn't going to stay in it. It is a big target, bit silly.

## Tape 6

00:35 **What kind of loads were you carrying?**

Everything from troops, rations, explosives, one night there we had to go and pick up, a mortar platoon had a fire mission to do and they were running low on shells so

01:00 we had to go and pick up two truck loads of mortar bombs and bring them back to the mortar platoon. That was probably eight thirty or nine o'clock at night. I'm afraid I cheated because I had the tipper, I tipped them, just dumped them off. I wasn't going to unload them by hand. It's not the right thing to do with explosives but I did and I went back to bed. They said, "How quick can you get them off." I said, "Easy." Up she went and tipped the lot.

01:30 "Okay". We had to unload the other truck by hand though, it wasn't a tipper. But we had a dozen more blokes to do it anyway. What else was I carrying? Oh you towed trailers too with water tanks on the back and fuel bladders, fuel drums, everything you can think of we carted on the trucks the same as what we do here in Australia.

02:00 Most of it was loaded by hand. If you were lucky you had a forklift.

**Was there more specific methods you had to use carrying ammunition?**

No. Well we had wooden trays to start with, which helped. They're all packed in boxes for travelling

- 02:30 and they're not armed. Nothing could explode. They're not armed until they are on the ground ready to be used. Then they arm the weapons, the caps are screwed into them and that so nothing really that could explode. Most explosives, like if you are only carrying explosives and no detonators and you get a fire explosives won't explode, they'd burn.
- 03:00 We used to use plastic explosives to cook our dinner on. If you light it with a match it burns like a hot flame that will boil your water in a matter of seconds so it burns. If you've got a detonator or like diesel fuel will explode. If you get an explosion like that under a load of explosives that explosion will blow the rest and cause the others to go off and then you'll get a big, big bang out of it. I've had one
- 03:30 happen to me in Australia where a mob in Brisbane, they got sacked over it. Actually the civvy [civilian] blokes that were working there, I didn't know they had put it on, they said it was all explosives but I was half way home to Melbourne and I found they'd put fourteen pallets of plastic explosive on the truck and on the back end they put two pallets of electric detonators and that is a no no. And I went through a lightening storm coming home and it only takes the right frequency to set off the electric dets.
- 04:00 So we found out half way home that they were on the truck and we called through and told them what had happened and we had to keep going so we parked the truck two miles from the pub we were staying at out in the middle of no where and went to the pub, walked into town. We weren't going to park the truck in town because there was a lightning storm around and if it went off it was far enough away that it wasn't going to hurt anyone. But that scared the hell out of us. They got the sack over that but over
- 04:30 in Vietnam you did things that you wouldn't do here with mixed explosives and stuff because you had to get them here. You didn't worry about it, you just did it. Most of the trucks were pretty well insulated for carrying explosives anyway. They all had wooden trays. You were not allowed to use steel because they caused sparks so you had a wooden tray; wood on wood doesn't spark.
- 05:00 And if it was going to go up anyway you're not going to know about it because you were only sitting about eight or ten inches from it so you are not going to worry about it. If you do it's too bloody late anyway so we just did what we did. So we were not worrying about it otherwise you wouldn't do the work.

**Did you ever hear any stories of something happening?**

I've seen the results of one truck blowing up, an American one. He was in a convoy leaving Nui Dat and he

- 05:30 hit a mine in the road and it was a huge mine too because it blew the front clean off the trunk. The engine was over three hundred metres into the scrub and all that was left of the truck was probably the back axles and the back tray, the rest was gone. There was nothing to find. That sort of shakes you up and that was only a couple of months after being in country. They used to give us flak jackets to wear
- 06:00 which would stop a round going right through you. We never wore them. We'd fold them over and put them under our bums and sit on them because if we hit a mine we were sitting on the wheel, the wheel was right underneath us. So we said the family jewels were more important. We sat on the flak jackets doubled over so you'd do stupid things like that. And a lot of the times going down the road, after you'd been in country for a while you used to wrap the rifle in plastic and put it behind your seat.
- 06:30 I never carried it. We were under escort anyway. I just didn't want to clean the rifle. You got that blasé about it you couldn't care less.

**What were the main routes that you were taking?**

We used to go from Nui Dat to Baria, Baria we'd turn left and go into the main drag into Vung Tau. I don't know what the names of the roads were. And once we turned right and went to

- 07:00 Long Binh, the Yank base. That was only one trip up and one trip back and we were finished there. And the village was out to the right that we were working in building the school. That was probably ten or twelve kilometres out of Baria in the middle of nowhere. All it was was a RF [Regional Forces] compound, which was the regional forces and in the middle was another compound which was their regular army
- 07:30 and a village and that was it, in the middle of nowhere. Half the time the RF force used to knock off at night and go home, they were only there during the day. They'd take their weapons and everything and go home and go work for the Vietcong at night. So that's what I mean, you couldn't trust anyone and that's why the regular army in South Vietnam never mixed with them even though one compound was round there and the military
- 08:00 was in the middle.

**How did you guys know this?**

Oh you could see them go at night with the weapons. Some of them had been caught but you can't prove it when they were in the compound and the South Vietnamese Army issued them weapons

anyway. What do you do? Are you going to shoot them all? Can't. You just ignore it and if they are on the other side of the wire when a firefight starts it's there bad luck. If they are on the inside

08:30 they had better stay shooting out or the South Vietnamese army will start shooting them. They treated them like shit. If they didn't do something, I saw their gaol there. It was bamboo buried in the ground and probably about that high off the ground and they used to stick them in there in the sun and that was their punishment. That was their gaol so not a good army to be in. No thanks,

09:00 I'll just keep out of that so we just let them go. We didn't worry about them; they never worried us, we never worried them.

**Did you think about the situation about whether you could win the battle?**

You'd never win it with them, they come in en masse. They're like ants, we killed one and another two replaced them so it was not worth the trouble. In a major battle well that's a different kettle of fish but

09:30 in a small place like that it's not worth the trouble. We got hit one night up there. There was just a large couple of explosives. They blew the bridge up actually, next to the village and we didn't get to fire a shot. We couldn't see them. Didn't know where they were, they just came in and blew the bridge and took off. I know the two guns that were in the compound,

10:00 the 155 guns they opened fire in the direction the enemy were going but that was the South Vietnamese Army not us so we just went back to bed. When the guns had finished back to bed so not worth getting involved. If they hit the compound then yes we would, we'd bring in reinforcements but they didn't hit the compound; they just blew the bridge and took off. The next day we had the bridge built again. That was that. Tit for tat.

**10:30 What was life like out at this other place? What was it called again?**

Buon Tring the village was. Probably the same as back in camp except we had an American map team living in the camp. We'd go and sit with them and have a Kentucky Bourbon at night. Just the same thing, knock off at four thirty, sit down and have a beer. The compound gates are closed, barbed wire's across the road, and no one can travel down the road,

11:00 the barbed wire's all booby-trapped and that's it. You'd knock off at night like you'd do at home and then in the morning you'd get up and have a check out around the area, do a patrol and then open the barbed wire up, the road up again. They used to the road the same as we did. That's why we had to do a roadblock to find out whether they were carrying stuff but you never find them. They were too smart.

11:30 They'd carry it in on anything; a motor bike with saddlebags might have explosives on it and they were shipping them through to their people. You couldn't stop everything, couldn't do anything really. It was supposed to be a police action, not a war. And they still classed it as a police action. A funny bloody police action but anyway that's what we were sent there for, to try and stop them, but we couldn't stop them. They just kept coming and coming and coming.

12:00 Anyone that didn't help them they killed them. They are doing the same to their own people now. If they don't tow the line - it's the usual communist thing - if you don't tow the line you're dead. If your father did something they'd kill the daughter. If they can't catch him they'd kill the son. They haven't changed and never will.

**What's it like fighting an enemy like this?**

Hate.

12:30 All the blokes wanted to do was shoot a few. I just don't like people like that. That's why I hate these terrorists. They're doing exactly the same thing. They're killing innocent people for no reason at all. They don't even have any weapons and they're still killing them. Like they're doing in Israel doing these suicide bombings. I hope more of their bombs blow up before they get there and get rid of them because they are only killing their own people off too and they are killing their own kids,

13:00 sending them in. What mentality is that? Those people are still back in the dark ages as far as I am concerned. They have got no thought for other people or their lives. All they want is power and that's all those terrorists want, is power. Look at all these Muslim countries. The Muslims are running the country. What have you got? Nothing different to bloody peasants and lords,

13:30 that's all they are. They use God's name as justification.

**What were you doing out of Buon Tring? What was the job you were doing there?**

I was a driver, I had a vehicle there, a Landrover. I used to go into Nui Dat every day and go and pick up our rations and beer supply and all that. And when I'm not going in I'm sitting on the side of the road with the vehicle and a machinegun and that just protecting

14:00 the engineers who were building the school. And that's all we did, just sat there all day protecting them and that was it. Quite boring.

**What were the engineers exactly doing?**

They were building a school. The school had been destroyed by the Vietcong because they didn't want people educated. Educated people were dangerous to them. They destroyed schools right, left and centre and as they destroyed them we rebuilt them so that kids can go to school. That's the normal things we do in Australia,

- 14:30 kids have go to school. We get them educated, that's what the Vietcong were frightened about, if they got educated then they're not educated in the communist doctrine. They were educated in the free doctrine; you could do what you like and in their system you can't. So we built the schools and some of them even helped train the teachers. The kids used to come round and sit with us in the vehicle asking stupid bloody questions
- 15:00 the same as our kids do when they're little. Actually a couple of kids up at Long Binh, the American dump there, we took a load of gear down to the dump to get rid of and there were heaps of Vietnamese kids crawling all over the dump down there. A couple of villages lived inside the American compound and this place is twenty-five miles surrounded by
- 15:30 barbed wire and the dump's inside and there were all these kids running around and we were going down to the dump and they told us not to go over a certain area, the kids, they said there were hand grenades there. So we just contacted the Yanks and told them about it and they came down and blew them up. Someone had put hand grenades in there with the pins out, sat the rubbish on top and when the rubbish is moved the handle flies off and the grenades go off. There was always spies in there, always someone who'll get in. You can't stop them, you can't tell the difference if he hasn't got 'VC' [Vietcong] written on his forehead when he walks in
- 16:00 you don't know, you don't know at all. I think most of the time they used kids to carry the stuff. We just plodded on and done what we were told and that was it.

**How does this affect your stress levels?**

Over there it kept you on your toes, that's about all it did. You didn't get stressed out about it, the stress came a year or two later after we got home.

- 16:30 Try to forget about things but of course you have nightmares. Some things you've seen keep coming back. I'm not too bad now. I don't worry about it any more.

**I'm interested in...When they built this school what would happen when they would complete the job?**

Well it never got blown up again. I don't know what happened after that, I left the area,

- 17:00 went back to camp and never heard any more about it. So as far as I know it was still there.

**So you pack up and...?**

Just go. They had the army there anyway, their own army so we'd just leave. We'd done our job. The same in Baria we rebuilt the school building, it had been rocketed. The same thing there, just guard it

- 17:30 and doing the ration runs and rebuilt the school there. It's just civil aid, that's all it's called. We'd just go out and help the people and that's it, finish, and back to camp. And that's the only two we did, two schools. The one in Baria, that was funny because the teachers, one of the teachers
- 18:00 was leaving, they were going to another school and having a party and they grabbed us because we were working there and made us the guests of honour. We were sitting at the head of the table and they brought all this food out and we looked around at the food trying to work out what the hell it was and one looked like worms and none of us were game to eat it because it was slimy. I took a chance and ate some and said, "It's not bad." and they were all laughing, the Vietnamese. I said, "What is it?"
- 18:30 One of them who spoke English and said, "Bamboo shoots". "Thank god for that". We didn't know what it was and none of us was game to eat it but it turned out alright. The teacher was quite happy, the one that was leaving that we came. If we hadn't have come it would have been an insult so we had to go. We told the boss and he said, "Yep go". We got back to work that day anyway because they drank rice wine. It is made by the Montagnards up in the mountains and like if I had a bottle like that
- 19:00 I would not be able to drink a third of that bottle before I was unconscious on the floor. It's just virtually pure alcohol. And you bet a little glass like that and a piece of fish and it smells like rotten flesh and you throw it down the back of your throat and eat the bit of fish at the same time to take the taste out of your mouth. I had two before I fell asleep. It's very potent and I made the
- 19:30 mistake of sending some home to my father in law in a bottle of Bacardi. I emptied the bottle out, filled it up with rice wine and sealed it and sent it home. Mother in law was going to kill me but he drank it and thought it was great but he'd drink anything old Bob.

**How did it affect your morale doing something like interacting with villagers and building schools?**

It felt good.

- 20:00 We weren't doing something military. We weren't in danger as far as we were concerned. It's just like doing something for charity. You are getting paid for it and they're getting something for nothing, no it was good. A lot of blokes used to volunteer for it. They used to go out of civil aid jobs because it was great work. The people used to look after you and give us bits and pieces of food or
- 20:30 they'd make something. One of the village women would make something and present it to you, a gift. It was embarrassing at times but it just made you feel good. It made the morale good because everyone wanted to do it. We didn't travel a big distance to do it. We did it within our own area, the Australian area. Up in the American area
- 21:00 you'd find the people their attitude was different towards the military. Then the Australian area down south, the south area the village was totally different people again so it's strange. They are still tribal in their areas and they've got the little groups that they stick to. The only ones that stayed right away from everything was the Montagnards and they were up in the mountains anyway, you don't see much of them.
- 21:30 Down the bottom most of the people were good but the normal Asian people they were in it for what they could get. If they could get it for nothing they'll take it. They bargained, the same if you go to Singapore or Hong Kong and you're going to buy something you've got to bargain for it. Well you do the same over there when you buy something in town. They tell you a price and you beat them down. That's all it is, it's like being on a holiday but you're getting paid for it and they're shooting at you, that's the only difference.
- 22:00 But no it was interesting I suppose.

**Was it a good chance to get to know locals or to get to know a sense of them?**

Yep, we knew them, we knew a lot of them. A lot of them came out here. I haven't seen any in Australia but I know friends of mine have said that a lot of people we knew around Nui Dat, Baria and that, Mamasan from the laundry, she moved to Australia, Diane moved over here. Quite a few of them came to Australia.

- 22:30 There's bloke he actually got married over there. He got permission. She had to be cleared by the medical that she didn't have TB [tuberculosis] and all that but he married a Vietnamese girl and she was sent back to Australia and the army looked after her until he got back. It didn't happen very often but there was the odd one that we know of anyway. He never went anywhere outside the camp anyway so nothing at night. He couldn't go anywhere at night.
- 23:00 I can't think of much else.

**So if that was a good job what was one of the worst that you had to do?**

The garbage run. Pick up the slops from the kitchen, all the bloody food left overs in the big bins and empty them into the forty-fours and take them down to the tip and empty them out and scrub them out. It was like a 'yuck' duty.

- 23:30 The stuff would be rotten in the heat from all day; breakfast, lunch and dinner and the next morning you'd pick it up and take it away. No, not a nice job. It stunk to high heaven and when you finished for the day you stunk. You couldn't even go for a beer because the blokes wouldn't even let you in the boozier because you stunk too much. So we used to come back and have a shower, clean the vehicle up, we had to clean that because it stunk too. So that was the worst job. The best job everyone wanted was to drive
- 24:00 the medical vehicle into Vung Tau in the morning and come back in the afternoon. We used to take some of the cartons of beer down from the camp and get down there and when the blokes were dropped off at the hospital you had the day to yourself. You'd jump in the vehicle and go to the American base and swap probably four cartons of VB [Victoria Bitter] and get about six or eight cartons of Budweiser and slits, the American beer.
- 24:30 You'd nearly double or triple the alcohol you had. You'd take that back to camp with you. I didn't mind that stuff, it was quite good. You could swap stuff for bottles of rum and port and stuff you could send home - sealed bottles you could send home - take cigarettes down and get double the amount, all these things these little perks you could pick up and make extra out of it we used to do it.
- 25:00 It would save money.

**And what about one of the worst kind of jobs connected to a campaign?**

Binh Ba. Binh Ba rubber when they hit the village up there. That's that ones of the photos are. They went through the village and it think it was ninety-nine killed they got that day

- 25:30 and all the bodies had to be bought back, the dead bodies had to be bought back to camp, identified by the medicals, checked to make sure they were dead, body bags and they try and identify them to find out what areas they come from, what villages and that they came from. We spent a day or two there carting them back because they're not in bags when you bring them back. They are just chucked in back of the truck and brought back to camp and they are

26:00 bagged up at the hospital. I didn't touch them. I let the medics do that.

**Describe the scene? You saw like...**

Bits of bodies. Most of it's just blood and guts. That's it, it's war. It doesn't worry me dead people but I don't like dead animals.

26:30 It's just...bodies. All they are is meat as far as I am concerned because they are dead. We just brought them back. All we wanted to do was get them back and get the trucks washed and hit the piss and that was it. We had enough for the day. It rouses your nerves, it shakes you up.

27:00 You never forget it but you are thankful of one thing; it's not you, that's it. That's all I can say about that.

**What were you told about Binh Ba before you went to do this work?**

We knew it was going to happen. We knew exactly what was going to happen. They were going to hit the joint because there'd been rockets coming into our camp from there.

27:30 So they went through the joint and cleaned it out. Found tunnels under houses and things. My CO was a bit gung- ho so he decided to do an old fashioned clean out using tanks, armoured personnel carriers and troops. The blokes would just walk behind the tank, grab the phone off the back of the tank and say, "House to the right, Vietcong" and bang. The tank would fire the shell through it, we moved

28:00 up to the house, we'd go through the house and find out what was in there, mark them, tag them and go to the next house, if you could get to the next house without getting shot. Because they moved out, part of the village moved out to one side and opened up on us and the local villagers moved into the old rubber factory to keep out of the way of the guns. And they just went through the joint like a dose of salts. We got all the bodies out

28:30 of there. I don't know if any civilians were hit. All the ones we identified were all Vietcong from that area so it wasn't our problem.

**So where were you? What were you doing?**

On the edge waiting, waiting to go in. I was thankful I didn't have to go in because we never lost anyone there.

29:00 None of them got hit as far as I can know. There might have been but we just stayed back on the edge and waited until it was finished and didn't go in.

**What were you seeing from the edge?**

Nothing. I could hear a lot but not see much.

**What were you hearing?**

Just explosions, gun fire and machine guns going off.

29:30 We knew it was going to happen. We knew what would happen as soon as they hit the place because they cordoned the place off first and then went through it so we knew we had them trapped and they were going to fight so we just sit back and wait. That's all we can do, can't do much else. Just keep our selves out of trouble so all we do is stay with the vehicles with

30:00 our weapons pointing outwards towards where the gun battle was going on in case anyone comes through the scrub there. If anyone comes through then they got it. No questions asked, asked later. That was it.

**And did you see the scene after?**

Yeah. Shell craters from the guns, blown up houses, burning houses...

30:30 What else was there? Some of the dead had been crushed by the tanks, they'd been run over. They were just picked up and thrown on the back of the truck. Weapons, they were stripped of anything they had on them like information, paperwork, weapons, ammunition and then time to take the bodies back to be identified and buried. We didn't leave anyone out in the scrub to die or if dead just leave them there,

31:00 we took them back and got rid of them. They would only cause disease for the locals anyway. So the only briefing we got really when we got back to camp was hit the piss. We never got any debrief. That's why most of the blokes had the problems when they come back home.

**Was it quite a horrific sight to see?**

31:30 Like a disaster. Like someone had set off a large bomb, bodies everywhere. Well not everywhere but different places we'd find bodies. A house had collapsed and you'd find bodies in there. It's like that earthquake, had to dig them out, pull them out and it is, it's just like a disaster like a bomb's gone off and you've got to go in and clean up the mess. No matter what it is,



32:00 whether it's peace time or not a bomb goes off that is it. People everywhere get hit.

**Did you see tunnels?**

No. I didn't go into them. I seen the result come out of them. Ammunition, medical supplies and what not plus the tunnels under ground, under trees, under buildings. Some blokes went in, they were the tunnel rats. They were

32:30 trained to do it. It was very dangerous because they used to tie snakes to the roof. You'd walk in not suspecting in the dark and get bitten around the face by bloody cobras or asps or whatever is hanging from the ceiling. A snakes doesn't like hanging by its tail. That's what they used to set up inside their entrances, booby traps like that. They were very cruel people. The only way we could go in

33:00 was either throw a few hand grenades in the place or a flame thrower and then go in. You don't go straight in it's too dangerous. They are like rabbits living underground. Surprising a little hole that wide and they'll go down that and you get down there and there's half a city under there, in the ground.

33:30 A lot of them got buried in the ground too. When the B52s were bombing the Long Hai Mountains the vibrations of the explosions used to go right through the ground and the tunnels and that must collapse left, right and centre. But we never saw that.

**And how long did it take you to clean up and collect the bodies?**

Only a day or so. We didn't stay in there long. In, clean up, out and go back to normal then.

34:00 Not worth staying around too long.

**Did you want to get out of there?**

I wanted to go home. The first thing you think of is, "Go home. I've had enough of this". We used to count the time on the calendar it would be maybe sixty days and a wakey. Sixty days and you wake up and you're going home. That's how we used to count the days down.

34:30 **And you were told to hit the piss after this job. Do you remember that night?**

No. You don't remember much after you get to the boozier. We used to just go in and play darts, talk about what happened that day amongst ourselves

35:00 and that was it. The normal boozier; joking and laughing and carrying on. Some would wander off and go to bed and others would grab a chair and go up to the pictures or something to break the monotony and bloody do something different.

**Do you remember what some of the men were saying after this operation?**

No. Well some were talking about it, "I got two today". You know shot two and everything like that.

35:30 That's all they talk about some of them, it's a joke. It doesn't really hit till later on. And when you get back home and you're not doing it any more and all the shit that's going on at home, that hit home and that's why blokes freaked out. They sent them to do a job and they came home and they had shit put on them so not hard for them to freak out.

36:00 **How did something like this Binh Ba hit you later on? What happened?**

Just thinking about, "It could have been you". It's frightening when you got, not so much me but the other blokes I talked to that were there, they talk about you are waiting for that shot that you don't hear and your heart's going at a hundred mile an hour

36:30 and you can hear the odd round bounce of the tank. It does affect you, it's got to. There's no way it can't. But you still do your job, you do what you are told. If you are ordered to do something then you go and do it. You don't think about it till later and when you've done it and you can stop and think about it then it rattles you. But some blokes used to go and talk to the padre and have

37:00 a chat with him about it or you didn't have to go to the boozier you could go to the everyman's club. You could do your own filming, develop your own photos. They had a huge slot car track in there and you could go car racing with the model cars. They brought all that over. We had games nights in there. Some blokes that wanted to get away from the boozier and have a night off it would go

37:30 and play darts, play cards. That's something to do different.

**When you are talking about this coming back later does any of the horrific images or....?**

They give you nightmares sometimes. Not all the time.

38:00 It's just frightening. You can still hear the rounds flying past and that. That's what wakes you up in a sweat sometimes. I haven't had a fit for a few years now. It doesn't worry me any more. I can talk about it now. I suppose I am getting old.

38:30 The kids ask me about it at times and I don't tell them much. It's not worth telling them. All I tell them

is, "You don't want to know what war is about. You watch the movies and things but you'll never ever realise what the real thing is like until it happens to you. You just pray to God you never have a war to go to" and that's what I tell them. The old saying, "Been there, done that, don't want to

39:00 come back, never do it again". So that's what I think about it, "Never do it again".

## Tape 7

00:35 Long Binh base we spent six or eight weeks up there. It was one of the biggest American bases there. It was twenty-five miles surrounded by barbed wire. They had everything you could think of in there; their own rubbish dumps, their own air ports, air strips, everything inside the base, everything was there.

01:00 The thing that really fascinated us was the way they, every night - even we did it every night before we settled down we sent out patrols around the base to clear the area - the yanks didn't send patrols out. They sent, around Long Binh there was a creek line outside the wire, it was fairly deep and one of the little bubble helicopters used to fly that at night. You could hear it but you couldn't see it because it was below the ground line. And

01:30 once he had done that and he was cleared and back in then they'd clear the area and they'd open up with every gun in the place along the perimeter and just shoot out the bush. That would clear everything out. That amazed us. We'd never do that because the first thing you are doing is giving away to the enemy if they are out there, where all your guns are, all your positions. You might as well just put a big sign above them saying, "I'm a machine gun. Here I am here".

02:00 That just blew us away. But we have our companies out in the bush from there operating around the area. Charlie Company was one of them. We were listening to the radio because there was a call come in from Charlie Company saying that they had made contact. So we sat there around the radio listening and waiting to see what the action was.

02:30 We could hear the shooting in the distance and then we could hear one KIA [Killed in Action] and then one WIA [Wounded in Action], which is one killed in action, one wounded in action. "Yeah okay, this is beaut. We've got another kill". And then it went silent. We said, "C'mon". There's a certain amount you've got to give when you give a report back and they stopped. It came back, "Correction,

03:00 killed in action one elephant, wounded in action one elephant. We are following up the other elephant". They ambushed three elephants. Killed one, shot another one, and they were the brunt of jokes for months after that. But we got a bit of action out of there. One was up at another fire support base. We were going in to supply the base convoy and one of our APCs,

03:30 it was an American APC in front of us crossed the railway line and vanished in a blinding flash and the Vietcong had found a five hundred pound bomb that the Yanks had dropped that never went off. They buried it in the road on the other side with the nose up. The APC went over, hit it and all we found was a couple of road wheels and a piece of track. Nothing left of anything else, five hundred pounder. Consequently we sat there for six hours waiting to go

04:00 in. What do you know, unloaded, come out of that and back to the American base. There were a couple of blokes from the Big Red 1, 1st Infantry Division and we're drinking at the boozier when he asked me if I could get him a slouch hat. "Yeah, no worries". I had mine there anyway. We'd take them with us and buy a new one when we got back there. It cost us five bucks or six bucks for the hat and they would pay up to two hundred, three hundred dollars for them. But I swapped him and I sold one for fifty

04:30 bucks and I had another one there and I said to this bloke, "You can have it. No worries, don't tell your mate." He said, "Oh beauty. I'll get you something." The next day a ten ton truck turned and was looking for me and Mr Stinson, our officer said, "We've got a Yank here looking for you." I looked up and saw and said, "Oh yeah. I was drinking with him last night." He said, "He's got something in the truck for you." "Oh," I said, "I gave him a slouch hat, that's all." "Well he's got something for you" the boss said.

05:00 I went over and, "What have you got?" "The crate's yours, where do you want it?" I looked at this bloody huge crate and I said, "What the hell am I going to do with this thing? What is it?" And I looked at the side of the crate and went. "Uh Uh, I'm not having that." He said, "Why not? You can do what you unlike with it." It was a bloody brand new Hughie helicopter. About a million and a half bucks worth. He said, "She's written off. Don't worry about it. Take it home." I said, "How am I going to get it home?"

05:30 He had to take it back or else I would have had my own private helicopter. The military version is quite powerful so we had to give that a miss.

### Why did they like the slouch hat so much?

Souvenirs. I've got American stuff here round the place. I've got badges and stuff we used to collect. They do the same. The Australian slouch hat is a souvenir that they'd take back home and it's on the mantle piece at home. Like we used to get like grabbing

- 06:00 their uniforms, their bush gear because ours was really heavy material. That's light material actually and the American stuff's the same as that. Shirts hanging out and everything, they don't get tucked in. Ours was all tucked in and stinking hot and sweaty, theirs was cool so we used to wear their stuff in the scrub. We used to grab hold of their uniforms. Some of their boots were good to wear because they were canvas sided, not leather. They were leather at the bottom and rubber soled but canvas
- 06:30 up the sides. Ours would stay wet for days. So we grabbed their gear and I modified one of their shirts. Instead of having all me webbing with all me pouches and everything, I had pockets sewn in around here and I carried all my ammo in the pockets, all the magazines. And the big pockets they actually bulge out and you can fill them right up. I had my rations and smokes and all my other gear in pockets and all I was wearing around my
- 07:00 waist was my hootchie rolled up under my belt and the belt had four water bottles on it. And that's all you used to carry out in the bush. So very light. No big packs and none of that garbage. So anyway the American base, that was definitely an eye open because we went down to the American dump to get a chit from the commanding officer there and he said, "You can go down to the dump and get whatever you want from the dump."
- 07:30 We went down to the dump and I stood there amazed and looked. Just inside the dump sitting with no wheels on it, was a brand spanking new Dodge car. I said to the Yank, "What's wrong with that?" He said, "Oh she's done forty thousand miles. She's a write off now." They do forty thousand and then they write them off. I said, "You're kidding." He said, "Yeah, yeah. It's only this year's model". I walked over, the key was in it I turned the key and the motor started. They'd took the wheels off, put it on its belly and said, "That's it, she's written
- 08:00 off." And the Vietnamese were going in there and buying the American trucks, the American Army trucks that had been written off. They were rebuilding them and using them themselves for carting logs and doing different things. They could buy them from there. We walked in with a chit and we got two fridges we wanted to turn into eskies. What else would an Australian soldier get? An esky. But we looked around the dump, I stood there agog just looking. There was
- 08:30 Herculeses aircraft stacked on top of each other, there was jet fighters, cars, trucks stacked eight and nine high. I couldn't work out what was wrong with them but their age had written them off so they dumped them. That dump when the Americans left Vietnam would have been a haven for the Vietnamese. They would have had a ball in there. The amount of gear that's in there and all of it is virtually brand new stuff. They just write it off after

09:00 a certain age.

**And did you get your fridges?**

Oh yeah, we got our fridges. We got them before we left the area. We tore the motor out of the fridges and turned them on their backs and got RAEME [Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers] to put in a plug hole, a drain hole. Just laid it on its back, filled it up with beer and ice, closed the lid, perfect esky. As a matter of fact a friend of ours out here at Howard Springs has got a fridge like that sitting on his front verandah next to his bar which

09:30 holds all the grog and it's perfectly made.

**And what was the atmosphere like in Long Binh?**

It is like a big city. It's all it is. Everyone's got their job and what fascinated me is some of the people going to work, the Yanks... You know the big flying crane helicopter that they've got out here doing the fire fighting, Elvis [name of helicopter used for fire fighting in Australia]? They had those in Vietnam too. They used to be able to pick up a module underneath them that was like a bus

10:00 and people would come out from their living quarters and they'd hop into this thing like a bus that's on wheels with no front and back, no engine or nothing and the helicopter would land on top, hook up this thing and they'd fly them across the area of the base and land them at their work area. It was just a bus. It would just drop the bus off and fly away and do another job. When they'd finished the come back, get back on the same bus and the chopper would take it back and take it back to their quarters. Phenomenal. I've seen, I've got movie film there

10:30 of one of them, flying cranes taking off with a small bulldozer underneath it hanging by cables. Another one flying across the sky with a six by six ten ton truck hanging underneath it. They would just fly away with it. Terrific power.

**How did the Americans morale on the base seem in the times when you were there?**

They all wanted to go home, same as us.

11:00 They didn't want to be there. The first couple of months is phenomenal, it's an experience but after that you just wanted to go home, "I've had enough". That's when you start counting the time down. They did the same thing as us, counted the time down.

**Did you observe any of that sort of I guess, things that were happening in America at the time happening in the bases in Vietnam? Like the segregation of black and white?**

Oh there was a bit, especially after hours. During their working

11:30 hours they all worked together but after hours, no, the blacks sat with blacks and the whites sat with whites most of the time. There were a few odd ones around that mixed but when we went to the club the big Negro that grabbed us at the door, he was like a walking tank. He was about six foot nine and he had eight pick handles across the shoulder and he just asked, "Are you Australians?" We said, "Yeah." He said, "Would you mind drinking with us?"

12:00 I said, "No." We never bought a beer all night, they paid for the lot. And all they did was ask us about Australia. They were going to Australia, they were going to Sydney. That's all we got all night.

**What did you tell them?**

To watch out of the kangaroos in the main street, they kick. Things like that, a lot of bullshit. A couple of them knew we were bullshitting and laughed.

12:30 It was just fun, shit stirring.

**Was there any particular nickname that the Australians had?**

What each?

**In general and then each.**

We each had our own nicknames and that. Mine was Kenworth. My father in law was a truckie and drives semi-trailers and my first two initials are KW which is Kenworth and I'm driving a truck so they called me Kenworth.

13:00 Another bloke we had later on in the army after Vietnam, he had no neck and was built like a Sherman Tank and he was nicknamed moose. He's the only bloke I've seen to pick up a forty-four gallon drum off the ground full and put it on the back of his truck by hand. That's why he got called moose. So you got all these funny names. A bloke in our tent, his name was Price,

13:30 his last name was Price, so he just got nicknamed Pricey. All the usual stuff. Sometimes I was called dog, which didn't worry me because my last name's Barker. That doesn't worry me in the slightest, I used to get called that at school because no one could catch me. I can't think of....Some of the other nicknames you can't repeat.

**What kind of things?**

I'm not repeating them, disgusting names. One of the tents in our lines,

14:00 the OC's tent had a picture of Anne Margarithes in there stark naked, the movie star. It was taken with an infra red camera by an American. Infra red doesn't show clothing so what she had underneath was all in synthetic clothing. Bra, panties are all synthetic material and the infra red deletes it and the whole thing shows. That was on a wall and that was about six foot tall and you could see the blokes going around doing their patrols.

14:30 They'd sneak into the CO's office and you could see their torch go up and down the picture and then out the door. Yes, it was quite interesting up there at the Yank base. What else did we do up there?

**What did the Americans call the Australians?**

Aussie, the usual shit. They are all different because it depends whether they are from the south or the north.

15:00 From the south it was drawn right out and they talk slow and when they come from New York or somewhere like that, oh God. They were so full of themselves it wasn't funny. The southerners were the same. The Negroes had some of the accents like that but they didn't treat us or talk to us like they talked to their own white people, totally different people.

15:30 Maybe because we didn't give a shit, we'd have a drink with anyone and that's the way we treated them. So then night time back at camp and we were asked about the CO. I had to drive him across to the main headquarters because the ammo dump was on fire in our main base. I heard a few explosions go off. A grass fire had got into the ammo dump. That was fun.

16:00 We had to drive through it and both of us had our heads down right behind the steering wheel trying to duck. We drove round past the ammo dump and there was baboons going everywhere because SAS hill still had a lot of monkeys living on the hill and we had to back up and go round the long way one time going over there because a monkey had bailed us up on the road. You don't muck around with a baboon. They're about this high and they've got fangs

16:30 like this long and you've got no doors and no roof on your vehicle. Are you going to argue with a monkey? I'm not. We backed up and went round the other way. He could have that road, it was his. Sometimes you could go up there and throw a few apples out and they would go chase them. But not this one, he wanted the road so we let him have it. And he wasn't going anywhere because the ammo dump was on fire and the explosives were upsetting a lot of them. And I made the mistake, I left the CO's rifle in the helicopter so I had to go racing back to get his rifle.

17:00 He threatened to castrate me if I didn't get it. I got back with it, I knew where it was. His ranger rifle, his toy. That was interesting. They took a while to get that fire out.

**Was there ever any really bizarre packages or deliveries or transports that you had to do? Anything quirky or unusual?**

No. Nothing really around that area.

**You mentioned way back at the beginning**

17:30 **how much you liked Elvis when you were younger. Was there any particular music or songs that make you remember Vietnam now?**

There was one song that was sung, it was an Australian song – I can't think of the name of it now... It was a true story of a,

18:00 I don't know which battalion it was, it never said on the song who it was. It was about the Vietcong and the Australian soldiers. What it was was they had gone into a village that we were near and they had done a lot of damage in the village and got a six month old baby and cut it up alive,

18:30 he was still alive because they knew that our blokes would go in to get the baby out and it was a trap. And it's a song about a bloke who went in with a crew and his best mate was killed but they still got the baby out. The Doctor was killed too but they got the baby out and saved it. But he lost his mate. I can't think of the name of the song now, I haven't heard it for years. I can't think of the name of it. And the other one I like is

19:00 one called The Green Beret, it is an old one. I haven't heard that one for years either. The other one we used to sing a lot in Vietnam was Take Me Home Country Road, John Denver. Everybody used to sing. When that came on the radio everyone sung it, just take me home. Because we had that "good morning Vietnam" every morning,

19:30 used to play a lot of good music, especially country and western. The Yanks were mostly country and western stuff anyway. We didn't get a lot of Elvis or anything over there, it was mostly country. I'm just trying to think now... Things pop into my head that have been passed and gone and I just can't think of anything.

20:00 **We talked a while ago about when your son was born and when you got the news of that but tell me about the leave that you had when you got to come home.**

I took my leave in the...He was born on April 16 '69 and I went home in May '69. No one knew I was coming home, no one at home knew.

20:30 Sandy had...she was out somewhere or was she? No, she was home I think. I can't remember now. I remember walking in the front door and the mother in law nearly collapsing. I walked in and said, "What's for tea Mum?" And she said, "Roast." And that's as far as it got. I was supposed to be three thousand miles away in Vietnam, not standing at the kitchen door.

21:00 She screamed, Sandy came racing out and nearly passed out on the floor. Yeah, it was quite interesting because I had come home and I took a photo of us in the lounge room the night before I went back of all of us together, here's all these white people in the photo and there's a black bastard in the middle because I was burnt to blazers in the sun over there. I'm black here but I was worse over here. They were all white as anything because they were living in Melbourne

21:30 and I was black in the middle and I never used to suntan. Ever since then I don't burn any more. I've been burned to a sinder a couple of times but I haven't burnt any more. Maybe it's because I don't stay out in the sun long enough but I do, my arms and legs are out in the sun all day. If I take these off I've still got them on when I take them off because it's white underneath so I was the black fellow in the house.

**What was it like to see your son?**

22:00 I'm not into kids. It was good to see him, yes it's terrific but babies, even my grand kids; I'll hold them and that but as soon as the mother's free she can have them back. I don't like handling kids. No. When they're five and six year old and talking and that's alright. Josh is alright but little kids, babies, even with my own kids I was never like it

22:30 because I had never grown up with younger kids, I was an only child. That's the hard part, you don't know. If you have a brother or a sister or something then it's different, you know but I never knew and it made it hard. So like that's why I yell a lot and I don't ....I don't hit. Because I had the shit belted out of me by my old man every time I did something wrong,

23:00 the belt came out. I thought, 'No'. When the first two were little they got a smack on the backside but that's as far as it got. I threatened them especially Vicky and Steven when they were thirteen or fourteen years old. I just had to take my green army belt out and hang it on the door and all the arguments between the two of them would stop instantly. They knew I would use it, I wouldn't - I just

hung it there. No hang on I did use it once.

- 23:30 They both got it around the arse once for arguing and it hurt like hell. But I'd just take it out and hang it on the door and say nothing. You can ask Sandy that one; they'd instantly shut up, no fighting between them and they are talking to each other after that. That's all I needed to do.

**And how old was Vicky when you came home on leave?**

- 24:00 Vicky would have been two or two and a half or something.

**And did she recognise you?**

Yes, she knew me because she grew up with me part of the time, most of the time. Steve never did. He only knew me for a couple of days when I was on leave and he was only just born. And the father in law and I had to take the two girls to hospital the same night and he was a nervous wreck because his sister had a

- 24:30 baby the same night. They were about an hour and a half apart, two hours apart and we were both in Vietnam.

**Did those kids grow up close?**

Yes, Carol and Steve. Steve is six foot five or six foot six. He is built like me, thin. Carol is the total opposite. She is six foot, blond with brown eyes, and Carol would be

- 25:00 she'd have to be twenty-two stone, she's huge. She has just let herself go because her mother's big. Sandy is the opposite again. Sandy is skinny and her sister is fat and Faye's kids are all the same except for one kid, David, he's built like us. The rest of the kids just.... But Carol and Steve

- 25:30 were born on the same day a matter of hours of each other, their birthday been on the same day they always rang each other, always talked to each other, always got in trouble together so they are like twins the two of them. They're both blond; one's got hazel eyes and one's got brown eyes. And my brother in law said, "You didn't sneak in behind me did you?" "No'. We were both in Vietnam. I said, "It couldn't be. You were home on leave and so was I." "Yeah" he said, "That's right". But it hit the Melbourne

- 26:00 Herald, Melbourne Sun sorry, front page. The father in law rang them up and I ended up with an envelope with a big glossy photo of her, Sandy and Steve and Jo got the same plus the newspaper and clippings and everything that went with it. It was quite interesting. It hit the news and everything.

**Were the other men (UNCLEAR)?**

Oh they took me out and did shit. They pinched the picture off me and put it in the battalion paper. It went all over the battalion about it.

- 26:30 Headquarters and task force heard about it so it got around don't worry.

**Well tell me what it was like to be home for that short time?**

Good but dangerous. Good to be home but I kept driving on the wrong side of the road. I was that used to driving on the wrong side of the road. Every time I turned a corner I ended up with Sandy saying, "Get on the right side of the road." "Oops". I couldn't help it, I just got used to the gutter being on my side.

- 27:00 And the same when I come home for good. It took me a good two or three months before I stopped doing it. How I didn't get killed or kill someone else I don't know. I just turned the corner and stay on the other side of the road. If I was turning at an intersection there form this road here, instead of turning on this side of the road I turned on that side of the road. It took a while to get used to.

**And how about things like the creature comforts of home?**

Yeah well

- 27:30 they were good but we still had virtually the same over there. We slept in beds except when we were out bush. It is the same in Australia if I was at home I was at home and if I was out bush I'd be on the ground. The food's the same. The only trouble is when I went on ration packs I put on weight and when I came home to Sandy's cooking I lost it. She'll tell you that. I don't know why but it just worked out that way.

- 28:00 I bought ration packs home one night, I had a couple of blokes round for tea so Sandy cooked the ration packs and didn't tell them. They ate the tea and they thought it was great. It was the best meal they had for ages and then she told them it was the ration pack, she said it was ration packs and they said, "Your kidding. We can't cook them like this." So they ate ration packs. Yes, it was quite funny.

**And how did it feel to have to leave them again?**

I didn't want to go back but

- 28:30 I knew I had to. All I took back with me was one set of clothes, a bag and inside the bag I had a cask of bloody port, a big cask of port and a dozen meat pies. That's what I took back. Because a meat pie was \$20.
- 29:00 And you take an Aussie four and twenty meat pie back from Melbourne to Vietnam and get the cooks to warm it up and you could sell them there for twenty-bucks a pie and the blokes would pay them. They'd pay fifty bucks just to taste a meat pie. The little perks. That's the things we didn't have over there. The cooks could make it but they could never make the Melbourne meat pie.

**And did you notice any like I suppose being home,**

- 29:30 **did you notice any changes in yourself during that leave? Even just...**

Yeah you are nervous. You're still...It takes years to get over it or get passed it. As I said before the slightest sound will make you jump and you got that used to the environment over there that you wanted to get back to it in a way and in another way you didn't want to go back.

- 30:00 **How about in terms of the lifestyle that you had been living in Vietnam, that sort of drinking... was that different when you came home?**

You had to pay more for a beer. Instead of paying 15c it was more than that. You got in trouble in the pubs, you put 15c on the bar for a beer and the bloke looked at me and said, "You're from Vietnam are you?" I looked down and "Yeah. Sorry."

- 30:30 I had the father in law with me. But I don't drink that much now on account of what I used to. I might have two light beers a night if that and I don't get drunk any more. I don't drink heavy beer any more unless I'm out somewhere in town and Sandy's driving I might have a couple but I get to the point now where I just don't bother, I go and drink lemonade. It doesn't worry me, it's still a cold drink. Yeah I had to

- 31:00 admit it. I was an alcoholic. I knew it. That's why we split up for seven, eight years. She married again, I married again. That's why I've got two young kids then my ex shot through. She's up here still but she shot through and the kids were three and two and she shot through.

- 31:30 And it ended up I got the kids and the house. But we're still friends Sandy and I, still talk on the phone and I asked if she wanted to come up to help with the kids; Danielle's home - her voice has risen. And she said, "Yes". So after twelve months up here she said, "Oh bugger this." She changed her name back to mine and said, "Oh well, let's get married again."

- 32:00 I didn't ask her, she asked me this time and that was eighteen years ago now - seventeen or eighteen years ago. So it worked out alright.

**And had the drinking contributed to you guys splitting up?**

Yes. Yes. I would come home and that's all I'd do is drink all night. That's why I got out of the army. When I was up in Tully I was running the boozer which made it even worse.

- 32:30 I was in charge of the joint. I could go and get a beer in the middle of the day if I wanted to. I said, "No. That's enough for me, I've had enough". I enjoyed my time in the army but I just had enough. It started to get to me. There's a time when you say, "No, that's enough, switch off". I did that and about eighteen months ago I did the same with cigarettes. I got the patches. The first lot lasted a week on them,

- 33:00 I got the second lot, used two and that's as far as I went. I never had another smoke after that. Probably four lots for one month and two days I didn't smoke again. I've done that twice now actually because I went back on smoking for eighteen or twelve months and then I took it up again eighteen months ago.

- 33:30 I still feel like one but I don't bother. I don't know whether I feel any better or not. Since I've given up smoking I keep catching colds and everything else. When I was smoking I never got sick, not a thing. The same with her, she just had a heart attack a little while back and they did a check on her. They put a tube up her main artery in her leg and went right up into the top round her heart and they checked everything and there's not a

- 34:00 bit of garbage in her veins anywhere, she'd perfectly clear. The doctor said, "I'm not going to use you as an excuse to give up smoking." She smoked all her life and nothing happened. And other people don't smoke and they die. So I give it up. In Vietnam I was smoking probably two or three packets a day.

**Why so much?**

Well it was only thirty, forty-five cents for three packets and each fortnight you get

- 34:30 two or three hundred dollars in your pay. What are you going to spend it on? Nothing over there. You could go to the PX and buy a radio or a watch. I bought watches and sent them home. The father in law's watch, I bought it and sent it home. Those sorts of things you just blow it, take it into the boozer. It was nothing to drink fifty bucks worth in one night and at fifty cents a can that's a lot of beer and still find your bed. It was very hard but we had it worked out; we had luminous tape on the trees.

- 35:00 It led from the boozer to bed in our tent. That's the only way you could get to bed half the time, follow

the luminous tape through the bush. We were not far away from our boozers anyway but it still gave us the right way to go.

**Was that drinking culture when you were in Vietnam but when you came home...**

It's still the same in the army. It's no different now, all the same. There is nothing else to do after hours. They can go out of town and get drunk

35:30 and get caught drunk driving and everything or they can stay in the boozers and get blind and flake out in bed, in their own bed. That's what half of them do anyway. They blow money on cars and booze. And where I work, the four-wheel drive place, I get lots of army blokes coming in buying big, flash, expensive four-wheel drives, some of them buy HSV Commodores and stuff like that. We've got one sitting in the yard, a second hand one, that's \$59,000. That's nothing to them, they'll buy one of them.

36:00 Two hundred and eighty, three hundred kilometres and hour. A lot of money.

**Do you think this kind of drinking culture is something that is a problem with the army?**

It is in a way, it is but a cold beer is the Australian way of life. How are you going to change it? If you have a hard day you go and have a beer and another beer and another beer and most blokes

36:30 will go to tea, have a feed before they go back to the boozers and some don't even go back to the boozers. It's only a minority that push it. Like we had blokes in Vietnam that used to get books sent over from home and they'd go and lay in bed and read or go up in the office, the office is the only place that had a light on and go and sit up with the duty bloke and talk to him, play cards or whatever while he's on duty there.

37:00 Do things like that.

**What kind of pressure was there, if there was any at all to drink?**

Well if you didn't drink they'd give you a bit of a hard time but there was no real pressure. It was up to yourself, you don't have to if you don't want to. I've had nights off where I said, "That's it for this week. I just don't feel like it tonight" and I just won't touch one. It's the same I still do it here.

37:30 I buy one carton and that lasts me the whole seven days. I have a few at night and on the weekend I drink a few more during the day and I run out before payday so I'll just drink coffee or grab a can of coke out of the fridge. I've got to the point now where I just do it automatically. Even when I was in the army if I got too much in me I'd get bloated so I would go drink a lemon squash or something. Or if I got bored of drinking, it used to bore me at times I'd

38:00 go home, go to bed, go have a shower or something. But these days with the young blokes there is too much money around. Their board's paid for, their food's paid for and they've got nothing to worry about and nothing to spend their money on so they go and buy cars and fast bikes and stuff like this and look good and all their mates back home when they get back home they've got this great, flash, fast car and all this stuff.

38:30 That's why they get themselves killed; they go out and prove how fast the car is.

**In the time I guess since you were in Vietnam till around 1984 before you retired, what sort of changes did you see happening in the way the army?**

Well the culture came in that you weren't allowed to swear at the troops any more, you could give an order but there comes a point where

39:00 they can now quit any time they want to, put in for your discharge. Before you couldn't. You had no choice. You just stuck it out or go to gaol for not following orders. Things have changed right around. The army today is too small and it's getting smaller. And that's what the Government has just woke up that our army could not defend this country in a fit.

39:30 And as they say if this place got attacked from up here they'd sacrifice all of the top end. They just have not got anyone to stop them. They may do a bit more now they've got Tindal Air Base here but they still haven't got the troops on the ground. So there's buggers all in the army. The air force is getting the same and all the experience is gone. All the experienced blokes, when they started changing things, said, "Stuff this, I'm out". I did the same. I had two years to go to retirement

40:00 and I told them to shove it. I'd had enough, the culture had changed completely. The army has lost all its experienced soldiers, the ones that had been to war and should be training the troops, they lost them and they all got out. They done the wrong thing by them but that's governments for you. Now they're going to pay for it and they're worrying about it now. They're just not training troops the same way they used to.

40:30 They just pussy foot around them now because you're not allowed to do this, not allowed to that. All these do-gooders that have done it and they've stuffed the whole thing. The same as I don't agree with people saying that you can't smack your child because they've done something wrong. Well look at all the teenagers now that are running amok. We've got them at Casuarina shopping centre the other day, a bus driver was bashed, two young kids. One got a good whack in the mouth for it but they got them and what to they do?



- 41:00 Smack on the hand, "Don't do it again", let you go and they go and do it again. They can't do anything with them, they're not allowed to touch them. The cops [police] can't touch them, the cops are frustrated. Before when I was a kid the cop would give you a foot up the arse, take you home and the old man would give you a belting and you'd never do it again. Now you can't even do that. And in the army if the boys, if one stuffed up and didn't pull his weight he'd be taken out the back, given a thrashing and the next day he might come back from the RAP with a black eye and a broken nose or something but he pulled his weight and from then onwards never a problem.
- 41:30 Now you say, "You can't do that". No, not allowed to.

## Tape 8

- 00:35 **We were just talking off camera about a little job driving the CO around and rest in country. Do you want to tell us about that?**
- What they used to do is every month or two you get rostered to go down to Vung Tau to what we called the Badcoe club for a couple of days just
- 01:00 doing nothing; swimming, drinking, there was movies down there, there was shows, Philippino girls down there singing and dancing, the old go go stuff it used to be with long, high boots and short skirts, plus swimming on the beach. And I was out with Father Shanahan, myself, and one other and we grabbed a couple of surfboards
- 01:30 just mucking around in the surf and I felt something hit me across the chest and stomach and it was like someone had hit me with a thousand red hot needles I had red spots all over me and welts. It was a jellyfish that got me. Father Shanahan called me Jesus Christ after that because I left the water so quick he said I was walking on it, I even left the surfboard behind. I told him what had happened to me and took off.
- 02:00 And they raced me into the hospital there and laid me on a table and gave me a couple of needles and then while I was laying there the sun changed and the direction came in through the window and after the jelly fish sting I was badly burned on both legs from the sun. I finished up with the top of my legs here, on both legs, was one blister, the whole top. When that actually burst, my shorts that I was wearing actually rubbed through the top
- 02:30 because the fluid drained out and I'd already had a piece of skin off my arm on my bed lamp. It was pulled over a bit of wire, it was just this, the tattoo. So I added these two to it. Gruesome but wrapped it around the lamp and stuck it on, skin. It was two big sheets it was. But I couldn't walk for about five days because they left me in the bloody sun.
- 03:00 I don't know which was worse, that or the Jellyfish sting. I got over that within a couple of hours but the rest of it was a week or two to get over it. I couldn't work, couldn't bend my legs, and couldn't even drive the truck or nothing. They done a good job there. A few bums got kicked over that. They just left me lying there. The doctor got his arse kicked. But that's all we used to do down there was just drink. The Kiwis used to go there
- 03:30 right next to the...a nightclub was down the beach, Beach Comber that's right, same as most other places has got a Beach Combers. And we used to crawl through the barbed wire and go to the Beach Combers. And it was alright except we got caught one night and our guards around the camp down there were South Korean. You don't argue with them, they're big guys. They caught us going through the wire. They didn't say nothing, and they let us through
- 04:00 but we never went through again after that. It was too much to argue with them. They were all bloody Karate experts and everything. We were all too pissed anyway so it wouldn't make any difference. So we used to sneak out at night and go down there. We were not supposed to, it was against the rules but no one knew. No one went out of the camp at night except us so we got away with it.
- 04:30 What else was down there? The nurses down there had a car to run around in. I don't know where they got it from, it was an old Citroen and they got hold of a car and they painted it pink with flowers all over it and that was their run around, it was some civilian car they got hold of. And the other one we had on the beach was an ex-army Landrover and it had been painted pink too and they used to use that as a dune buggy, an army vehicle mind you. We used to have some fun
- 05:00 in that and used to go from there you'd go into town and go to any of the bars in town. It was not like here where you go from pub to pub, they're not next door to each other. Over there the bar was next door to a bar next door to a bar, next door to a bar right down the main street so you'd never ever get to the end of the street in one night. We were able to stay in the other clubhouse which was in town which I was in,
- 05:30 in 1969 sitting there and I fixed the TV set and we watched the landing on the moon. I can remember that night because the TV went out about half an hour before the moon landing and I managed to get

the bloody thing working again so we got to watch it. That was a different clubhouse in the main street. I forget what they called that place. That's all I can think of on that.

### **Would any of the**

#### **06:00 men mix with the girls?**

A few of them did but they all got lined up in the RAP next morning for their needles. I've seen one bloke get it three times. The first time you get tablets, the second time you get the needle and the third time you get the umbrella. I've only ever seen one bloke get the umbrella and that was it. No one wanted that because you knew when a bloke got that you could hear him screaming.

06:30 But there was one problem over there. It was I think they call it the black jack. If you got that you'd never go home. You'd go to Singapore and live the life of Singapore or Hong Kong and that's it, you never go back to Australia because you are dying anyway. The extremities of your body would die and rot so the first thing you'd lost is what you used in the first place that caused it.

07:00 Then your fingers, toes so you'd virtually go somewhere to die. I never heard of anyone getting it but we [were] warned about it. It still didn't stop blokes, it wouldn't stop them at all. I thought, "It's not worth it, not worth the trouble". There was a few of us who didn't bother, just abstained from it. Too much of a chance.

### **How would the girls approach?**

Oh the Yanks had brothels set up

07:30 where they monitored the girls, tested them, checked them, made sure they were clean and everything and they got paid for it. It was part of the army - not ours - the American Army. I thought, "No, I'm staying out of them bloody joints. I don't know what the Yanks have got either". No I never bothered, that was their business. We've had kids come...you'd be out on operation in the middle of nowhere and some young kid will appear out of nowhere

08:00 and try and sell his sister to you. You could get whatever you wanted for a tube of toothpaste or a bar of soap. You didn't have to pay money. They were selling their sisters. They're kids, they're only bloody eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve year old. No. I'm not a paedophile.

### **What did you think of this?**

Disgusting. None of our blokes took any. They wouldn't touch them

08:30 because if they got found out the commanding officer would take them and have them castrated on the spot. He didn't tolerate any of that kind of shit, he'd take you out and shoot you, finished. He threatened everyone...told everyone about it and said that if any one did don't bother to think you're going home. He said, "You'll go home in a box [in a coffin]". So everyone took him at his word.

09:00 No, leave the kids alone. It's not on.

### **You mentioned a Father Shanahan?**

Father Shanahan loved his drop, top bloke too. He was always there when some bloke was in trouble. He used to go up to SAS hill and drink with the SAS quite a bit and occasionally you'd have to go in the vehicle and go and get Father Shanahan

09:30 and bring him home. He was Irish of course and he'd be singing all the way home. Pitch black and driving the Landrover on black out lights and Father Shanahan with the white collar on would be singing away, singing his Irish songs. But a top bloke, excellent bloke. Everyone in the battalion loved to go and see him. You'd be in the boozer and he'd walk in and he was a captain? Major

10:00 I think he was. He'd walk in the boozer and say, "Top of the morning to you boys" and put fifty bucks on the bar, pass right through and grab a beer on the way out and leave the fifty bucks there and say, "Drink up" and keep walking. He'd have a beer with him and go home, go back to his tent. That's the sort of bloke he was. I don't know what happened to him after we come back. Wouldn't know where he went.

### **And you talked a lot about**

#### **10:30 this drinking culture and stuff. Did you notice anything about drugs?**

No. Americans yes, they were on the marijuana and shit like that but our blokes, no. There wasn't the drug culture in the army as there is now. We didn't touch it. We didn't drink and then go out on patrol. As I said we didn't smoke much on

11:00 patrol unless we were allowed to. We'd stop deliberately at a place where it was safe to have a smoke. We didn't smoke on the run or walking, patrolling or nothing. It's just not our way of doing things because that gives you away; people can smell cigarette smoke for miles, especially someone you doesn't smoke, especially European cigarettes. Asian cigarettes smell like marijuana. I don't know what they use in them, what tobacco they use in them but that's what they smell like. And those Indonesian ones smell like

- 11:30 you are smoking dope and they're shocking. I've tried one. I think I'd rather take a twig off the tree out there crush it up smoke it. But no, there was no dope or nothing in our unit, I knew that for sure. With the Yanks, you could tell with the Yanks. Their eyeballs, it was the middle of the day and bright sunlight and their eyes were still wide open and large. "He's on a trip". You knew it straight away.
- 12:00 If they got caught they were court martialled. There was that many on it. They were mainly taken up because of the war. A lot of the culture over there made them feel like they didn't give a shit. It's not going to worry them. Just it felt good. That's why they took it.

**So tell us about the lead up to your wakey?**

- 12:30 Oh God, the last week, I don't remember a lot about the last week because we drank five forty ounce bottles of Bacardi over the last week, the last few days. We ran out of coke so we were drinking it with lemonade, lime, orange, lemon flavouring, whatever we could find and then we ran out of that so we drank it straight. We were that bad
- 13:00 about going home that we were sitting at the table with a beer glass, that high, full of straight Bacardi and we were drinking that. It consequently was quite an interesting trip on the truck down to Vung Tau to get on the landing barge to get on the Sydney because they trucked us all the way down. We were pissed, we were happy and there was a bloody helicopters flying overhead dropping smoke grenades on us
- 13:30 because we were going home. We were throwing them back at the choppers. If we had have hit one we'd have brought one down but they were coming right down over the top of us and dropping them, mucking around. I know one bloke fell over and broke his arm on the truck. The worst part was we had to get off the landing barge in rough weather onto that little two foot by two-foot square platform, pissed
- 14:00 with a rifle and a kit bag. We never lost anyone, I don't know how. But we did it. We stepped off and got onto the platform. So everybody was sort of...Practically everyone in the battalion was drunk, we were going home. We couldn't give a shit about anything then so they drank anything. They actually closed the boozier on us and said, "You couldn't get any more booze" but wrong.
- 14:30 We had all these supplies we were taking home so we drank them. And they give up in the finish and opened the boozier back up again so they couldn't stop it. Everyone was too happy they were going home.

**What was it like to see the land disappearing in the distance?**

Oh fantastic. I didn't see much of it. I think I was flat on my back on the mess deck. I couldn't move.

- 15:00 I just saw the last bit of it. The last thing I saw I remember was some of the Yanks were packing up gear and leaving and they were further out of the harbour but they were dumping gear. I was watching them push aircraft off the ship into the water. Perfectly good helicopters; they land on the deck, everyone gets out, and they heave it over the side.
- 15:30 I've never seen anybody waste equipment. They say the earth can't run out of metals and stuff like that. They were just dumping it. "Take it back and recycle it". "No, too expensive". This really got my goat, wasting all this equipment. We do it here, we did it up at Exmouth; D9 Bulldozers. They're over \$750,000 for one
- 16:00 bulldozer. You start the engine up, put it into gear, hop off it and watch it walk into the sea. We did that at Exmouth. Brand new air conditioning and stuff like that they buried them in the ground. It was too hard to bring them out. This is in Australia we did the same thing. Waste, total and utter waste. That's the last thing I saw of Vietnam was watching those getting those pushed off the ships.
- 16:30 And of course on the way home there was nothing to do except we hit a typhoon in the South China Sea and that was interesting because the old Sydney was rocking and rolling then and the waves were coming down the flight deck. We went up onto the Admiral's bridge, which is above the main bridge of the ship. It was the only place above the water that you could see and watch these waves going down the flight deck. Consequently, back down the
- 17:00 deck into the hammock and we didn't move for two days. It was the only part of the ship that didn't move because if you close your eyes the ship's going around and the hammock stays right where it was. Close the portholes, close the doors and we didn't eat or nothing. We didn't get out of the hammock; it was too dangerous. If you try and walk down the deck and the ship suddenly goes like that and then rolls like that. You'd try and eat a meal; you don't know whose meal you are eating in the finish because it was all over the joint.
- 17:30 And you'd go for a shower and in the shower the doors were like that high and the shower floor in the bathroom was that deep in water all the time. It just doesn't drain away straight away. That's slopping everywhere. It's just seawater; you can have a salt-water shower, you can have a fresh water showers on the boat. But that was an interesting vision that, seeing the front of the aircraft carrier dive down under the water and come up again.

- 18:00 It was frightening because we knew that about seventy percent of the hull of the Sydney wasn't steel any more it was just ferrous concrete. As it rotted away they filled it up with concrete. We found out after we got back she ship was put into dry dock for a hull clean and a bloke put his hammer through the hull and we had just gone through a typhoon in it. And we knew it what was down the bottom because we'd been down to the engine room and had a look. There was about
- 18:30 twenty or thirty feet of water inside the hull under the engine room, which was the ballast to keep the ship upright. It doesn't give you a real good feeling when you know all that water's in there and it's a couple of hundred tonne and if it springs a leak it will put a bloody lot more in there real quick because it's only concrete.

**So tell us about coming in Sydney Harbour?**

Oh that was a fantastic feeling.

- 19:00 The first time we saw the heads we were lined up on the flight deck and you cried. That's the only way you could put it. We got met by heaps and heaps of small boats, newspapers, reporters on boats taking photos and everything and filming and Christ knows what coming in. There was bloody fireboats with bloody fire hoses and everything. When we docked
- 19:30 we could see from the flight deck the families down there waiting. Sandy and the kids were down there. We talked to them for about ten, fifteen minutes and then we had to be bussed into Sydney. The families were taken to parliament house and we marched through Sydney. The demonstrators there demonstrated against the war, they threw red paint. They took out Father Shanahan with the red paint.
- 20:00 He was marching at the front of the battalion with the CO, missed the CO, got him, he kept marching as we did but he marched off to the right and punched this bloke fair in the mouth, knocked him out cold and the whole crowd around the area erupted in an uproar of cheering. And that was it. No more demonstration after that. They shrunk away, they thought they had the people with them but they didn't and then back to the wharf before we handed in our weapons and
- 20:30 everything and collected our gear out of containers. We virtually, I got a lift home. My mate's missus was there with his car and dropped me a home and went over to Holsworthy to his place so I didn't have to catch a taxi home. Just got out of uniform and put on civvy clothes.
- 21:00 And firstly I just sat there and had a few beers and just watched TV. I didn't do nothing, didn't want to do nothing. I had Vicky sitting on my lap gibbering in my ear and I just felt good it was over, finished. I didn't have to go back to work for three months. It was even better. I just did that and did nothing after that.
- 21:30 I didn't receive any of my gear that was in the trunk until about three and a half months later. Someone in the battalion had it there, I couldn't be bothered going in to get it. I went in and got it and bought it home with all the gear I had in it. I gave that out and what did I do with the trunk? I think my son's got it, my old trunk. We had it, I don't know what he's done with it now.

**How were you relating to your family after all**

22:00 **this?**

Distant. It took a while to get back into the swing of things. It was just strange, you know? After thirteen months of living the way you did and suddenly you're back in a house with four walls, a missus and kids you don't know what to do.

22:30 And now you've got three months off and you've got nothing to do. What do you do? I didn't know what to do.

**How had you changed over this period?**

As I said before like become jumpy at the slightest sound,

- 23:00 mood swings and I still to this day I don't like going out too much at all. I go to the movies occasionally but I would never go into town to pubs. I don't like going to other people's places at times. I can survive now for a while at someone else's house but then I've got to
- 23:30 ...It gets to ten or eleven o'clock at night I've got to go home. I've got to get out of there. It just feels wrong and it still does to this day. I like to go out but I don't want to go out and I'm still....Still with a lot of things I'm a loner,
- 24:00 I don't mind being by myself. Danny goes out now, she use to be home all the time, she was alright. Sandy's at work most of the time so at the moment like she's a week on so I see her for a few minutes in the morning and then I don't see her again until eleven, twelve o'clock at night if I stay up. If I don't stay up I don't see her until the next morning. It doesn't worry me.
- 24:30 I rely on her more than anything because I'm bloody hopeless at paying bills. I'll spend the money. I just give all the money to her and let her pay them, she knows what she's doing so I leave her to do it. I just work around the garden, do the gardening, house maintenance and stuff like that. Keep my hands busy.

**How was she when you immediately returned? You mentioned before you went away, what happened then?**

25:00 I took off and left her in Sydney. I wasn't very popular. I got down to Melbourne and grabbed mother in laws car and she said, "I'm coming with you" so both of us drove back to Sydney, we stayed there a couple of days, loaded the kids in the car, closed the house up and went back to Melbourne. Most of that leave I think I spent in Melbourne at her mother's place. Everything down there was more familiar because I hadn't lived in Sydney in a married quarter before. I had lived in the barracks but

25:30 when we came back and we were in the married quarter it was strange to me, it didn't suit me. I had to get back to something I knew, familiar surroundings. The funny thing is now I can't stand either place, I don't like any of them. Melbourne is worse now, traffic's worse. I used to go twenty minutes I could one side of the city to the other, now it takes nearly two hours, It's peak hour all day. In Sydney traffic, God that's even worse.

26:00 I just don't like it.

**Her mother, what did she think of you nicking off?**

Oh Val she's Mum to me, she looks like my mother that's the funny thing. Even when we split up Val kept saying to Sandy, "You'll get back with him, you'll get back with him. No worries". She was right, I don't know how. But Mum's always been Mum. Whether we were split up or not she'd still ring me up and ask me how I'm going,

26:30 how my other wife was going, how the kids are. She'd always ring me up and she said to me straight away, "Family's family and that's it". All she does, Sandy's side of the family is her family has got bigger and that's it. She doesn't give a shit where you're from, who you are, or whatever you're family and it just got bigger and bigger and bigger.

27:00 She jumps around and she doesn't come up here, it's too bloody hot now. She's seventy something now and she's living in Brisbane. But she flits between Brisbane and Melbourne to Sandy's sister's place; they've got a flat in the back yard. She stays there for a few months. She'll flit up to Sydney to her boyfriend's place at seventy-one and she'll stay at his place. Well she lives there mainly now but that's what she does, backwards and forwards. She was in Sydney the other week and Newcastle

27:30 at her son's place. I don't know if she'd been down to Tassie [Tasmania] yet to Kevin's place but kids are all over the place so she just flits around now and family's family. It doesn't matter whether you're married to the kids still or not. Like Ian's been married again and his ex-wife lives in Brisbane and Val goes and sees them still. Still goes and sees her. She is still family as far as she is concerned.

**How about in those early years? You mentioned that you had the drinking.**

Well she was used to it, Val.

28:00 My father in law was an alcoholic.

**How were those first few years relating with your wife and family?**

All right the first years. That's why I said I joined the army because I was a ratbag. I just didn't want to hold a job down, got sick of working in the one place and I just quit. In those days it wasn't hard to get a job. Those days were alright. The father in law had the shits with me for a while before we got married and then

28:30 once we got married and that he came round one night and said, "Come on" and I jumped in the truck with him and we went for a drive and it finished up that I drove most of the way up and back in the truck. Actually from the wedding night onwards we were best friends. That's why I got pissed and couldn't do the bridal waltz because we snuck out the back bar, the Coach and Horses Hotel at Nunawading and hit the top shelf.

29:00 So from that day onwards we were the best of mates because I became a truck driver like he was and that made him happy.

**And you mentioned earlier about the Post Traumatic Stress coming in. When did that start to affect you?**

Oh I never knew what it was, my mood swings and all that sort of garbage. It was only a year or so ago

29:30 that the psychiatrist came up and assessed me and said, "That's exactly what it is." He said he'd done Vietnam vets and they've all got it. "That's what the problem is, that's the problems you're having". And there's nothing they can do about it, not a thing. That's why they now give me a....Because of the rash included and that I get free medical and I got a pension, part pension

30:00 out of it.

**Tell us about this rash.**

Oh it's like a sweat rash but it's not. It's just bloody annoying, it drives you crazy and it's mainly caused by Agent Orange [herbicide used in Vietnam], the chemical. We were sprayed something chronic. We

used to watch the aircraft going over and you could feel it landing on you. It was in our drinking water. It was everywhere; we were eating it, drinking it, bathing in it, it was in everything. It was a defoliant. It used to kill all the leaves, knock all the leaves off so they could

30:30 find the Vietcong walking through the jungle. But they didn't know the after effects until after the war finished. Now we've got the after effects. Thankful I haven't got the cancer or anything that goes with it, touch wood. But the rash gets all over my back and chest and goes away again then it comes back again any time it feels like it. It annoys the shit out of you. It's like a sweat rash.

31:00 You now you get that prickly feeling? Exactly the same as that and it drives you nuts and you can't scratch otherwise you'll tear your skin off. I've got some cream that they supply me with that's good. It takes the itch out of it. It quietens it down for a while and then it comes back and it quietens it down. I use the big tubes like that. I've gone through one already and I've got another I'm starting on now. I use a couple of them over a couple of months.

31:30 I've sort of got it under control but there's nothing they can do about it, nothing will stop it. I've been to dermatologists and everything in Melbourne when I was down there and in the cold weather and my skin here these creases in my arms like there and there, they just split right open. And there's nothing they can do about it. The top bloke in Australia could not do nothing about it. Tried all the creams and everything and could not do anything about it

32:00 before they got on to the Agent Orange bit. So I thought, "Well bugger this I'm going back to the tropics". I got posted back to Tully and my arm has cleared up and I ended up with just the rash so I thought, "Well stuff it. I'm staying in the tropics". So I stay up here. If I go down south for too long in the cold weather it will probably happen again so I just don't taken the chance anymore. So I live up here and when I retire I like the Cairns area;

32:30 north of Cairns or south of Cairns, Innisfail, I love it up around there. I know it's around Tully again but I just like the area, Mission Beach, it's a beautiful place. You know that's where I'll retire to.

#### **Do other Vietnam vets that you know move to the tropics because of this?**

I don't know. I haven't run into many at all. I ran into one bloke from 5RAR, two actually up here.

33:00 One was that drunk all the time. He was actually the company sergeant major of Charlie Company...no A Company I'm sorry, A Company it was. And they were in the brunt of some of the action over there and he was a drunk. I tried to help him but he got set in his ways.

33:30 I haven't seen him for years now. I don't even know whether he's still alive. The other bloke was in North Force, CMF. I don't know what happened to him. They're the only ones because most of our people come from Sydney, Melbourne and Perth. So I don't see any of them. I haven't even been back to any of the reunions or anything.

#### **Do you ever have flashbacks?**

34:00 Occasionally something will trigger something and I'll remember something from Vietnam that I haven't thought about for years. I don't know why but occasionally that happens. I'm thankful most of the time it's pleasant that I get a bit of memory of something but most of the time I don't think anything about it. Anzac [Australian and New Zealand Army Corps] Day my eldest daughter has dragged me out a couple of times to the barracks over here at Robertson

34:30 for Anzac Day. That's the only time I've been out, three times I've been out on Anzac day in the twenty years I've been up here. Because I don't know anyone up here even though I could go to the RSL and soon meet someone and talk to them which I did the first time. I went to the service, I went to the RSL in town and before I knew it I was getting pissed [drunk] with the bloody bandmaster.

35:00 He was the head piper from the pipes and drums band. Scared the hell out her and I got into the grog with him. But then I had to get home. But that time I lived in Palmerston. God help me if I've got to get home from town to hear. No, it's not worth it. Too many breathalysers around.

#### **Speaking of the Anzacs, do you feel part of the Anzac tradition?**

Yes because

35:30 some of the older diggers have actually told us that. They say we might not have been on Anzac Cove but Anzac was a tradition and we are the Australia and New Zealand Army Corps, we fought in Vietnam together so it was Anzac. They classify it as Anzac because we were fighting with the New Zealanders again. Because we had, Four Battalion had Whiskey Company New Zealand Regiment there. So the

36:00 Kiwis were over there with us so we just stuck together. We drank with them too.

#### **Speaking of this how do you feel about how the Vietnam vets were treated as opposed to anyone else?**

They were treated like shit. Everybody knows what they did. It's hard to explain. It's just

36:30 a lot of blokes that I know of were abused and what not. They find out you're a Vietnam veteran and

they'd turn their back on you and walk away from you, you know? It's just...That's why I didn't bother going to that big march they did in Sydney. We could fly down from here but no. It's over, it's over. That's it. I go Anzac Day

37:00 on behalf of myself and my father. Last Anzac Day Josh wore my father's medals. I wore mine. I told Joshua that when I'm gone the medals are his and he's got my miniatures now. I've got a miniature set, a small one, I've given them to him. I just felt like it at the time. It was Anzac Day

37:30 so I said, "You can have them?" I haven't decided on my father's medals yet, I may give them to my eldest son. As I said I put in for the service medal. My brother in law has put in for it too and it's been accepted and everything. They said twelve month waiting list but it's over twelve months ago now. I probably won't see it till the day I die.

38:00 My sister in law told me, "Put in for it, you're entitled to it" and she sent the paper work up and said, "Get it filled out send it back" and she sent it in. You don't argue with Faye.

**What do you feel you learnt from your experiences?**

You certainly grow up quick. I don't know how you'd explain it.

38:30 You do come back different. You are a lot quieter. Everyone that's come back has been different. The parents have noticed that straight away. I'm a lot quieter. Some blokes come back and they are a lot rowdier. It affects everyone in different ways. I'd rather sit down by myself with a couple of cold beers and watch a bit of TV or a movie and other blokes should rather go out

39:00 on the town and go nuts. It affects people different ways, I've just gone quiet. As I said before it takes a lot to get me going but I'm just thankful that I have never got going. I don't want to.

**We're just coming to the end of our tape and I just want to ask you one more thing. Do you have any final words that you want to share?**

39:30 No not really. I've got no great regrets over it. It was an experience. I wanted to go. I've got problems out of it, Yes but I've got to cope with them and I'd rather have done it in this country than bloody in America or some other country. I'd hate to be in their army. Even though they've got better equipment I think our people are better trained.

40:00 I think the comradeship in the Australia Military Forces is a lot better than the other countries, Britain is the same; Britain, Australia, New Zealand and I'll include the Gurkhas, it's like a brotherhood. We all speak the same language except for the Nepalese were different; they were a different kettle of fish.

40:30 They were a soldier you want to be with. They were a friend you'd want to have because once you got a friend there you've got a friend for life. They'll protect your back no matter what happens and you couldn't get a better friend than that. It's just, I don't know. I've had a good life I suppose. Except that I am getting bloody old now.

41:41 Get puffed out when I'm doing things.

**I think we've come to the end. Thanks very much, you did a great job, terrific.**

**INTERVIEW ENDS**